Quality Framework for Competency-Based Education Programs

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C-BEN Contributors

QUALITY STANDARDS TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Deborah Bushway, Ph.D.
CBE Consultant
Lumina Foundation

Kevin Corcoran, MBA
Strategy Director
Lumina Foundation

Laurie Dodge, Ph.D.
Vice Chancellor of Institutional Assessment & Planning,
Vice Provost, Brandman University

Frank Essien, MA
Strategy Officer
Lumina Foundation

Myk Garn, Ph.D.
Assistant Vice Chancellor for New Learning Models
University System of Georgia

Jillian Klein, MA
Associate Vice President, Government Affairs & Public Policy
Capella University

Charla Long, J.D.
Executive Director
Competency-Based Education Network

Marni Baker Stein, Ph.D.
Chief Innovation Officer
The University of Texas System

Alison Kadlec, Ph.D.
Facilitator
Senior Vice President, Director of Higher Education &
Workforce Engagement
Public Agenda

MEMBER INSTITUTIONS

Antioch University

Brandman University

Broward College

Capella University

Central New Mexico Community College

Charter Oak State College

City University of Seattle Concordia University (WI)

Danville Community College

Davenport University

DePaul University

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Southern New Hampshire University

Southwestern College (KS)

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (South Texas College And Texas A&M University-Commerce)

Thomas Edison State University

University of Maine at Presque Isle

University of Maryland University College

University of Michigan

University of Texas System

University of Wisconsin-Extension

University System of Georgia

Walden University

Westminster College

The C-BEN Quality Framework for CBE Programs was developed in response to a growing need for definitions of quality relating to competency-based education. Led by the C-BEN Quality Standards Task Force, this work drew from the *Shared Design Elements and Emerging Practices of Competency-Based Education*, and brought together leading program designers and system administrators from C-BEN institutions representing an array of models. This task force worked together over 2016 to create the first edition of **Quality Principles & Standards for Competency-Based Education Programs** through an iterative and inclusive process, developing principles and standards universal enough to apply to all CBE programs, regardless of model variations. In the future, we envision these universal principles and standards will be augmented by additional stackable principles and standards based on research as well as model-specific, programmatic features.

Our aim with this work is to provide guidance to the field, allowing institutions to draw on these principles and standards to inform the design, implementation or scaling of high-quality programs. The principles and standards also can provide guideposts and assurances to policymakers and accreditors tasked with regulating this vibrant, and still emerging, field of practice. The process of developing these standards has been inclusive of both the entire C-BEN community and the wider field. Not only did C-BEN members from 30 institutions and four state university-systems offer feedback, but over a hundred other individuals from around the country provided guidance that informed this final version. In addition, a convening of roughly 40 C-BEN members and more than a dozen national experts and regulators was held in late 2016 to finalize the standards and begin ongoing work on development guides.

The goal of the task force was to provide principles and standards that are at once accessible and aspirational. This is achieved by the use of performance indicators embedded in the Development Guides designed to make the principles and standards multidimensional. The performance indicators for each of the principles were also released in May 2017, and feedback was gathered from Spring, 2017 C-BEN convening attendees as well as through an online portal established to solicit feedback from the field. This feedback has now been incorporated into the Development Guides which are available on the C-BEN website.

As evidence emerges regarding the efficacy of CBE program design, it is time to put a significant stake in the ground around quality. The future of the movement depends on our ability to do so. But C-BEN knows full well that the evolution of the field and the growth of the evidence base will require that these principles and standards be regularly revisited and updated to reflect the state of knowledge. This edition of the Quality Framework for CBE Programs is intended to inform strong program design, ease accreditation, and build the confidence of regulators working to create safe space for responsible innovation. Ongoing refinement and revision from the field at-large will be necessary to ensure its' use and relevancy in building and refining quality competency-based education programs.

Key Definitions to Aid Understanding

Elements, principles, standards, performance indicators and development guides form the backbone for this work. The Quality Framework focuses on the program as the unit of analysis, and begins by articulating elements, principles, and standards of quality for CBE program design and implementation.

For clarity's sake, the terms used in this document are defined below:

Element: *The label or shorthand for the principle being described*

Principle: *A fundamental proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief, or behavior, or for a chain of reasoning*

Standard: *A level of quality or attainment, and an idea or thing used as a measure, norm or model in comparative evaluations*

Performance Indicators: *A measurement that describes how effectively an institution is achieving the principle and standards.*

Development Guides: *A set of scaffolded performance indicators intended to allow programs to understand stages of development for a CBE program. Each stage (from "Initial" to "Highly Developed") is intended to build on and include the expectations from the previous stage.*

Download a digital copy of the Quality Frameworks for Competency-Based Education Programs at cbenetwork.org

Quality Framework for Competency-Based Education Programs

Eight Elements of Quality

1 Demonstrated Institutional Commitment to and Capacity for CBE Innovation

2 Clear, Measurable, Meaningful and Integrated Competencies

3 Coherent Program and Curriculum Design

4 Credential-level Assessment Strategy with Robust Implementation

5 Intentionally Designed and Engaged Learner Experience

6 Collaborative Engagement with External Partners

7 Transparency of Student Learning

8 Evidence-driven Continuous Improvement

Demonstrated Institutional Commitment To and Capacity For CBE Innovation

Demonstrated Institutional Commitment To and Capacity For CBE Innovation

1 PRINCIPLE

In order to produce a high-quality CBE program, the institution must build a foundational infrastructure in support of competency-based education. This includes the development of a CBE philosophy and commitment as it relates to the institution's mission, the design of the program structure and the definition of appropriate supports for the program and its learners (including people, policy and process supports). The institution must also make appropriate financial investments in the program, understanding that the returns on investment (ROI) for CBE programs are generally longer-term, and recognizing that such investments are often necessary both to achieve regulatory and accreditor compliance and to provide learners with an adequate and appropriate support structure.

2 STANDARDS

1. The institution's senior leadership and board members understand the role CBE programs play in furthering or enhancing the institution's mission, and support the creation, continuous improvement and ongoing growth of CBE programming.

