

Understanding the Academic Calendar

A RESOURCE GUIDE



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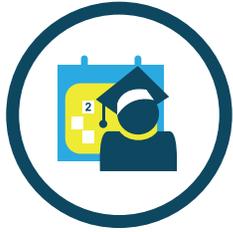
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Introduction

Institutional leaders have a myriad of questions when tasked with the challenge of designing and implementing a competency-based program. Often, institutions report not knowing how to even get started. The Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) has created this resource for financial aid professionals so that they can support competency-based innovation on their campuses. During the initial stages of designing competency-based programs, financial aid professionals could share this document with their academic colleagues, explaining the financial aid ramifications of various program design options.

Federal Financial Aid and Competency-Based Education

There is no federal definition of competency-based education (CBE) in general. Typical characteristics of CBE include organizing academic content via competency (rather than a course) and measuring academic progress by assessing learning outcomes. CBE may include different faculty roles, no set class sessions, and the ability for a student to demonstrate learning at his/her own pace. For federal purposes there are two types of CBE: direct-assessment CBE and credit- or clock-hour CBE.

Direct-assessment programs do not measure progress by credit or clock hours, instead using credit- or clock-hour equivalencies for the purpose of calculating Title IV aid. The assessment measures are for the demonstration of learning. In a direct-assessment CBE program all the measurement must be done via the direct assessment—no hybrid model is allowed outside of participation in the 2014

Limited Direct Assessment experiment¹. The only exception to this is that remedial coursework offered in credit or clock hours in conjunction with a direct-assessment program is allowed.

CBE programs that are measured via credit or clock hours are subject to the federal definition of credit and clock hours. These programs may be offered partially in CBE and partially in traditional course-based delivery models, provided that credit or clock hours are used as the measurement in all cases.

Instructions for Using This Resource

The tables, in general, accommodate semester, trimester, and quarter hours, and each column contains information specific to each type of model. This document is based off the **2015-2016 Federal Student Aid Handbook**. Additional references are made to the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), specifically 34 CFR, which can be found online at **Electronic Code of Federal Regulations (eCFR)**.

It is important to understand this is a document meant to help facilitate understanding and is not a substitute for the Federal Financial Student Aid Handbook, the Dear Colleague Letters, and other notices and information provided by the U.S. Department of Education or other regulatory agencies.

Any references to the U.S. Department of Education will henceforth be labeled “ED.”

