

A photograph of two women shaking hands, overlaid with a blue gradient. The woman on the left is smiling and has curly hair, while the woman on the right has straight hair and is wearing glasses. The background is a bright, indoor setting.

# Enrollment Management & Competency-Based Education



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**Enrollment Management & Competency-Based Education**

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# Enrollment Management & Competency-Based Education

## Registrar and Financial Aid Edition

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Welcome to the Enrollment Management and Competency-Based Education guidebook. This resource will equip you with the essential knowledge and strategies to navigate competency-based education programming on your campus.

Developing and implementing policies and procedures related to the administration of enrollment management policies and practices, especially for financial aid and registrar functions, is already a daunting task. Yet, as higher education institutions embrace innovative models, enrollment management functions will face new challenges and opportunities. With this resource, you will gain valuable insights and practical tips to successfully support students and manage enrollment management functions within the context of competency-based education programs.

This guidebook should increase your confidence in this emerging field. It begins with an overview of CBE, why institutions pursue CBE, and the learners most often served by the model. Next, we dive into how the federal government recognizes and provides paths for CBE implementation. Lastly, you will find a list of questions you must consider to ensure programs are designed with compliance, quality, and learners in mind. We believe these resources will allow you to continue to play a vital role in making higher education accessible and affordable for students.

We invite you to join our dynamic and collaborative network of professionals dedicated to advancing new models of learning based on competencies. The Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) provides access to a vibrant community of leaders passionate about transforming education and supporting student success through CBE. We encourage you to use our other materials, found online at [www.c-ben.org](http://www.c-ben.org), and to engage in discussions, join webinars and attend CBExchange, our energizing annual conference. We also thank our partners at the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) for their partnership and expertise that guided the development of this resource.

Together, we can shape the future of education and ensure that education remains a cornerstone of equity and access. Thank you for being committed to making a difference in students' lives.

Best wishes on your CBE journey,

**Dr. Charla Long**

President, Competency-Based Education Network

# Introduction

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## U.S. Higher Education is in Transition

The current state of higher education in the United States is characterized by a combination of challenges and ongoing transformations. From the recent announcement by the Carnegie Foundation to transition from the credit-hour structure of learning to drastically shrinking enrollments, several key trends and areas of focus have dominated the discussion, including:

- **Competency-Based Education (CBE):** CBE has gained traction as an effective approach to traditional credit-hour-based education. CBE focuses on assessing students' mastery of specific skills and competencies, allowing for personalized learning pathways and a flexible pace that allows learners to engage on their own time without sacrificing quality.
- **Affordability:** The cost of higher education continues to be a significant concern for students and families. Rising tuition fees, coupled with the burden of student loan debt, have led to a growing emphasis on financial aid, scholarships, and alternative funding models.
- **Access and Equity:** There is a persistent focus on improving access and equity in higher education, particularly for underrepresented and marginalized communities. Efforts are being made to expand opportunities, bridge the achievement gap, and promote diversity on campuses.
- **Online and Hybrid Learning:** The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online and hybrid learning models. Institutions have been forced to adapt quickly and invest in technology to facilitate remote instruction. This shift has also prompted discussions about the future of online education and its integration into traditional campus-based programs.

# 82%

of higher education leaders believe the number of competency-based education programs will grow nationally in the next 5 years.

**59%** of institutions pursuing CBE are doing so to respond to workforce needs.

- **Workforce Readiness:** There is an increased emphasis on aligning higher education programs with the demands of the job market. Employers are seeking graduates who possess relevant skills and competencies, leading to a greater focus on career-oriented education, internships, and experiential learning opportunities.
- **Technology and Innovation:** Technology continues to shape higher education, influencing teaching methods, administrative processes, and student support services. Innovations such as learning analytics, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality are being explored and implemented in an effort to enhance student outcomes and improve operational efficiency.

Of all these issues, competency-based education has the potential for the most disruptive impact on enrollment management operations. This guidebook is designed to increase your understanding of competency-based education and provide guidance on key areas that should be addressed in collaboration with CBE program design teams and faculty.

**“What you’re really arguing for in competency-based education is to shift the spotlight to the outcomes and assess what students can actually do. When we shift the spotlight to outcomes, you unleash innovation.”**

– Paul LeBlanc  
President, Southern New Hampshire University

# What is Competency-Based Education?

Competency-based education (CBE) is an educational approach that focuses on the mastery of specific knowledge, skills, and intellectual behaviors, known as competencies, rather than solely relying on the accumulation of credit hours. In a competency-based education program, the emphasis is placed on students' demonstrated proficiency and their ability to apply what they have learned in real-world, authentic contexts.