2. The institution has defined its approach to competency-based education, including the degree of autonomy given to programmatic-level design and delivery.

3. The institution has developed and adopted a faculty and staff model that meets the unique needs of its CBE program and complies with internal governance processes and controls while efficiently utilizing institutional resources.

4. The institution has developed policies and procedures for its CBE program that support learning and the learner experience while maintaining compliance with regulatory requirements.

5. The institution maintains, across relevant academic and non-academic departments, sufficient administrative capability and commitment to manage and support competency-based education programs.

6. The CBE business model, including the tuition structure, has been analyzed to determine feasibility and sustainability.

7. The institution has evaluated the technology needed to support the learner lifecycle (such as student information systems, financial aid delivery systems and learning management systems) and, where appropriate, made investments.

8. The institution has a plan for data collection and reporting regarding the learning experience and the efficacy of the CBE program. These data form the basis for examination and discovery of needed improvements in areas such as learner performance across diverse groups, graduate success and employer satisfaction.

3 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Criteria	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
1. The institution's senior leadership supports the CBE program.	Institutional leaders (e.g., senior leadership and board members) have been informed of a competency-based education program at the institution, and the program administration and faculty may have a plan in place for program launch.	Institutional leaders have been informed of a competency-based education program at the institution (via board meetings, academic leadership meetings, etc.) and initial action steps or a plan is in place for program launch and sustainability.	Institutional leaders understand how the CBE program supports the institution's mission, and advocate for allocation of resources for the program. Clear action steps are in place for program sustainability, including program design, a growth plan and a continuous improvement plan.	The institutional leadership team has articulated the long-term ROI for CBE; approved a long-term action plan; and made investments in the launch, scaling and sustainability of the institution's competency-based education program.
2. The institution has defined its CBE philosophy.	Institutional awareness of and buy-in for competency-based education is isolated to a specific program and/or the faculty and staff. There is currently no plan for improving awareness of CBE across the institution.	The institution is actively considering a competency-based education approach (e.g., analyzing the cost-benefit ratio relative to a customized program offering). The institution is actively working toward a common understanding regarding competency-based education and the assessment of learning for the institution (e.g., faculty workshops, draft statements, etc.).	The institution clearly articulates and agrees upon a common definition for competency-based education and has a shared understanding of how the assessment of learning takes place. Ongoing action steps are being taken to improve institution-wide awareness and engagement (e.g., institutional focus or advisory groups).	The institution actively shares its clearly articulated institutional definition of competency-based education both internally and with external partners. Focused conversations result in an increasingly clear common understanding of the institution's CBE philosophy, and action steps are defined to implement institution-wide changes in support of it (e.g., transcription or policy changes).
3. The institution has adopted a faculty and staff structure that supports the unique needs of the CBE program.	A traditional faculty and staff model is in place. New models that support learning in a CBE program have been articulated. Action steps toward this new model and/or specialized roles (e.g., assessment specialist, instructional designer, coach) are defined.	Faculty and staff position descriptions reflect an intentional model designed to support the CBE learner effectively.	Learner needs for support are well-understood, and faculty and staff models reflect those needs. Faculty and staff members identified for specialized roles are aware of, have participated in training for, and agree on their roles and responsibilities.	The institution continues to refine the faculty and staff structure to support the CBE program based on data, including learner satisfaction and performance data.
4. The institution has CBE policies and procedures in place to support learner success and meet regulatory requirements.	The policies and procedures required to support the CBE program (e.g., attendance, tuition and fees, transfer policies, transcription of competencies, etc.) are being considered. Key internal stakeholders (e.g., registrar, business office, provost's office, information technology) and external stakeholders (e.g., accrediting body approvals, federal and state regulations) have been identified and an action plan is in progress to meet learner and program needs.	At least half of the relevant policies & the attendant processes (e.g., attendance, tuition and fees, transfer policies, credit hour equivalencies, SAP) to support the CBE program have been revised. Key internal stakeholders (e.g., Registrar, Business Office, Provost's Office, Technology) and external stakeholders (e.g., accrediting body, federal legislation) are engaged in the ongoing revision process. The institutions is actively pursuing regulatory approvals. An action plan is in progress to meet student and program needs.	The policies and procedures that are unique to the institution's CBE program (e.g., attendance, tuition and fees, transfer policies, competency mastery assessment, satisfactory academic progress) are established (i.e., are in a learner handbook) and in practice to meet learner and program needs. The institution has secured program approval for its respective competency-based education program, as needed. Key faculty and staff are working to monitor program compliance with these approvals.	The institutional policies and procedures that support CBE programs are clearly communicated, including tuition and fees, transfer policies, and satisfactory academic progress. These policies are continuously refined as changes in the program, environment and learner performance are noted. The institution is active in compliance conversations and shares relevant data with peers in order to further responsible changes in compliance and regulatory requirements.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (CONTINUED)

