

Competency-Based Education: The Basics, Myths, and Truths of CBE

Brooks Doherty
AVP of Academic Innovation at Rasmussen College

The Basics

Rasmussen College

- Founded in 1900 just outside St. Paul, MN
- Traditionally career-focused
- Began offering first associate degrees in the 1980s
- Now offers certificates through master's degrees
- Growing bachelor and Nursing populations
- 12 CBE programs with more than 1100 students
- Founding member of the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN)



Education responds to the economy

The diagram consists of two main parts. The top part shows a large grey arrow pointing right, containing three green boxes: 'Memorizing Information', 'Classifying Information', and 'Applying Information'. The bottom part shows a large green arrow pointing right, divided into four segments: 'Agricultural economy', 'Industrial and manufacturing', 'Knowledge economy', and 'Demonstration economy'.

We live in a Knowledge Economy rapidly evolving into the Demonstration Economy where students & employees are demonstrating what they know (Institute for the Future, 2018).

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"America cannot lead in the 21st century unless we have the best educated, most competitive workforce in the world."

President Barack Obama
Remarks on Higher Education
April 24, 2009

"By 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world... So tonight I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training... every American will need to get more than a high school diploma."

President Barack Obama
Address to Joint Session of Congress
February 24, 2009

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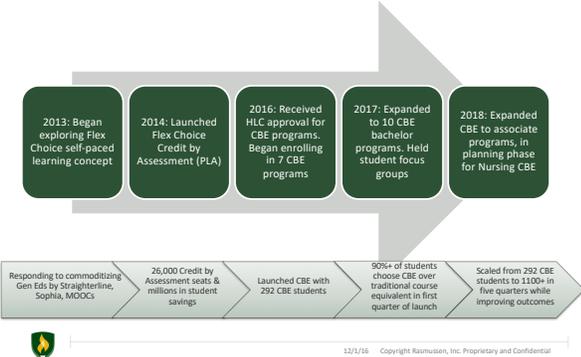
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Competency-Based Hiring: 10 Signals The Shift Is Happening

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Rasmussen's Response



CBE Defined

“Competency-based education combines an intentional and transparent approach to curricular design with an academic model in which the time it takes to demonstrate competencies varies and the expectations about learning are held constant. Students acquire and demonstrate their knowledge and skills by engaging in learning exercises, activities and experiences that align with clearly defined programmatic outcomes. Students receive proactive guidance and support from faculty and staff. Learners earn credentials by demonstrating mastery through multiple forms of assessment, often at a personalized pace.”

Benefits

- Students:**
- Allows for clearer pathway from life and work experience to academic programs, affordability, and speed to degree.
 - More independence and control of their own learning.
- Colleges:**
- Creating modular, competency-based content with interactive media and real-world assessments provides multiple product options which continue to meet the needs of the Demonstration Economy.
 - Allows for more agile curriculum refreshes to keep pace with employers.
- Employer:**
- With CBE, grads communicate with confidence they can demonstrate competencies employers deem valuable.
 - More benefits arise when colleges collaborate with employers on program design.

	Credit- and Course-Based CBE (Examples: WGU and Rasmussen)	Direct Assessment CBE (Examples: Capella and SNHU's College for America)
Curriculum Design	It is possible to build a stand-alone CBE course, but a program-first design is best practice as it allows for a tapestry of skills and knowledge areas.	Must use a program-first design approach as Direct Assessment offers no courses, only competencies.
Time	All CBE programs prioritize learning and its demonstration over time-in-seat. If some degree of student control over time isn't present in your CBE programs (e.g., the absence of assignment deadlines) you are not offering CBE. Term lengths of CBE programs vary from 2-6 months. Some remove academic terms altogether.	
Delivery	Can be online, residential, or blended, but competencies must be contained in courses.	Program has no courses – only competencies – and is typically offered online.
Workforce Ties	CBE programs should be built collaboratively among faculty, industry experts, and external standards where applicable.	
Faculty	Many, but not all CBE programs use a "disaggregated" or "unbundled" faculty model which divides instruction and assessment of student learning. It is critical that any faculty model you choose provides regular opportunity for substantive academic exploration, even in a self-paced environment.	
Regulatory	Each accreditor is different, but CBE nearly always has a high barrier to entry. Some regional accreditors offer blanket approvals after a minimum number of program approvals have been met.	Often features more complex and frequent need for regulatory approvals given the absence of both courses and, frequently, standard academic terms.
Financial Aid	Some similarities to traditional FA, but more differences related to self-pacing and varying terms.	More significant differences relative to traditional FA than most credit- and course-based models.
Student Support	Most CBE students, irrespective of their program design, receive support from faculty, coaches, advisors, and/or tutors. Support is often more robust than traditional learning given CBE's self-paced nature and adult learners' tendency to procrastinate given busy lives.	



Myths and Truths of CBE

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Myths

- *CBE programs, by definition, don't allow for higher order thinking. It's just a pile of fragmented skills.*
- *CBE programs are job training. You can't do Gen Ed or liberal arts in this model.*
- *CBE programs don't exist in current higher education systems. They're built in "innovation incubators" to circumvent governance.*
- *CBE programs don't have faculty.*
- *CBE programs don't have quality standards.*



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- CBE programs have a definition of success for higher order thinking skills, not just a list of content-based skills.
- CBE programs are designed so you can't do Gen Ed or liberal arts in the program.
- CBE programs do not fit the current higher education system, but are in "innovation incubator" environments.
- CBE programs don't have faculty.
- CBE programs don't have quality assurance.



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What Our Students Say

In addition to strong learning outcomes and improved retention compared to comparable cohorts in traditional models, here's what our students are saying:

- Live collaborative classrooms (ONL+) are **the most valuable tool in their CBE courses.**
 - Watching ONL+ live to be able to "ask questions right on the spot."
 - Archives "filled knowledge gaps because students were asking questions [she] had."
- All students were satisfied with their level of interaction, citing availability of faculty, quality of ONL+, and open discussion space.
- All students reported emailing, calling, or texting faculty; all generally received responses within 48 hours, and typically within 24 hours. One said, "teachers are always available."



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Contact

Brooks Doherty
AVP of Academic Innovation
Rasmussen College
Brooks.Doherty@Rasmussen.edu
952-806-3911
[@Brooks_Doherty](https://twitter.com/Brooks_Doherty)



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