Competency-based education aims to foster deeper learning, enhance student engagement, and better align educational outcomes with workforce needs. It offers a flexible and student-centered approach to education, empowering learners to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for success in their chosen fields.

Although there is no federal definition for competency-based education in law, C-BEN has worked with the field to develop a [Quality Framework for Competency-Based Education Programs](#), along with various guides and resources to support implementation of quality CBE.

## Key characteristics of competency-based education includes:

- **Clear Learning Outcomes:** CBE programs define the explicit competencies that students are expected to achieve. These outcomes are often aligned with industry standards or specific job requirements.
- **Flexible Pace and Pathways:** CBE allows students to progress at their own pace and customize their learning pathways. Students can move quickly through material they have already mastered, and spend more time on areas that require additional attention or development. This flexibility also ensures each and every learner has the opportunity to reach their full potential and master every competency in the program.
- **Personalized Learning:** CBE promotes individualized instruction and tailored learning experiences. Students receive personalized support and resources to help them achieve their learning goals. Instructional methods, assessments, and learning materials are designed to meet the diverse needs of today's learners.
- **Performance-Based Assessments:** CBE uses performance-based assessments to measure students' mastery of competencies. These assessments are designed to mirror as closely as possible what students will be expected to do post-graduation. The focus is on evaluating

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students' ability to apply knowledge and skills in authentic contexts, such as projects, role-plays, and simulation. Each and every learner must demonstrate mastery according to predetermined performance-based criterion.

- **Continuous Feedback and Support:** CBE provides ongoing feedback and support to students to help them improve their performance and make progress toward their goals. This includes regular and substantive engagement with instructors, mentors, and peers.
- **Transcripts and Credentials:** CBE often utilizes alternative methods of documenting student achievement, such as learning and employment records or digital badges. These transcripts and credentials provide a more detailed and nuanced representation of students' competencies and accomplishments in a digital format that can be easily shared, in real-time with employers.

To deliver on the promise of CBE, institutions must expand their view of key partners in the design and delivery of credential programs. Namely, while CBE is a pedagogical approach and requires faculty involvement, the student-centered and personalized characteristics require a team of cross-institutional faculty and staff who represent functions that contribute to student learning, success, affordability, and access and equity, as well as quality assurance and standards. Most institutions engage the following functions in the design of programs:

- Academic Program Chair and Teaching Faculty
- Student Affairs functions to support basic needs, advising, and belonging
- Financial Aid
- Registrar
- Bursar/Billing/Business Office
- Library Services
- Accreditation Liaison

## Enrollment Management Questions

If your institution is looking at competency-based education, ask the leaders of the effort to share their definition of competency-based education. How closely aligned is it to the characteristics of CBE described above?

Is your institution utilizing the C-BEN Quality Framework to design a CBE program? If so, where can you best contribute to planning and bring key insights about how financial aid practices can facilitate student success?





# Why Competency-Based Education?

You may be questioning why your institution wants to pursue CBE if the model requires disruption or even radical departure from business as usual. For many institutions, that's the point – they want to disrupt normal operations and create a new model of higher education that can better serve students and employers rather than continue with traditional higher education models that are failing to meet the needs of the majority of students.

**Institutions pursuing CBE report the following goals and motivations behind the development of CBE programs:**

- **Focus on Real-World Skills:** CBE programs aim to align education with the skills and knowledge that are relevant to the job market and industry needs. By focusing on competencies, institutions can ensure that students acquire practical, applicable skills that are valuable in their chosen fields.
- **Increased Accessibility:** CBE programs can make education more accessible to a broader range of students. By allowing learners to demonstrate competency regardless of the time and place of their learning, CBE can accommodate students who have work, family, or other commitments that prevent them from following traditional class schedules.
- **Flexible Learning Pathways:** Traditional education often follows a fixed timeline and one-size-fits all approach, but CBE programs provide flexible pathways for learners to progress by demonstrating their mastery of competencies in various ways, such as projects, portfolios, or assessments. This flexibility enables learners to progress on their own timeline and in accordance with their life because progress is based on demonstrated knowledge and skills, rather than simply completing a set number of clock hours or years.