Criteria	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
5. The institution maintains sufficient capability and commitment to manage and support its CBE program.	The institution has identified the resources needed to support its CBE learners effectively, including faculty, staff, information technology and other administration.	The institution has a realistic and viable plan to supply the required resources as its CBE program launches and grows.	The institution has approval to implement its plan to supply the required resources as its CBE program launches and grows.	The institution has integrated its resource plan with its business model and is committed to incremental resource addition and modification as the program scales.
6. The CBE business model has been analyzed for feasibility and sustainability.	A business model has been drafted and reviewed with key internal stakeholders (e.g., chief financial officer, provost's office, board members). A hypothetically feasible and sustainable business plan has been created.	A feasible and sustainable draft business model has been approved by key internal stakeholders.	The institution is monitoring the performance of its CBE program against the primary levers identified in its business model. Adjustments are made as needed to ensure the program's sustainability.	The institution has adequate data to continuously analyze its CBE business model, including the tuition structure, and is willing to share what it has learned with other CBE institutions. The CBE program is financially self-sustaining.
7. The institution has evaluated the technology needed to support the CBE learner experience, and has invested as needed.	Technology systems (e.g., LMS, SIS, CRM, financial aid billing) have been evaluated to plan for CBE program needs and functionality.	The institution has identified gaps in current technical systems' and processes' abilities to support the CBE program, and has created a roadmap to fill those gaps (which could include using a blend of current and new systems). Initial changes have been made.	The institution has reviewed all technology systems in place to support the CBE learner ecosystem and, where appropriate, made investments.	The institution has developed an integrated set of technology systems to support the CBE learner ecosystem. It actively shares its processes with other CBE institutions and uses its data to help them improve their solutions.
8. The institution has a data collection plan that supports a continuous improvement effort.	The institution has identified program success measures and key performance indicators (e.g., program objectives, learner performance across diverse groups, enrollment, graduate success, employer satisfaction).	The institution has developed and resourced a plan for data collection (e.g., faculty and staff effort, learner success, cost model) that aligns to the CBE program's success measures and key performance indicators.	Program success measures are clearly defined and agreed upon by the faculty. A data collection process is established. Data are used to monitor program effectiveness and efficiency as well as to inform strengths and needed improvements across a variety of areas (e.g., program objectives, learner performance across diverse groups, enrollment, graduate success, employer satisfaction).	The institution has adopted a sustainability plan that is agreed upon by institutional leadership as well as by program faculty and staff. The institution has dedicated resources to the continuous improvement of the CBE program, and shares its learnings with the broader CBE community.

Clear, Measurable, Meaningful and Integrated Competencies

Clear, Measurable, Meaningful and Integrated Competencies

1 PRINCIPLE

Each competency is explicitly stated and provides unambiguous descriptions of what a learner must master to complete a program of study. Each competency includes the theory and the application of theory required for mastery at the appropriate level for the credential being earned. Each competency connects to content and learning activities designed to support learners in developing the proficiencies required by the program to award a credential. Each competency is measurable and can be reliably and validly assessed.

2 STANDARDS

1. Competencies represent explicit knowledge, skills, abilities and intellectual behaviors, balancing theory and application in a demonstration of mastery.

2. Competencies are co-constructed with input from diverse communities such as employers, expert practitioners, subject matter experts, faculty, learners, advisory committees, recent graduates and professional or licensing bodies.

3. Individual competencies are relevant, current and accurately depict the needs of employers and society.

4. Competencies are capable of anchoring, specifying and guiding the learner experience, including curricular design, the development of instructional content, activities, remediation offerings and the assessment strategy.

5. Individual competencies are aligned to cognitive levels of learning using recognized taxonomies—such as the DQP (Degree Qualifications Profile), or Bloom's Taxomony—and/or industry standards

3 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Criteria	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
1. Competencies represent required knowledge, skills, abilities and intellectual behaviors, and balance theory and application.	Credential-level competencies are defined.	Competency definitions explicitly include the knowledge, skills, abilities and intellectual behaviors required to demonstrate competency.	Credential-level competency definitions include application standards and clearly state what is required for demonstration of competency.	The institution gathers data regarding learner performance on each of the competencies. External validation data (from employers, licensing exams, etc.) are used to strengthen learner performance.
2. Competencies are co-constructed with input from diverse stakeholders, including employers, expert practitioners, subject matter experts, faculty, learners, advisory committees, recent graduates and professional or licensing bodies.	Input from an advisory group is integrated into the competency development process.	Competencies are reviewed by experts in the field for relevance and clarity. Tools such as the DQP are used to ensure the appropriate level of rigor for the credential being earned.	Stakeholders (such as employers, expert practitioners, subject matter experts, faculty, learners, advisory committees, recent graduates and professional or licensing bodies) participate in defining credential-level competencies.	The program has a process to continuously review and revise competencies as disciplines evolve over time. Employers of graduates provide feedback regarding whether the competencies yield better-prepared graduates.
3. Individual competencies are relevant, current and accurately depict the needs of employers and society.	Individual competencies are defined to reflect current needs.	Individual competencies are aligned to stated employer and community needs.	Individual competencies reflect the current assessed needs of both employers and society.	The institution has a process through which it assesses the changing needs of employers and society in order to maintain the currency, relevancy and accuracy of the CBE program's stated competencies.
4. Competencies anchor, orient and guide the learner experience.	Competencies are defined clearly and specifically, providing learners a base for their learning journey.	The competency framework is well-articulated and defined so that the learning journey can support competency development.	The learning journey and the assessments entailed are well-integrated with and aligned to the competencies.	There is a continuous improvement model in place that clarifies any ambiguous competencies, supporting a clearer pathway to the credential for learners.
5. Individual competencies are aligned with the cognitive and behavioral levels of learning appropriate for the credential being earned, as well as with recognized taxonomies (such as the DQP or Bloom's) and/or industry standards.	Competencies are defined appropriately for the credential level being earned.	The competency framework supports a scaffolding of competency levels that aligns with learners' entry level capabilities and credential-level requirements.	The competency framework is aligned, as appropriate, with recognized frameworks and taxonomies and/or industry standards.	The competencies and competency framework are revised as external standards and frameworks evolve so that they maintain their linkage to the cognitive level appropriate to the credential being earned.

Coherent Program and Curriculum Design

Coherent Program and Curriculum Design

1 PRINCIPLE

Competency-based education programs use an intentional and transparent approach to curricular design that provides a learner with the full range of competencies necessary to meet post-graduation demands. These programs intentionally seek to reduce racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender and other potential bias in their design, delivery and implementation. This academic model, which provides clear pathways to completion, builds a unified body of knowledge that leverages frameworks, disciplines, standards, national norms, workforce and societal needs. Learners are at the core of the program's design, and the logic of the program (as well as its associated assessment strategy) supports flexibility in pacing. The curricular design ensures that the level and complexity of the competencies are congruent with the achievements required for the academic level of the credential.

2 STANDARDS

1. The set of competencies is clearly specified and provides easy-to-understand pathways that illustrate what the learner must know and be able to do in order to progress in and complete a credential.

2. The program encompasses an integrated curricular sequence that scaffolds learning at appropriate cognitive levels leading to mastery while affording the learner flexibility in the time spent to reach mastery.