¹ <https://experimentalsites.ed.gov/exp/approved.html>

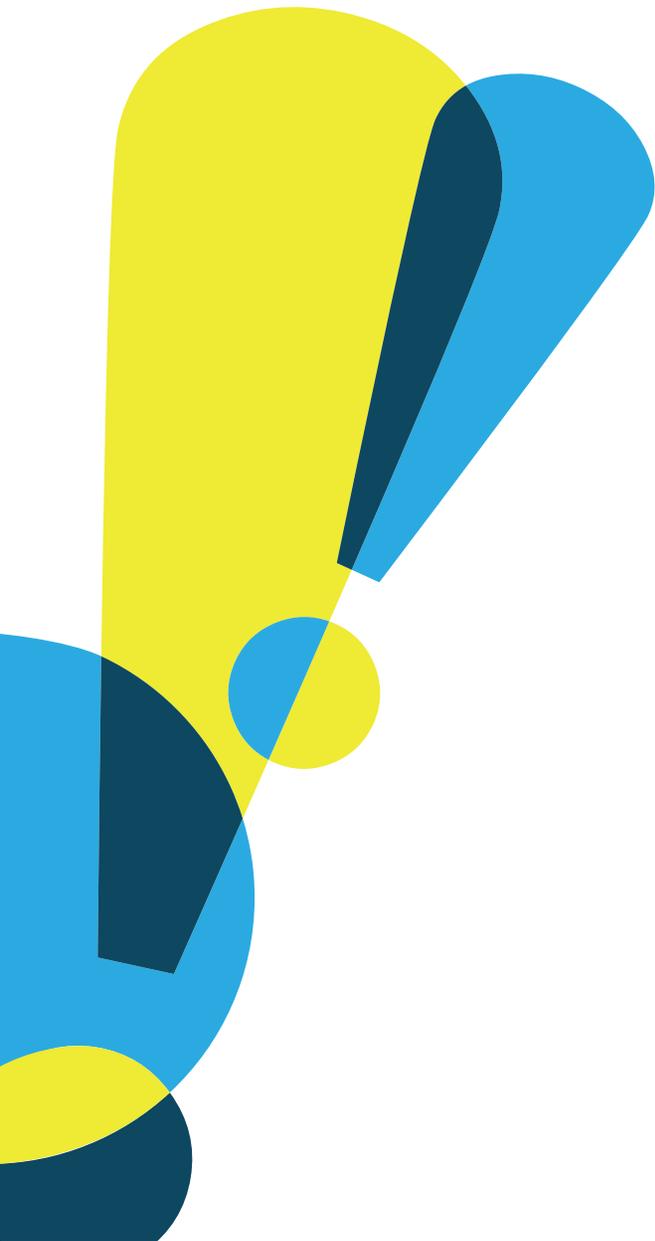


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Description of Academic Calendars | FSA Handbook, Volume 3, Chapter 1

Each academic program has a corresponding academic calendar. The program is defined by degree, location (e.g., on-campus, hybrid, or online), length (e.g., traditional or accelerated), and schedule (day, evening, weekend, or self-paced).

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter)

- Standard terms are semester, trimester, or quarter, and all classes are scheduled to begin and end within a set time frame. If an institution wants to use standard term for a CBE program, the competencies students are enrolled in must be designed to be completed within a term. If students are allowed to begin new competencies so late in the term that it is not reasonable to expect that the competencies can be completed by the end of the term, the program does not meet the requirements of a term-based program.
- An academic calendar that uses semesters traditionally has two terms, fall and spring; trimesters have fall, spring, and summer; and quarters have three 10- to 12- week terms and often a summer term as well.

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter) with Modules

- Shorter periods may be combined, offered sequentially, and meet requirements of a standard term. For example, two sessions that are each eight (8) weeks, or four one-month (4 weeks) modules might be combined into one semester term. Please note that these periods do not have to be equal lengths.

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Equal-Length Terms

- Nonstandard terms are terms that are not semester, trimester, or quarter terms using the definition of these terms in the FSA Handbook. The length of the term may not necessarily be associated with the type of credit hours awarded.
- Each term has fixed beginning and ending dates. Terms may be of unequal length.
- All coursework (including competencies) is expected to begin and end within a set period of time.

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Unequal-Length Terms

Nonterm: Credit-Hour and Clock-Hour

- Programs that measure progress in clock hours are always treated as a nonterm program.
- A program that measures progress in credit hours is nonterm if:
 - Courses do not begin and end within a set period of time;
 - Courses overlap terms, including self-paced and independent-study courses;
 - There are sequential courses that do not begin and end within a term.

Term Length | FSA Handbook, Volume 3, Chapter 1

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter)

- A semester term is generally 14 to 17 weeks in length.
- A quarter term is generally 10 to 12 weeks in length.
- Institutions that offer CBE in a standard-term program must use the appropriate credit-hour value (14 to 17 weeks would be a semester, and 10 to 12 would be a quarter) for credit-hour equivalencies.
- Institutions that offer CBE through subscription periods under the standard-term classification may treat the subscription period as an academic term, and it may coincide with the institutions' regular standard academic term (but is not required to do so).

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter) with Modules

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Equal-Length Terms

- A term length is other than the standard semester- or quarter-length term. All terms are substantially equal in length, which is defined by ED as two calendar weeks' or less difference between any two terms. For example: a program that offers six terms per year of two months in length. Please note the type of credit hours awarded may be semester or quarter—as this may not be related in a nonstandard term to the length of the term.

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Unequal-Length Terms

- A term length is other than the standard semester- or quarter-length term. Terms are substantially unequal in length, which is defined by ED as more than two calendar weeks' difference between any two terms.

Nonterm: Credit-Hour and Clock-Hour

- There is no term. You must operate on the basis of a financial aid academic year (AY).
- Students' aid eligibility and timing of disbursements "floats" based on their progress earning credit hours or clock hours.
- Schools may use subscription periods in a nonterm structure, but aid eligibility may not necessarily coincide with subscription periods.