67%

of institutions choose  
CBE to expand access to  
non-traditional learners.

# 56%

of institutions are motivated by a desire to improve learning outcomes through CBE.

- **Outcome-Oriented Approach:** CBE programs focus on measurable outcomes rather than solely on the completion of courses or seat time. This outcomes-based approach helps institutions assess the effectiveness of their programs and ensures that students are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in their chosen careers.
- **Continuous Improvement:** CBE programs emphasize ongoing assessment and feedback, allowing institutions to continuously improve their educational offerings. By collecting data on student performance and using it to refine curriculum and instructional methods, institutions can enhance the quality and relevance of their programs over time.

Overall, institutions create competency-based education programs to offer more flexible, relevant, and personalized learning experiences that align with the needs of students and the job market.

## Enrollment Management Questions

It is important to understand why your institution is interested in pursuing CBE. Institutions create CBE programs for many reasons and understanding why your institution is considering CBE is essential to structuring the right financial aid solution. What is your institution hoping to gain with a CBE program?

What will CBE allow your institution to do that current offerings do not?  
How can financial aid processes and procedures align with these goals?



# Who Does Your Institution Want to Serve with CBE Offerings?

Competency-based education places the learner at the center of all design decisions. By looking at the needs of the intended learners, institutions can create in-demand programs that are designed to deliver outcomes for students.

One of the first decisions an institution must make is to identify the type(s) of learner(s) it seeks to serve, or serve better. Most institutions leverage competency-based approaches to reach learners that have not been able to access the institution previously, or as a way to improve outcomes with learners that the institution has not served well in the past.

As your institution builds a CBE program, C-BEN encourages instructional teams to create and use learner personas that define the characteristics and considerations associated with the learners it seeks to serve through CBE. It may not be surprising as you examine your own institutional data and equity goals that institutions often report the following learner considerations, however, it is important to note that CBE can be designed to serve any learner population. Well-designed CBE credentials, especially those built to adhere to The Quality Framework for CBE Programs, appeal to learners because they offer:

- **Affordability and Access to Financial Aid.** Cost considerations are important for learners. They may look for colleges or universities that offer affordable tuition rates, flexible payment plans, scholarships, grants, and other forms of financial aid support. Nearly all CBE programs today are Title IV eligible, and many use a tuition structure that is lower than the institution's traditional model or allow for acceleration through content to reduce the overall cost for learners.
- **Age and Life Responsibilities:** Learners are typically older than traditional college-aged students and bring a wealth of life experience to the educational setting. They may be working professionals, parents, caregivers, or have other commitments that require attention to these basic needs and juggling their time and priorities. These may include academic advising tailored to adult learners, career counseling, childcare or respite services, financial aid resources, and networking opportunities.
- **Diverse Backgrounds and Motivations:** Learners come from diverse backgrounds, including but not limited to race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, age, or work experience and have unique motivations for pursuing higher education. Individual motivations could include enhancing their career prospects, changing career paths, providing more financial stability for their family, or finding more fulfilling work. They may appreciate practical, hands-on applications of knowledge, collaborative learning opportunities, and instruction that relates directly to their career goals.

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- **Flexible Learning Options:** Many adult and working learners prefer flexible scheduling to accommodate their work, family, or other life responsibilities. Having the ability to learn on their own time, maybe in the evenings, early mornings, on weekends, or through online and distance learning, provides the flexibility in time they need to master competencies and progress through their program.
- **Credit Transfer Opportunities:** Adult learners who have previously attended college or have earned credits at other institutions often prioritize colleges or universities with favorable credit transfer policies. Institutions that accept and maximize the transfer of previously earned credits can help adult learners save time and money in completing their degree. CBE programs have a range of methods for handling credit transfer.
- **Credit for Prior Learning:** Learners have often acquired knowledge and skills through prior work, military service, community leadership, or other learning venues. To save both time and money, learners with established skill sets seek institutions willing to grant academic credit for competencies worthy of college-level recognition.
- **Career Placement and Networking Opportunities.** Because of the experiential, applied nature of CBE programs, learners have deeper understanding of their skills and are more confident in their pursuit of employment. Most if not all are often given opportunities to connect with potential employers and build a professional network prior to completion of their credential which can be particularly attractive to learners with strong motivations for credentials that result in employment and wage increases.

For institutions that recognize the importance of meeting the needs of all their learners, competency-based education can be a key strategy as the model aligns closely to key factors learners look for in an academic institution and/or credential program.