3. The set of credential-specific competencies, chosen through a co-constructed process, represents the complete taxonomy of the knowledge, skills, abilities and intellectual behaviors required by academia, the workforce and society to evidence a prepared and proficient credential holder.

4. Learners can articulate what they should know and what they should be able to do upon completion of the program.

5. Learners have meaningful access to faculty subject matter experts who play an active, central role in the design and delivery of the program.

6. Learning environments, content, communications, activities and assessments are accessible to and inclusive of each learner, based on identified needs.

7. Learners are offered varied learning exercises, activities and experiences to promote their engagement and provide multiple opportunities for the development of competency mastery.

8. The program is designed to support individual learners with personalized learning pathways as they develop and master competencies.

3 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Criteria	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
1. The entire set of competencies is clearly specified and provides pathways for learners.	Credential-level competencies are clearly and transparently articulated for learners, faculty, staff and other stakeholders.	Pathways for credential completion are clear and shared with learners, faculty, staff and other stakeholders.	Along with credential-level competencies and clear pathways, it is clear how learners progress toward and complete a credential, even when they may struggle with a component.	Data regarding learner progression are collected through the pathways, and curricular improvements are made when barriers are identified.
2. The program has an integrated curricular sequence that scaffolds learning at appropriate cognitive and behavioral levels for each credential while also supporting flexibility for learners.	Learners in the program attain and demonstrate competencies throughout an integrated curriculum.	The integrated curriculum scaffolds learning along the pathways that lead to demonstration of competency at the appropriate cognitive and behavioral level for the credential. (For example, intentionally different expectations exist for an AA than an MS.)	The integrated curriculum affords the learner flexibility in the time spent to reach mastery while scaffolding learning at the appropriate cognitive and behavioral level for the credential.	The program collects and analyzes data regarding learners' rate of progression through the curriculum with an eye to any inequities in learner performance. Data are also used to validate that learning is occurring at the appropriate cognitive and behavioral levels to remove barriers, offer support and inform continuous improvement of the curriculum.
3. The set of credential-specific competencies represents the complete taxonomy of knowledge, skills, abilities and intellectual behaviors required for success.	The credential-level set of competencies is comprehensive, cohesive, and appropriate to the credential being granted.	The credential-level set of competencies has been reviewed and validated by stakeholders such as employers, community leaders and faculty for representing a complete taxonomy of required competencies. When appropriate, the set of competencies is validated against established tools such as the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP).	The credential-level set of competencies is co-constructed with stakeholders to represent the complete taxonomy of knowledge, skills, abilities and intellectual behaviors required by academia, the workforce and society to evidence a prepared and proficient credential holder.	The set of credential-specific competencies is validated using employer data as well as other achievement data, and changes to this set of competencies are made based on data, changing external requirements and learner performance following credential completion.
4. Learners can articulate competencies.	Learners can articulate what they should know and what they should be able to do upon completion of the program.	Learners can describe the competencies for the credential for which they are studying.	Learners are able to interpret their own data to understand their progression toward "knowing" and "being able to do" the defined competencies upon graduation.	At graduation, learners are able to demonstrate what they know and are able to do.
5. Learners have meaningful access to and can engage with faculty to benefit from their expertise.	Faculty are readily available to learners as they progress through the program.	Learners have meaningful access to faculty subject matter experts who play an active, central role in the design and delivery of the program.	Faculty are readily available to learners. Systems and processes are built to further support learner engagement with faculty (including "alerts" for faculty, clear response time expectations and technology-enhanced solutions).	Engagement is monitored to ensure that meaningful access to faculty is truly available.
6. Learning environments, policies, content, communications, activities and assessments are accessible, inclusive and equitable.	Learning environments, policies, content, communications, activities and assessments are all designed to be equitable for a diverse set of learners regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, religion or disability.	Learning environments, policies, content, communications, activities and assessments are critically assessed by both internal and external experts for inequities.	Learning environments, policies, content, communications, activities and assessments provide resources to learners who have not traditionally received them. Accessibility and inclusivity are audited by experts in each area of diversity.	Engagement is monitored to ensure that meaningful access to faculty works to support both engaged learning and "meaning-making" related to the competencies and credentials being earned.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (CONTINUED)

Criteria	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
7. Varied opportunities promote learner engagement and the mastery of competencies.	The CBE program is designed to offer learners multiple opportunities to develop mastery of the defined competencies.	The learning journey for the CBE program provides more than one learning resource in support of competency attainment.	Learners are offered varied exercises, activities, experiences and formative assessments to promote their engagement and provide multiple opportunities for the development of competency mastery.	Data are gathered about learner engagement and the relative efficacy of the given opportunities to develop mastery. These data are used to enhance and improve the learning experiences offered.
8. The CBE program is designed to support learners with personalized learning pathways.	Pathways to credential completion are developed based on the needs of each learner.	Each learner understands the pathways to earning the credential for which s/he is registering.	The program is designed to proactively support individual learners with personalized learning pathways as they develop and master competencies, possibly through a blend of technology and faculty and staff outreach.	Data regarding learners' progression through various pathways are collected and monitored, then used to personalize the learner experience and improve pathway articulation and support.

Credential-Level Assessment Strategy with Robust Implementation

Credential-Level Assessment Strategy with Robust Implementation

1 PRINCIPLE

Authentic assessments and their corresponding rubrics are key components of CBE, which is anchored by the belief that progress toward a credential should be determined by what learners know and are able to do. The overarching assessment strategy is comprised of assessments designed both to inform the learning journey (often referred to as "assessment for learning" or formative assessment) and to validate mastery (often referred to as "assessment of learning" or summative assessment). In CBE models, assessments are intentionally aligned to competencies and cognitive levels, and use a range of assessment types and modalities to measure the transfer of learning and mastery into varied contexts. Authentic assessment design and use follow best practices for assessment professionals.

2 STANDARDS

1. Authentic assessments are built within and aligned to an overarching assessment strategy for the competency being measured and the credential being earned.

2. The assessment strategy clearly articulates how the set of assessments supports the learning journey for learners, matches the cognitive level of the competencies being demonstrated and determines mastery at the appropriate academic level.