Intersession | FSA Handbook, Volume 3, Chapter 1

Intersessions are short nonstandard-length terms offered between fall and spring semesters.

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter)

- Intersession must be combined with either fall or spring term. If it is not, and it does not meet standard-term definitions, then a school must consider the intersession not a standard term.
- Enrollment status, if combining intersession (i.e., in a semester system with fall or spring), is based on combined credit hours and treated as one term.

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter) with Modules

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Equal-Length Terms

- Intersession is treated as one of the nonstandard terms.

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Unequal-Length Terms

Nonterm: Credit-Hour and Clock-Hour

- There is no intersession.
- You must operate on the basis of a financial aid Borrower Based Academic Year (BBAY).

Summer Sessions | FSA Handbook, Volume 3, Chapter 1

Summer sessions are short nonstandard-length sessions offered after the traditional fall and spring calendar.

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter)

- A summer session may be shorter than the standard term.
- A summer session may be held between spring and fall in a semester-based term structure, is often included in a trimester-based term system, and may be offered between spring and fall in a quarter-based system (but not all quarter-based systems offer a summer session). For financial aid purposes, if there are multiple summer sessions the credit hours must be combined to determine enrollment status.

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter) with Modules

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Equal-Length Terms

- Summer session(s) is usually one (or several) of the nonstandard terms.

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Unequal-Length Terms

Nonterm: Credit-Hour and Clock-Hour

- There is no summer session.
- You must operate on the basis of a financial aid Borrower Based Academic Year (BBAY).

Academic Year

Each academic program must be defined by an academic year (AY). These are the federal minimum requirements. Please note that the number of weeks of instruction in a term is not necessarily the same as the number of calendar weeks. A week of instruction is federally defined as any period of seven (7) consecutive days in which at least one day of educational activity occurs.

In addition, schools may have different academic year definitions for different programs, and this includes different versions of the same program. A program's academic year does not have to be the same as the academic calendar. The financial aid academic year definition must be defined according to the following minimum requirements. However, if the program is less than the AY definition in hours or weeks student eligibility is affected.

For direct-assessment programs and other programs that do not measure progress in credit hours but in competencies or a similar measure, the regulations require an institution to establish credit- or clock-hour equivalencies to demonstrate that the amount of learning is equivalent to the amount of instruction, student work, and demonstrated knowledge expected in an equivalent traditional program. Information on how to establish credit hours along with two methodologies are described in Q&A #4 in the Dear Colleague Letter GEN-14-23.

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter)

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter) with Modules

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Equal-Length Terms

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Unequal-Length Terms

Nonterm: Credit-Hour and Clock-Hour

- **Undergraduate:** There must be at least 24 semester or trimester hours or 36 quarter hours and 30 weeks of instructional time.
- **Graduate:** There must be at least 30 weeks of instructional time. There is no minimum hours requirement in the definition of AY.

- For clock-hour programs, there must be at least 900 hours and 26 weeks of instructional time.

Academically Related Activities | FSA Handbook, Volume 3, Chapter 1

During a week of instructional time there must be academically related activities. Academically related activities do not include activities in which a student may be present but not academically engaged, such as: living in institutional housing, participating in a school's meal plan, logging into an online class without active participation, or participating in academic counseling or advisement. Instructional time also does not include vacation periods, homework, or periods of orientation or counseling.

Instructional materials and faculty support necessary for academic engagement must be available every week counted as a week of instruction. If instructional services supporting educational activity are not offered at any time during a seven-day period, that week would not count as a week of instruction in the academic year definition.

Credit-Hour and Clock-Hour Programs

- Regularly scheduled instruction
- Examinations or quizzes, tutorials
- Computer-assisted instruction
- Submitting an academic assignment, paper, or project
- Attending a study group required by the institution
- Participating in an online academic discussion
- *Faculty-guided* independent study (different from correspondence study)
- Consultations with faculty mentor

Direct-Assessment Programs

- All the activities under credit- and clock-hour programs plus:
- Development of an academic action plan in consultation with a *qualified faculty member that specifically addresses the competencies identified by the school*
- Other academically related activities that may be specifically approved by the Department of Education

Payment Period | FSA Handbook, Volume 3, Chapter 1

A payment period is a portion of an academic year or program used for various federal student aid purposes, most notably calculating disbursement eligibility for a specific period of time and the timing for evaluating Satisfactory Academic Progress.