## Enrollment Management Questions

Who does your institution want to serve with its CBE programs? How different is this learner from learners served today? How does your institution plan to better understand the needs of the targeted learner population? How will your institution meet these needs in the design of its CBE programs? How might learner needs impact financial aid operations?

# **Enrollment Management Considerations, Challenges and Opportunities**

# Federal Policy and CBE

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## What are the Three Types of CBE Recognized by the U.S. Department of Education?

The Department of Education has offered clarification on CBE since 2013 and in 2019 through negotiated rulemaking, the U.S. Department of Education updated its regulations specific to distance education, competency-based education, and other types of educational programs that emphasize the demonstration of learning rather than seat time, allowing for greater flexibility for institutions.

Today, the Department recognizes three types of CBE programs: Direct Assessment, Credit and Clock-Hours, or Hybrid. Below is an overview of each type program, which had different implications for the instructional team.

- 1. Direct Assessment CBE:** This approach that allows students to progress and earn credits based on the direct assessment of their demonstrated mastery of specific competencies. Instead of relying on seat time or credit hours, students are assessed through direct measures such as examinations, projects, portfolios, or performance-based assessments. Students can move through the material at their own pace and demonstrate mastery whenever they are ready, enabling a flexible and individualized learning experience.

*A direct assessment program is an instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as measures of student learning, utilizes direct assessment of student learning, or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others. The assessment must be consistent with the accreditation of the institution or program utilizing the results of the assessment. 34 CFR §668.10(a)(1)*

Since a direct assessment CBE program does not utilize credit or clock hours as a measure of student learning, an institution must establish a methodology to reasonably equate the direct assessment program (or the direct assessment portion of any program, as applicable) to credit or clock hours for the purpose of complying with applicable regulatory and accreditation requirements.

Before an institution may provide Title IV aid to students in a direct assessment program, the institution must receive approval for the program by both its accreditor and the U.S. Department of Education. This two-step approval process is described in 34 CFR §668.10(a)(5) and (b)(1-2). For institutions with strong track records with compliance, once an institution has one direct assessment program approved, subsequent programs at the same credential level do not require departmental approval – just accreditor approval. Institutions are required to still provide notice to the Secretary of Education when adding second or subsequent direct assessment programs.



# Enrollment Management Questions

Considering the Carnegie Foundation's recent statement about transitioning from the credit-hour as the measurement of learning, take a moment to read 34 CFR §668.10 in its entirety.

How might a direct assessment program work at your institution?

How could you disperse aid by a method other than a credit hour?

What systems would need to change?

**2. Credit- and Clock-Hours Based CBE:** This model combines elements of traditional credit and course structures with a competency-based approach. In this model, students progress through a series of courses or modules, and competency assessments are embedded within each course or module. Students must successfully complete the specified competencies to earn credits or advance to the next course. This model provides a balance between competency-based progress and the more familiar credit-hour system, allowing for a gradual transition to a fully competency-based model.

CBE may be offered using credit hours or clock hours. A program that is organized by competency, but measures student progress using clock or credit hours, is a CBE program, but not a direct assessment program. A CBE program offered using credit or clock hours is subject to Federal requirements for the definitions of credit hours and clock hours.

The definitions for clock hour and credit hour can be found in the regulations at 34 CFR 600.2. The definition for credit hour includes a provision that allows an institution to establish credit hours in a CBE program that are based on an amount of expected educational activity that reasonably approximates not less than one hour of classroom instruction and two hours of out of class work each week. An institution's policies for establishing credit hours in its CBE programs for Title IV purposes must be consistent with these requirements. An institution's policies for establishing credit hours for a CBE program must meet all requirements and standards set by the institution's accrediting agency.

**A clock hour is a period of time consisting of:**

- A 50- to 60-minute class, lecture, or recitation in a 60-minute period;
- A 50- to 60-minute faculty-supervised laboratory, shop training, or internship in a 60-minute period;
- Sixty minutes of preparation in a correspondence course; or
- A 50- to 60-minutes in a 60-minute period in distance education where there is synchronous or asynchronous direct interaction between faculty and students or technology that can monitor the amount of time a student participates in an activity asynchronously.

A CBE program that measures progress in clock hours must meet this definition.

