
Guidelines for the Evaluation of Competency-Based Education Programs

Definition of Competency-Based Education

The *Common Framework for Defining and Approving Competency-Based Education Programs*, adopted by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) on June 2, 2015, defines CBE as “an outcomes-based approach to earning a college degree or other credential. Competencies are statements of what students can do as a result of their learning at an institution of higher education. ... The curriculum is structured around these specified competencies, and satisfactory academic progress is expressed as the attainment or mastery of the identified competencies.” Students must generally perform at a level judged to be at or near the “excellent” range for each competency. There are three approaches to competency-based education: a credit-based approach, a direct assessment approach, and a hybrid approach. In brief, a credit-based CBE program measures student progress using credit or clock hours, and a direct assessment CBE program bases student progress on the demonstration of competencies. A hybrid approach measures student progress through a combination of credit or clock hours and a direct assessment of competencies. (Detailed descriptions of these approaches are available in the C-RAC *Common Framework*.)

Title IV Eligibility and U.S. Department of Education Approval

Institutions interested in securing Title IV eligibility for CBE programs are required to obtain approval from their regional accreditor. NECHE’s policies and procedures for substantive change apply to these requests.

To be in compliance with federal regulations and thereby qualify for Title IV funding, institutions need to demonstrate, and evaluators need to confirm, that their competency-based programs (regardless of the mode of delivery, whether credit-based, direct assessment or hybrid) include:

- a. **FACULTY INTERACTION**: Interaction must be initiated on a regular basis with students by one or more faculty members who have subject-matter expertise in the discipline of the course or program (and not performed by success coaches, academic mentors, graduate students or other individuals even if they have some subject-matter expertise). Faculty interaction must be “regular and substantive” (i.e., explicitly designed in the curriculum and documented), and the quality of the interaction must be evaluated as part of the institution’s curriculum assessment and program review.
- b. **CREDIT-HOUR EQUIVALENCIES**: When the institution is proposing eliminating “seat time” and credit-based units of measurement to enroll students and measure their progress, it is required to determine “credit-hour equivalencies” for the program based upon the conventional assignment of credit hours used for its other programs. For institutions that have not previously undergone a credit-hour evaluation in conjunction with a comprehensive evaluation, evaluators will need to assess whether “credit hour equivalencies” for the competencies and student learning outcomes of the program are appropriate in relation to the institution’s usual assignment of credit hours.

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