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter)

- The payment period is a semester, trimester, or quarter period. This is considered a term-based payment period.

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter) with Modules

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Equal-Length Terms

- The payment period is the nonstandard term. This is considered a term-based payment period.

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Unequal-Length Terms

Undergraduate:

- For Pell, SEOG, and Perkins, the payment period is the nonstandard term.
- For Direct Loans, it is one-half of AY (both in credit hours and weeks of instructional time). A student doesn't move from one payment period to the next until both credits or clock hours and weeks of instructional time are completed.
- There is a two-payment-period limit in an academic year or program unless you are using terms as payment periods.

Graduate:

- For a graduate or professional student in a clock-hour or nonterm program, or a program with terms not substantially equal in length, the Direct Loan payment period is one-half of what a full-time student would be expected to complete, in both weeks of instructional time and credit or clock hours.

Nonterm: Credit-Hour and Clock-Hour

Undergraduate:

- If using a credit-hour nonterm program, the payment period is one-half of AY (both in semester- or quarter-unit hours and weeks of instructional time). If the program is shorter than one AY in either credit hours or weeks of instructional time, you follow the payment period rules in effect for programs of less than an academic year, which indicate that you divide the program into two payment periods.
- A student doesn't move from one payment period to the next until both credit or clock hours and weeks of instructional time are completed.
- There is a two-payment-period limit in an academic year or program unless you are using terms as payment periods.

Graduate:

- For a graduate or professional student in a clock-hour or nonterm program, or a program with terms not substantially equal in length, the Direct Loan payment period is one-half of what a full-time student would be expected to complete, in both weeks of instructional time and credit or clock hours.
- A nonterm payment period ends after the weeks of instruction elapse and the student has successfully completed the required number of credit or clock hours (or equivalencies).
- For nonterm programs that offer subscription periods, a student's payment periods may or may not coincide with an institution's subscription period.

Enrollment Status: Definition of Full Time

Your school defines a full-time workload for an academic year, but it must also meet the minimum standards in the federal student aid regulations.

The full-time definition must be used for all students in a program and must be the same for all aid-related purposes. In a semester system a minimum of 24 semester credit hours is required for undergraduate programs. For reference see also the chart for standard-term minimum enrollment standards in Volume 3, Chapter 3 (Calculating Pell), pages 3-47.

Direct-assessment programs must define enrollment status according to these standards through converting competencies into credit-hour equivalencies.

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter)

Undergraduate:

- To be considered in full-time status, students must enroll in (using a semester system) 12 semester hours or 12 quarter hours per term.

Standard (Semester, Trimester, or Quarter) with Modules

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Equal-Length Terms

Undergraduate:

- Students must enroll in at least 24 semester hours or 36 quarter hours per academic year. Full-time status in an individual term is calculated by dividing the number of weeks of instruction in the term by the number of weeks in the academic year, multiplied by the number of credit hours in the academic year.

Nonstandard Term: Substantially Unequal-Length Terms

Nonterm: Credit-Hour and Clock-Hour

Undergraduate:

- **Nonterm Credit Hour:** Students are considered full time if enrolled in at least six semester hours per nonterm payment period. Note that a student still does not progress from one payment period into the next until he/she successfully completes 12 semester hours and half the weeks of instruction in the AY definition.
- **Nonterm Clock Hour:**
 - 24 clock hours per week.

Appendix

List of C-BEN 2014–2015 Business Processes and Systems Strand Members

BUSINESS PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS STRAND

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About the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN)

The Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) is a group of regionally accredited two- and four-year public and private colleges and universities working together to address shared challenges to designing, developing and scaling high-quality CBE programs. C-BEN institutions have developed or are developing affordable, high quality CBE programs capable of serving many more students of all backgrounds. Additionally, member institutions are offering or will offer programs with well-defined learning outcomes and rigorous assessments. The C-BEN Board of Directors, comprising innovators from several participating institutions, guides the work to provide an evidence-based approach to advancing CBE across the country.

C-BEN can be found online at CBENetwork.org and on Twitter at [@CBENetwork](https://twitter.com/CBENetwork).

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