3. The set of authentic assessments is designed to provide learners with multiple opportunities and ways to demonstrate competency, including measures for both learning and the ability to apply (or transfer) that learning in novel settings and situations.

4. The assessment strategy and each of the assessments and their corresponding rubrics equitably measure learning outcomes across diverse learner groups, while guarding against bias in the formative and summative assessments.

5. Faculty understand their role in the overarching assessment strategy for the credential and are trained in and can articulate the critical function played by each assessment in validating mastery of a competency.

6. Each authentic assessment is transparently aligned to program competencies and their corresponding rubrics. Each authentic assessment is rigorous, has clear and valid measures and is approved by faculty and assessment professionals.

7. Formative assessments serve as a tool for learning and provide feedback for reflection and refinement while also offering a feedback loop that is timely and appropriate to the competency and intent of the assessment.

8. Summative assessments' ability to measure application (the "can do" aspect of a competency) is validated by a subject matter expert (SME), ideally one external to the program design team.

9. The assessment design accommodates personalization for learners by offering flexibility around when assessments will be administered. This ability is often supported by technology.

10. The timeliness of feedback from assessments enables learners to proceed with an absolute minimum of delay. Technology is used wherever possible to facilitate and expedite the timeliness of feedback.

3 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Criteria	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
1. Authentic assessments are built within and aligned to an overarching assessment strategy.	An assessment strategy is clearly articulated and its authenticity is defined.	Assessments (designed to measure both theory and the ability to apply the theory) are authentic and transparently aligned to competencies.	Assessments are performance-based when appropriate for the competencies being assessed, and aligned to requirements in the discipline and profession as well as to the overarching assessment strategy.	External SMEs review the assessment strategy for relevance and clarity. These reviews inform improvements in the assessments. The assessment strategy is transparent to learners and other constituents.
2. The assessment strategy articulates how assessments integrate with the learning journey and matches the cognitive level of the competencies being demonstrated to determine mastery at the appropriate academic level.	Assessments offer all learners the opportunity to demonstrate the mastery required for the credential being granted (certificate, AA, MS).	Assessments are designed to reflect the cognitive level of the competency (e.g., multiple choice exams for "remembering" and case studies for "applying").	Assessments have validity data to support claims about the cognitive level being measured. Performance data is also examined to reveal any inequity in learning outcomes.	Assessments have validity data to support claims about cognitive level being measured. These data include equity across diverse groups and are used for continuous improvement of the assessments.
3. The set of authentic assessments provides learners with multiple opportunities and ways to demonstrate competency.	The program offers learners more than one opportunity to demonstrate competency.	The program offers learners more than one modality (type of assessment) and more than one opportunity to demonstrate competency.	The set of assessments is designed to provide learners with multiple opportunities and ways to authentically demonstrate competency, including measures for both learning and the ability to apply or transfer that learning in novel contexts.	Each competency is assessed through a diverse set of opportunities, each of which is valid and reliable. The set includes measures for both learning and the ability to apply or transfer that learning in novel contexts. Assessments are personalized based on learner profile and needs.
4. The set of assessments equitably measures learning outcomes across diverse learner groups while guarding against bias in structure or accessibility.	Assessments are reviewed by diversity experts for any embedded cultural biases or language. Delivery methods are ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant.	The institution has an established position regarding equity in assessments and faculty are trained in bias issues as well as in the institution's equity goals.	Baseline data regarding assessment bias (particularly bias against race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, religion or disability), assessment performance and validation of rubrics and assessors is established.	Data are gathered, analyzed and reviewed for equity in a transparent process, then analyzed to reveal any gaps in learning outcomes as well as any bias in the assessment tools or grading practices. Analyses result in improvements in learning pathways, assessment tools and approaches as needed.
5. Faculty are trained in and understand the role of each assessment in validating mastery of a competency.	Faculty training results in faculty members' ability to articulate the assessment strategy.	Faculty training results in faculty members' ability to articulate how each assessment aligns to competency definitions.	Faculty training results in faculty members' ability to articulate how each assessment plays a critical role in validating mastery of a competency.	Faculty can articulate how each assessment plays a critical role in validating mastery of a competency. Faculty participate in a continuous improvement process for the assessments with which they work.
6. Authentic assessments are aligned to program competencies, are rigorous, and are approved by faculty and assessment professionals.	The curricular map aligns each assessment to related competencies. The institution has a definition of authentic assessment.	Each assessment is monitored for its alignment to competencies, its level of "authenticity" and is approved by faculty.	Each assessment is monitored for its alignment to competencies and its level of authenticity. Validity and reliability data are transparently reported and reviewed by faculty/assessment professionals.	Data regarding the validity and reliability of assessments across diverse groups of learners are gathered and analyzed. These data (along with other relevant data) are used for continuous improvement of the assessments.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (CONTINUED)

Criteria	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
7. Formative assessments serve as a tool for learning, offering a feedback loop that is timely and appropriate to the competency.	Formative assessments are aligned to learning outcomes, and assessment results offer direction for further learning.	The institution and CBE program have established expectations regarding feedback timing and quality.	Learners receive recommendations for learning resources to support ongoing competency development.	Data regarding the timeliness and quality of feedback offered on assessments are collected and monitored. These data are used to identify best practices and inform improvement.
8. Summative assessments' ability to measure application (the "can do" aspect of a competency) is validated by a subject matter expert, ideally one external to the program design team.	Every summative assessment measures application of the aligned competency, as well as knowledge.	Internal SMEs review each summative assessment for its ability to authentically and effectively measure application.	Data regarding reliability and validity are gathered, analyzed and shared with faculty for each summative assessment.	Each summative assessment's ability to measure application (or the "can do" aspect of a competency) is validated by an SME external to the program design team.
9. The timing of assessments is flexible to accommodate personalization.	Each learner understands the path to assessment of competency for his or her program, and can access assessments as appropriate.	Learner pathways for both formative and summative assessments are clear yet flexible.	Assessments are personalized based on individual learner experience and need.	Data regarding previous performance and readiness to demonstrate competency are used to personalize assessment pathways.
10. Timely feedback from assessments enables learners to progress efficiently. Technology is used wherever possible to facilitate and expedite the timeliness of feedback.	Clear institutional expectations about grading turnaround time are established.	Faculty training and support are in place to enable compliance with institutional expectations regarding feedback timing and quality.	Learner support (such as tutoring and supplemental instruction) is available if feedback is unclear or ineffective so that learners can progress efficiently.	Technology is leveraged to notify faculty of new assessments requiring feedback, to track completion of feedback and to alert learners that feedback is ready for their review.

