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SURVEY FINDS BROAD AGREEMENT ON FUNCTIONS REQUIRED FOR EFFECTIVE COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION PROGRAMS

SAN DIEGO, Calif. Dec. 3, 2015 – A new report reveals that colleges and universities offering competency-based education (CBE) programs have common expectations for program design and that those responsible for designing and delivering these programs tend to be full-time employees with a master's or a doctorate degree.

Schools engaged in competency-based education – which focuses on how students learn, retain, and use their knowledge rather than on how much time they spend in the classroom – show a striking amount of agreement on functions that need to be performed for CBE programs to be effective. This was particularly true for tasks related to curriculum.

The report, *Faculty and Staff Roles and Responsibilities in the Design and Delivery of Competency-Based Programs: A C-BEN Snapshot*, was released today by the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) during its winter convening in San Diego. C-BEN is a group of colleges and universities working together to address shared challenges to designing, developing and scaling CBE programs.

The report was authored by Michelle Navarre Cleary, Associate Dean of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment at DePaul University's School of New Learning and based on a first-of-its-kind survey this past summer. Administrators from C-BEN institutions Capella University, City University of Seattle, Danville Community College (Va.), Davenport University, Lipscomb University, Purdue University, Texas A&M University-Commerce, and University of Maine at Presque Isle also contributed to the report. This research was supported by Public Agenda.

The survey discovered that directors of CBE programs generally have advanced degrees, with 56 percent of those responding saying their position required at least a master's degree and another 29 percent saying their position required a doctorate. Of all the program directors, 83 percent were full-time staff.

Titles varied widely among CBE personnel, but 55 percent of respondents identified as either administrators (31 percent) or staff (24 percent). Only 15 percent were tenured or tenure-track faculty and only 19 percent indicated that they participated in shared faculty-administration governance as defined by the American Association of University Professors, a finding which supports some concerns about CBE programs lacking an independent faculty.

“This survey sheds light on those who are designing and delivering CBE programs at the institutional level,” said Alison Kadlec, Senior Vice President, Director of Higher Education & Workforce Programs, Public Agenda. “We found remarkable overlap in the kinds of work that these colleges are doing. But we encourage all CBE programs to closely examine these findings as they consider how to ensure high program quality and rigor.”

The research survey found broad agreement on the best approaches to the functions of curriculum, assessment and instruction within CBE programs, but great diversity among staff and faculty on how best to approach coaching, advising and mentoring of students.

The survey also looked into how CBE program leaders spend their time. On average, respondents spent 41 percent of their time on curriculum; 34 percent of their time on instruction; 29 percent of their time on coaching, advising or mentoring, and 26 percent of their time on assessment. (The total exceeds 100 percent because each respondent provided broad estimates.)

Finally, 20 percent of respondents offered suggestions to open-ended questions about reconfiguring the roles and responsibilities. These responses focused on the need to clarify roles and responsibilities; to improve curriculum, assessment and delivery design, and to increase support for faculty.

“These results provide a snapshot of CBE faculty and staff roles and responsibilities at a time of significant experimentation in how such programs are being developed and delivered,” the report concluded. “All are adapting to new conditions in today’s rapidly changing higher education landscape. As programs continue to innovate, they will continue to reconfigure faculty and staff roles and responsibilities.”

More than 140 individuals representing 32 of the 34 C-BEN member institutions responded to the survey.

Looking ahead, the report acknowledges that researchers are aware that as programs continue to innovate, they also will continue to reconfigure faculty and staff roles and responsibilities. The report notes that of the four functional areas identified, the area of coaching/advising/mentoring is currently the most in flux, and C-BEN researchers hope to focus more closely on innovations in this functional area in the future.

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The Competency-Based Education Network is a group of regionally accredited colleges and universities working together to address shared challenges to designing, developing and scaling competency-based degree programs. The group includes community colleges, colleges, universities and state systems, with public, non-profit and for-profit schools all represented.