- 3. Hybrid Models:** As a result of the negotiated rulemaking process, a hybrid of the two previously described models exist. A hybrid approach to CBE combines elements of both traditional education and competency-based approaches. These models often involve a mix of seat time, credit hours, and competency-based assessments. Students may have the option to choose between traditional courses and competency-based pathways, allowing for flexibility and customization. Hybrid models can be designed to fit the needs and preferences of both students and institutions, providing a transitional or alternative approach to implementing full-scale CBE.

## Enrollment Management Questions



Using the following chart as a starting place, what are the pros and cons of each CBE model from your perspective?

If you looked at the pros and cons from the learner's perspective, would it be different?

Which model do you think would work best for your institution and its learners?



Type of CBE Program	Pros	Cons
<b>Credit-hour based CBE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Financial aid is administered under normal statutory and regulatory provisions for clock or credit hour programs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More challenging to offer in flexible pacing and differentiated instruction.</li> <li>- Often need workarounds if requiring mastery and learner has not demonstrated all competencies by end of term.</li> </ul>
<b>Direct Assessment CBE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides the greatest flexibility for learners.</li> <li>- Variable pacing allows some learners to realize cost savings.</li> <li>- Allows institutions to require mastery of competencies before advancing in program.</li> <li>- Removes arbitrary, time-bound measures of learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Requires institutions to re-think financial aid policies, processes, and procedures.</li> <li>- Must receive approval from the U.S. Department of Education for how the institution plans to disburse aid based on competencies, rather than clock or credit hours.</li> <li>- May require additional technology to assist with disbursement of aid.</li> </ul>
<b>Hybrid CBE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Combines the best of both models.</li> <li>- Allows learners to choose the content delivery method most aligned to needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Still requires institutions to have direct assessment approval before having hybrid capabilities.</li> <li>- May require managing two different types of units to support academic year lengths, payment periods, enrollment levels, disbursement eligibility, SAP pace, and the like.</li> </ul>

# What are the Specific Regulatory Considerations?

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**Competency-based education (CBE) will impact enrollment management functions as administered today. In this section, we will explore several key policies and practices that require your thoughtful consideration.**

It is important to remember that there is no one right way to build a competency-based education program and there are a range of programmatic models in operation today. This is not by chance, but by design. By placing learners at the center of all your institution's design decisions, your role is figuring out how to meet these learner needs while maintaining regulatory compliance.

## 1. Credit or Clock Hour Equivalencies

Traditional financial aid programs often calculate eligibility based on credit or clock hours. In CBE programs, where competencies are the unit of measure, institutions must establish a process for determining credit or clock hours equivalencies. This means, you must determine how to equate competencies with credit or clock hours for the purpose of multiple financial aid calculations. For example, how will you define your academic year in competencies so it maps back to, for example, 24 semester credits/30 weeks? How will you determine a half-time or full-time enrollment level using competencies? And, if you are nonterm, how will you know when a student has mastered enough competencies to complete a payment period?

The definitions for clock hour and credit hour are found in 34 CFR 600.2. For purposes of this section, we will focus on the definition of credit hour in a semester context. A credit hour *reasonably approximates* one hour of classroom instruction and two hours of out-of-class work each week for fifteen weeks of instruction. For calculation purposes, a learner would have three hours of instructional activity for fifteen weeks equal to forty-five hours of instructional activity in one semester.

Nationally, there is no consistent amount of learning that comprises a competency. Some states are considering mandating this calculation with a one competency equals one credit hour or half-credit hour approach. Other states allow institutions to determine the equivalent size of a competency. When competencies are of variable size, the institution must explain how they determined the amount of learning contained in the competency.

To illustrate, institutions often create a robust outline of course content such as the one shown in **Figure 1**, from a healthcare program.

Then, the institution establishes a formula for calculating how to measure the amount of learning in a competency. In the example in **Figure 2**, a community college shared its credit hour calculations for various activities.

When the community college applied this logic to the detailed course outline or instructional materials, the college was able to determine the credit hour equivalency was two credit hours.

**Figure 3.**

**Course Title: Communication in LTSS**  
**Module 1 Title: Defining the Communication Process**  
**1.5 Estimated Lecture Hours**

**Module 1 Learning Outcomes**

- Identify key elements of the communication process.
- Recognize barriers to effective communication.
- Recognize your role in the communication process.
- Demonstrate strategies for effective communication.
- Demonstrate strategies to overcome barriers to effective communication.