Intentionally Designed and Engaged Learner Experience

Intentionally Designed and Engaged Learner Experience

1 PRINCIPLE

CBE professionals (faculty and staff) comprehensively understand the strengths and needs of their target learner population, and put those needs at the core of all decisions, processes and systems. CBE programs offer proactive and personalized support for learners, from determining program fit through alumni relations. Faculty and staff are invested in and involved with understanding and improving the entire learner lifecycle by designing, guiding and supporting the learning journey, including processes that facilitate and encourage meaningful interaction with individual learners. A full array of wraparound learner services and social supports, appropriate to the learners being served, is offered by CBE professionals through a wide range of roles and responsibilities.

2 STANDARDS

1. The institution invests in deeply understanding the learners to be served by its CBE program. This understanding is the foremost consideration when structuring the work of CBE professionals into specific roles and responsibilities.

2. The program is sufficiently resourced with faculty and staff to meet the needs of the learner. Faculty and staff roles are designed to provide differentiated support to a diverse range of learners that leverages the individual talents, strengths and competencies of the faculty and staff.

3. Faculty and staff performance metrics are established and monitored. One key metric is the ability of the team to support learners throughout the learner experience regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, or disability.

4. Clear expectations regarding institutional policies, the structure and expectations of the program, and tuition and fees are effectively communicated to the learner.

5. Learners have access to and proactive engagement with the subject matter experts, robust resources, tools and other supports necessary for them to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge, skills and abilities required for successful completion of the program.

6. Opportunities for engagement with peers, faculty, staff and employers who reflect the diversity of the learner population are provided throughout the learning journey.

7. Leveraging technology-enabled systems and processes when possible, faculty, staff and learners proactively monitor data metrics to ensure learners are fully informed, engaged and performing as anticipated throughout the learner lifecycle.

3 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Criteria	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
1. The CBE professionals have invested in a deep understanding of their learners and used this learning as the foundation of their program design.	The target learner population for the CBE program is well-defined and described.	The institution prioritizes learners' academic and personal needs as the CBE program is designed and delivered.	The roles of staff and faculty in the CBE program are based on well-understood and clearly articulated learner needs and strengths.	The understanding of learner needs and strengths is continuously refined as data are gathered through the program. Curriculum and roles are refined as new information becomes available.
2. The CBE program is sufficiently resourced and leverages the talents of involved faculty and staff to support learner success.	The CBE program's unique requirements for faculty and staff knowledge, skills and attitudes are defined as a baseline for resourcing the program.	Resources are in place to support faculty and staff engagement and training regarding the CBE program's design and requirements.	Input from faculty and staff is used to refine and adjust program resources and trainings.	Data are gathered regarding the efficacy of the program in meeting the needs of diverse sets of learners in the CBE program, and improvements are made based on those data (for example, faculty and staff are matched to learners based on data). External peers and exemplars are used to review and recommend performance improvements.
3. Faculty and staff performance metrics are transparent and reflect support for all learners regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion or disability.	Faculty and staff performance expectations are clearly defined, shared and monitored. The program has the resources to employ a sufficient number of faculty and staff who perform as expected.	Faculty and staff performance metrics are based on the need to equitably and effectively support a diverse set of learners.	Faculty and staff performance metrics are established and monitored in partnership with diverse learner groups and aid the team in supporting learners across all races, ethnicities, genders, socio-economic statuses, religions and disabilities throughout the learning journey.	Data regarding the ability of faculty and staff to meet performance metrics, and the impact of faculty and staff performance on learner success across demographic groups, are gathered, monitored and reported. These data are used to improve the learner experience.
4. Policies, structure and other program expectations are clearly communicated to learners.	CBE program policies and expectations are compliant with accreditor and regulatory requirements, and are clearly articulated and available for review by faculty, staff and learners.	Policies, structures and expectations for learners in the CBE program are defined and reviewed with the learner prior to matriculation in the program. Faculty and staff are adequately trained to align with these expectations.	Clear program expectations (including institutional policies, enrollment practices and policies, the structure and expectations of the program, transfer, withdrawal, and tuition and fees) are communicated to the learner in multiple ways, including required orientation, touchpoints each term and advisor conversations.	Information is gathered from learners regarding the clarity of these communications (including by tracking complaints and other satisfaction input), and improvements are made to the policies and communications as needed.
5. Learners have access to and engagement with learning resources, including faculty expertise.	The CBE program is designed to offer proactive support for learning, and faculty actively reach out to learners.	Faculty reach out to learners with subject matter content, recommend additional learning resources and are available for other support as needed.	Learners have access to and proactive engagement with the subject matter experts, robust resources, tools and other supports necessary for them to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for successful completion of the program.	Systems and processes are built to support learner access to faculty (such as "alerts" for faculty, and technology-enabled contact between faculty and learners) and other learning resources (such as adaptive and personalized technologies).

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (CONTINUED)

Criteria	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
6. Opportunities for engagement with a learning community are provided throughout the learning journey.	Learners can interact with each other as well as with faculty and staff.	The institution creates various pathways for learners to connect with peers as well as faculty and staff in support of their learning.	Meaningful opportunities for engagement with peers, faculty, staff and employers who reflect the diversity of the learner population are woven into the learning journey.	Learner feedback regarding the efficiency and efficacy of engagement opportunities is used to improve learners' connections with their peers and the larger learning community.
7. Learners' engagement and progress toward credential completion is monitored.	Learners can interact with each other as well as with faculty and staff.	Faculty, staff and learners are all aware of learners' academic engagement and progress toward credential.	Learner engagement and progress is monitored with digital systems and processes whenever possible (such as customer relationship management, or CRM, tools). Faculty, staff and learners proactively monitor progress metrics (such as formative assessment results and learner engagement with content) to ensure the learner is fully informed, engaged and performing as anticipated throughout the learner lifecycle.	The data gathered regarding learner progression and completion are used to both refine the learning experience and reach out to learners to support their ongoing progress in a personalized manner, intentionally supporting learners who might be struggling as well as those who are performing well.