**Lesson 1: Introduction to Communication**

- Learning Outcomes (Reading)
- Definition (Reading/Video Instruction)
- Check Your Knowledge (Quiz)

**Lesson 2: How DSWs Communicate**

- The Direct Service Worker (DSW) and Communication (Reading)
- You Use Different Ways of Communicating (Reading)
- You Explain Services and Service Terms (Reading)
- You Communicate in an Appropriate Way, part 1 (Reading)
- You Communicate in an Appropriate Way, part 2 (Reading/Video Instruction)
- Check Your Knowledge (Practicum Activity)

**Lesson 3: The Importance of Communication**

- Why is Communication Important for the Person You Support? (Reading)
- Why is Communication Important for the Care or Support Team? (Reading/Hotspot Quiz)
- Your Communication is Valuable (Reading/Audio Instruction)

**Lesson 4: Effective Communication**

- Check Your Knowledge, part 1 (Decision Tree)
- Check Your Knowledge, part 2 (Decision Tree)
- Key Elements of the Communication Process Identified (Reading)
- Key Elements of the Communication Process Explained (Reading/Video Instruction)
- Recognizing Key Elements of the Communication Process (Reading/Video Instruction)
- Journaling (Practicum Activity)

**Lesson 5: Conclusion**

- Coach Check-in (Faculty Coaching Session)
- Wrap up (Reading)
- Onsite Assessment (Reading)
- Additional Resources (Supplemental Resources and Readings)

**Figure 1**

**Key Activities for Estimations:**

Quiz = 10 minutes  
 Readings per 1-credit hour module = 15 minutes (based on approximately 250 words read per minute)  
 Readings per 2-credit hour module = 30 minutes (based on approximately 250 words read per minute)  
 Simulation = 5 minutes  
 Decision Tree = 10 minutes  
 Practicum Activity (3:1) = 20 minutes  
 Coaching session = 0.5 hour  
 Video Instruction = 2 minutes  
 Additional Resources = 20 minutes

**Figure 2**

The XX Competency is estimated at approximately X lecture hours and X practicum hours. This hour calculation is based on an average learner's time to complete the learning content, Assessment Center experience, and practicum hours. An average learner will spend the following time estimates in the following areas:

- 2 hours engaging in Assessment Center Exercises including a feedback session that offers individualized data and examples to support strengths and development opportunities
- 1.5 to 2 hours engaging with reading material and learning activities
- 0.5 to 1 hours engaging with video instruction
- 2 to 4 hours engaging with formative assessment activities and feedback including objective assessments, simulation exercises, decision tree activities, case study activities, and open response activities
- 3 to 4 hours engaging with faculty coaching sessions including reflection, debriefing, feedback, and personalized instruction
- 8+ hours engaging with workplace activities including competency application supported by journaling and cue card activities [Work experience per badge varies]

**Figure 3**

Even absent a state or federal policy to this effect, some CBE institutions have required faculty to design competencies in whole unit equivalencies. This allows the institution to avoid issuing fractional credit- or clock-hour equivalencies.

# What are the Specific Regulatory Considerations?

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## 2. Academic Calendar

The term “academic calendar” in the context of federal financial aid refers to the schedule and timeline of an educational institution’s academic year. It includes important dates such as the start and end of semesters or terms, holidays, breaks, and other significant academic events.

The academic calendar is relevant to federal financial aid because it helps determine the disbursement and eligibility of financial aid funds. Here are a few key aspects related to the academic calendar and federal financial aid:

- **Enrollment Status:** The academic calendar is used to determine a student’s enrollment status for financial aid purposes. The enrollment status, such as full-time, half-time, or less than half-time, influences the amount of financial aid a student is eligible to receive. The number of credit hours a student is enrolled in during specific academic periods, as defined by the academic calendar, is considered when determining their enrollment status.
- **Disbursement of Financial Aid:** The academic calendar plays a role in determining the timing of financial aid disbursements. Financial aid is typically disbursed in accordance with the academic calendar, usually at the beginning of each term or semester. Disbursements may be made in multiple installments throughout the academic year, depending on the institution’s policies and the specific financial aid programs the student is receiving.
- **Add/Drop Periods:** Add/drop periods, which allow students to modify their course schedules by adding or dropping classes, are typically defined within the academic calendar. These periods are significant for financial aid purposes because any changes made during this time can affect a student’s enrollment status and, subsequently, their financial aid eligibility and disbursement.
- **Satisfactory Academic Progress Evaluation:** Federal financial aid programs require students to meet satisfactory academic progress (SAP) standards to maintain eligibility for aid. The academic calendar is used to track and evaluate a student’s progress toward degree completion. SAP evaluations are typically conducted at the end of each term or semester, as outlined in the academic calendar, to assess a student’s GPA, completion rate, and other relevant criteria.

From a learner’s perspective, it’s important to be familiar with the institution’s academic calendar and understand how it aligns with their financial aid eligibility. By keeping track of important dates, students can ensure they meet enrollment requirements, receive timely financial aid disbursements, and meet academic progress expectations to maintain eligibility for federal financial aid programs.

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In the context of federal financial aid regulations, the terms “standard term,” “non-term,” “non-standard term,” and “subscription-based” refer to different academic calendar structures used by educational institutions. These structures can have implications for the disbursement and eligibility of financial aid funds. Let’s explore each term in more detail:

- **Standard Term:** A standard term refers to a traditional academic calendar structure that is divided into specific, predefined terms such as semesters or quarters. These terms have set start and end dates and are typically of fixed length (e.g., 15 weeks for a semester). The standard term structure is the most common and widely recognized format for organizing academic calendars.
- **Non-Term:** Non-term refers to an academic calendar structure that does not follow a traditional semester or quarter format. Instead, courses may be offered in a more flexible, self-paced manner without being tied to specific term lengths. Non-term structures often involve continuous enrollment and allow students to start and complete courses at various times throughout the year. Students progress through their programs at their own pace, and there may not be strict start and end dates for courses.
- **Non-Standard Term:** Non-standard term refers to an academic calendar structure that falls outside the traditional semester or quarter framework but still follows a defined term length. In this structure, the terms may have varying lengths that deviate from the standard duration. For example, an institution might offer a shorter term during the summer or a longer term during a specialized study abroad program. It is important to note that a nonstandard term substantially equal to and at least nine weeks in length are treated like standard terms.
- **Subscription-Based:** Subscription-based refers to an academic calendar structure that operates on a subscription model, where students have continuous enrollment and pay a flat fee for access to educational resources or programs over a specific period. Instead of following a fixed term-based schedule, students can start and complete courses at their own pace often continuing coursework in multiple subscription periods. This structure allows for flexibility in course selection and completion time. Federal regulations allow for a subscription-based term to be used in all types of CBE programs, including those that are not approved as direct assessment.

If you are planning to use subscription periods that are shorter than 9 weeks in length, work with your compliance team to ensure the annual ‘BBAY3’ rules on gaining access to a new annual loan limit that typically apply to nonstandard terms of that length either do not apply or are addressed by your loan packaging strategies. The Federal Student Aid policy team is reviewing this scenario and at press time we do not yet have a final determination.

## What are the Specific Regulatory Considerations?

These different calendar structures have implications for how financial aid is disbursed and students' eligibility for aid. Institutions must have appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure that financial aid is disbursed in a manner consistent with federal regulations, including the timing and proration of aid based on a student's enrollment and completion of coursework.

Academic Calendar	Pros	Cons
<b>Standard Term*</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear and well-defined structure that aligns with traditional academic norms.</li> <li>- Easier to administer financial aid disbursements and track enrollment status.</li> <li>- Consistent timing allows for efficient planning of aid distribution and processing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited flexibility in course scheduling, which may not accommodate certain students' needs.</li> <li>- Less adaptable to non-traditional or self-paced learning models.</li> <li>- Challenges in accommodating students who need to enroll or withdraw outside of standard term dates.</li> </ul>
<b>Non-Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexibility in course scheduling and start dates, accommodating diverse student needs.</li> <li>- Ability to offer continuous enrollment, allowing students to progress at their own pace.</li> <li>- More adaptable to non-traditional, online, or competency-based learning programs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Challenges in tracking enrollment status and determining financial aid eligibility.</li> <li>- Potential difficulties in aligning disbursements with students' individual start and end dates.</li> <li>- Need for clear policies and procedures to ensure compliance with federal regulations.</li> </ul>

\* Including substantially equal nonstandard terms that are at least nine weeks in length (SE9W)