Collaborative Engagement with External Partners

Collaborative Engagement with External Partners

1 PRINCIPLE

Institutions strategically identify and secure the commitment of multiple external partners to inform and support the achievement of their CBE programs' purpose and their institutional equity goals. External partners are meaningfully engaged in the design, delivery and evaluation of the institutions' CBE programs. They work collaboratively to inform and validate CBE program competencies and curriculum, and to ensure the authenticity of assessments. The result is a relevant, transparent credential and authentic learning experience that is endorsed and trusted by external partners as well as learners.

2 STANDARDS

1. In collaboration with faculty and staff, external partners offer their own expertise and resources, and are invested in and an integral part of the program design, delivery and evaluation processes.

2. Faculty, staff, learners and external partners regularly communicate about substantive matters, keeping each other informed of the latest developments; sharing information with researchers, discipline and career networks, and other professional organizations; and implementing needed programmatic changes.

3. External partnerships are cultivated to provide real life learning, training, assessment, internship and employment opportunities.

4. External partners are chosen based on their alignment to the program's purpose, the institution's equity goals, or field and workforce needs. When no pre-existing connections exist, faculty and staff are able to form these necessary relationships.

3 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Criteria	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
1. External partners are invested in the CBE program's success and are an integral part of the design, delivery and evaluation of the program.	External partners can communicate the rationale for offering the CBE program.	The external partners have reviewed and offered feedback on the program's competencies, assessments, learning activities and requirements.	In collaboration with faculty and staff, external partners are an integral part of the program design, delivery and evaluation processes.	The external partners provide the institution with data regarding graduates' performance on the job, allowing the institution to continuously improve the competencies, assessments and other components of the program.
2. External and internal partners communicate about how new developments and program changes are implemented to maintain currency in the field.	External partners are asked for input on any external changes that could impact the program.	Standing and regular meetings are held in which external and internal partners consider the success and efficacy of the CBE program from each partner's lens.	Faculty, staff, learners and external partners work collaboratively to update, refresh and improve the relevancy of the competencies attained and demonstrated by learners in the CBE program.	Data is gathered (from graduates, external partners and other sources) and widely disseminated by both internal and external partners regarding the efficacy of the CBE program in preparing learners for relevant jobs and life skills (including responsiveness to industry trends and other external changes), and improvements are made based on the data.
3. External partners provide components of the learning journey.	External partners understand the CBE program's approach and philosophy as well as its potential benefits to partners.	External partnerships are cultivated to provide real-life learning, training, assessment, internship and employment opportunities.	Formal agreements are established and operated with external partners to provide faculty expertise and onsite experiences (such as internships or apprenticeships) as a component of the CBE program.	Information is gathered from external partners regarding learner performance during internships, training opportunities and ultimately employment, and these data are used to improve the curriculum and learning journey.
4. External partners are selected based on institutional and programmatic mission and goals.	Possible external partners (including employers, regulators, licensure bodies, civic organizations and internship sites) are identified based on the institution's mission and goals for the CBE program.	Where new partnerships are required, institutions work to establish shared goals and effective partnerships.	External partners are chosen based on their alignment to the program's purpose, the institution's equity goals, or field and workforce needs. When no pre-existing connections exist, faculty and staff are supported in forming the necessary relationships.	The external partner relationships are evaluated in terms of the institution's mission and programmatic goals as well as the external partners' goals. Any gaps are identified, new opportunities are articulated and efforts to establish a working partnership are initiated.

Transparency of Student Learning

Transparency of Student Learning

1 PRINCIPLE

One of the central differentiators of CBE programs is their transparency regarding the learning required to earn a credential. This means that the competencies and their alignment, the pathway to mastering those competencies, the assessment methodologies and the performance requirements for successful demonstration of competency are clearly articulated to learners and all other stakeholders. Transcription practices make demonstrated competencies transparent to learners, faculty, staff, employers, transfer institutions, accreditors and regulators, often in digital form. Transcripts are designed to support portability and transferability to non-CBE environments and include an "extended or comprehensive record" with details about the learner's complete accomplishments.

2 STANDARDS

1. The competencies required to earn a credential are clearly and openly articulated to learners, faculty, staff and external partners.

2. The alignment of competencies, content, learning activities and experiences, and competency demonstration assessments is visible to all learners and stakeholders.

3. Learner progression toward competency mastery and credential completion is visible to the learner, faculty and staff throughout the learning journey.

4. The alignment of credentials' competencies to external requirements (licenses, transfer requirements, certifications, employer needs) is accurately and clearly communicated.

5. The institutional transcription policy and process are designed to communicate what graduates can do beyond course listings and grades. They express this information in understandable and relevant ways to an expanded community of stakeholders with the input and engagement of learners, transfer institutions, graduate schools and employers.

3 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Criteria	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
1. The CBE program clearly articulates required competencies.	The competencies required for a credential are defined.	The CBE program has clearly defined the competencies required for the credential.	The competencies required to earn a credential are transparently articulated to learners, faculty, staff and external partners.	The competencies required for a credential are transparently articulated to learners, staff, faculty and external partners, and have been clearly transcribed for use by other institutions as needed.
2. Alignment of the curriculum and competencies is visible to learners and other stakeholders.	Competencies, learning experiences and assessments are aligned.	The alignment of competencies, content, learning activities and assessments is captured in a reportable format.	The alignment of competencies, content, learning activities and experiences, and competency demonstration assessments is visible to all learners and stakeholders.	Curricular maps are technology-enabled and visualized so that any interested person can understand the alignment of competencies, learning experiences and assessments.
3. Learner progression toward credential completion is visible to all stakeholders, including the learner.	Learner progression toward completion can be monitored and reported on.	Learner academic engagement and competency demonstration is episodically captured, monitored and reported for learners as well as for faculty and staff.	Learner progression toward competency mastery and credential completion is readily visible to the learner, faculty and staff throughout the learning journey.	Technology (i.e., a progression dashboard) allows all stakeholders to see a real-time visualization of learner progression through the aligned assessments and competencies.
4. The alignment of credential competencies to external requirements is clearly communicated.	Credential competencies are aligned to relevant external requirements.	External requirements that map to the credentials are well-understood, monitored and aligned so that internal and external stakeholders (including learners) can describe the alignment.	The alignment of credential competencies to external requirements (licenses, transfer requirements, certifications, employer needs) is accurately and transparently communicated.	Visualizations of the alignment of external requirements and credential standards are developed and available for sharing (often via technology) with all interested parties. These alignments are changed and updated as external requirements shift.
5. Transcripts communicate competencies and support learners' needs for transfer, admission to other institutions and employment.	Competencies for the credential are available for review upon request or as an attachment to the transcript.	The institutional transcript communicates the competencies for the credential and each learner's demonstration of competency related to the earned credential while also communicating equivalencies in a way that makes sense to external entities.	The institutional transcription policy and process is designed to communicate what graduates can do (beyond course listings and grades), expressed in understandable and relevant ways to an expanded community of stakeholders with the input and engagement of learners, transfer institutions, graduate schools and employers.	The transcript utilizes visualization and e-portfolio technology to communicate the richness of the competencies demonstrated in earning the credential. It also offers a "crosswalk" to credits and grades, should such be needed by the learner. The transcript is electronically shareable and portable, upon learner request.
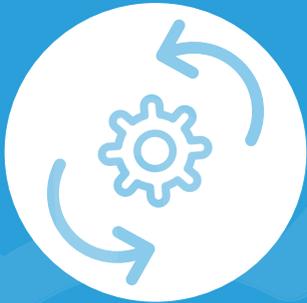
Evidence-Driven Continuous Improvement

Evidence-Driven Continuous Improvement

1

PRINCIPLE

An evidence-driven, continuous improvement methodology is an essential dimension of competency-based education. To ensure program effectiveness, data are collected and analyzed at regular intervals during the program and post-completion. These data are reported and used to inform learners and faculty, identify and prioritize improvements, evaluate and refine assessment strategy and implementation, monitor equitable learner achievement across diverse groups, optimize learner supports to impact program persistence and completion, and enable external validation of learning. Where performance gaps are identified, the institution actively implements and monitors solutions.

2

STANDARDS

1. The institution has adopted continuous improvement processes for its CBE program and is committed to sharing its data and discoveries with the CBE community.

2. The CBE program has agreed-upon performance goals (including equitable learner outcomes) as well as effective and regular approaches for monitoring, measuring, surveying, analyzing, reporting and acting on performance data (including specific learner outcomes).

3. The CBE program collects feedback from learners regarding the program and its personnel and resources.

4. The CBE program has a systematic process for improvement based on feedback from learners, faculty, subject matter experts and external partners, and has allocated appropriate resources to support this work.

5. Other related data, such as measurements of post-programmatic outcomes and the enduring value of earned competencies in the knowledge marketplace, are monitored to inform larger shifts in the design of the competencies and credentials being offered.

3 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Criteria	Initial	Emerging	Developed	Highly Developed
1. Continuous improvement processes have been adopted for the CBE program.	The institution expresses understanding of the need for continuous improvement of the CBE program.	The institution has set goals and metrics for the CBE program that support the identification of necessary program improvements.	The institution has adopted and resourced continuous improvement processes for the CBE program and is committed to sharing its data and discoveries with the CBE community.	The continuous improvement process results in a stronger, more effective CBE program, as evidenced by improvements in stakeholder satisfaction (including employers, learners and faculty) as well as better learning outcomes.
2. The CBE program has performance goals and effective measurement and reporting tools.	Performance goals and metrics are set for the CBE program.	The institution can and does measure the performance of its CBE program against the defined goals and metrics it has set, including benchmarks defined by relevant peers whenever possible.	The CBE program has agreed-upon performance goals (including learner outcomes across diverse populations) and has effective and regular approaches for monitoring, measuring, surveying, analyzing, reporting and acting on performance data (including specific learner outcomes).	Data gathered and shared regarding the performance of the CBE program lead to the design and implementation of improvements. Further data are then gathered to report on the efficacy of these interventions.
3. Feedback is collected from learners.	Basic surveys are sent to learners regarding their experience.	Learners participate in focus groups and/or other qualitative research forums to offer feedback regarding the CBE program.	Quantitative and qualitative feedback regarding the CBE program, personnel and resources is collected from learners.	The CBE program maintains an active relationship with its alumni and uses alumni feedback to inform continuous improvement. Feedback is also synthesized, reported and made available to all constituents.
4. The CBE program has a systematic process for improvement based on feedback from multiple stakeholders.	Feedback regarding the CBE program is gathered from multiple stakeholders, including learners, faculty and external partners.	The CBE program has a systematic process for synthesizing, reporting and sharing feedback from learners, faculty, subject matter experts and external partners.	The CBE program has a systematic process for improvement based on feedback from learners, faculty, subject matter experts and external partners.	Data is gathered from employers, graduates and other stakeholders regarding the ongoing relevance of the programs' competencies. This information is used to realign and/or improve the programs' learning outcomes' relevance. The CBE program shares its results with external partners and the larger CBE community to support continuous improvement of CBE as a practice.
5. The CBE program team monitors external data regarding the program and uses that data for program improvement.	The CBE program team has identified relevant external sources of information for improvement of the program.	The CBE program has a plan for data-gathering to source the information identified by the team.	Other related data such as measurements of labor market outcomes for graduates and the enduring value of earned competencies in the knowledge marketplace are monitored to inform larger shifts in the design of the competencies and credentials being offered.	The program gathers data regarding the ongoing relevance of the program's competencies from employers, graduates and other stakeholders. This information is used to realign and improve the program.

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