Academic Calendar	Pros	Cons
<b>Non-Standard Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allows for greater variety in course offerings and program structures.</li> <li>- Can accommodate specialized programs, study abroad experiences, or intensive sessions.</li> <li>- Flexibility in tailoring academic calendar to meet specific institutional or programmatic needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complex administration of financial aid disbursements and tracking enrollment status.</li> <li>- Potential challenges in aligning aid awards and disbursements with varying term lengths.</li> <li>- Clear communication and guidance required to ensure students understand the non-standard structure.</li> </ul>
<b>Subscription-Based</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offers flexibility for students to enroll and complete courses at their own pace.</li> <li>- Aligns well with self-paced or competency-based learning models.</li> <li>- Can accommodate students with varying personal or work commitments.</li> <li>- Financial aid awarded with traditional term-based rules for the student's selected enrollment level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complex administration of financial aid disbursements and determining aid eligibility.</li> <li>- Ensuring compliance with federal regulations regarding disbursement timing and enrollment status.</li> <li>- Potential difficulties in tracking and reporting student progress and academic success.</li> </ul>

A sample academic calendar on a subscription model would differ from traditional academic calendars. In this model, students pay a subscription fee and have the flexibility to enroll in courses and progress through their education at their own pace.

## What are the Specific Regulatory Considerations?

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A sample academic calendar on a subscription model would differ from traditional academic calendars. In this model, students pay a subscription fee and have the flexibility to enroll in courses and progress through their education at their own pace.

The subscription-based model has received a lot of national attention recently. To follow is an example of what a sample academic calendar on a subscription model might look like:

- 1. Rolling Admission:** Instead of fixed application deadlines, the institution has rolling admission, allowing students to apply and start their subscription at any time throughout the year. This provides flexibility for adult learners or non-traditional students who may need to begin their studies outside of the typical academic calendar.
- 2. Subscription Periods:** The academic calendar is divided into subscription periods instead of semesters or quarters. Each subscription period covers a specific time frame during which students have access to courses and resources. Students are billed flat-rate tuition for a selected enrollment level on a regular schedule. These students are awarded and receive regular term-based financial aid for that enrollment level, and complete programming at their own pace. If a student significantly slows progress below their selected enrollment level pace, disbursements are delayed until sufficient credits/units/competencies are successfully completed. Schools are offering a wide range of periods, including one-month, seven or eight weeks, three months, fifteen weeks, and six months. When offering subscription periods less than nine weeks in length, loan eligibility may be impacted if the learner has not completed a full academic year in credit/unit equivalencies by the start of the new aid year. As a financial aid professional, you will need to work with the CBE leadership team to determine an appropriate subscription period for your learners.
- 3. Course Availability:** Courses are available throughout the year, and students can enroll in courses at any time during their subscription period. The institution offers a wide range of courses and allows students to choose the courses that align with their interests, program requirements, and desired pace of study. The CBE leadership team at your institution will need to think through the implications of this type of availability on your faculty and staff model.
- 4. Self-Paced Learning:** The subscription model supports self-paced learning, allowing students to complete courses at their own speed within the subscription period. Students have the flexibility to set their own study schedule and progress through the course material and assignments according to their individual preferences and time availability.
- 5. Continuous Enrollment:** With the subscription model, students have the option to continuously enroll in courses and maintain their active subscription by paying the subscription fee. This enables them to continue their enrollment and access to courses and resources for the next subscription period. This means learning in one course may span across more than one subscription period.



- 6. Assessments and Grading:** The institution uses a competency-based assessment approach. Students are evaluated based on their mastery of specific competencies or learning outcomes rather than following a fixed timeline. They complete performance-based assessments, projects, or simulations to demonstrate their proficiency and receive feedback and grades on their performance. These assessments are used to determine when the learner has mastered the competency.
- 7. Bundled Support Services:** The institution provides support services bundled to the specifically academic content covered in the subscription period. This includes personalized academic advising, flexible tutoring services, access to digital resources, and online support for technical assistance or administrative inquiries.
- 8. Graduation and Credentialing:** Students work towards completion of their program requirements, and once they meet the specified criteria, they can apply for graduation or the awarding of a credential. The institution may hold graduation ceremonies at specific intervals throughout the year or provide online ceremonies for students who have completed their program.

It's important to note that the structure and details of a subscription-based academic calendar can vary based on the specific institution and program. The example above serves as a general illustration of what a subscription model academic calendar might entail. Institutions may use a more 'traditional' academic calendar for the subscription model. The terms are the subscription periods, but courses can overlap into more than one term.

While schools may wish to start a new subscription period whenever a student decides to start, they may also manage those starts (often, more easily) by starting new subscription periods once a quarter, every ten weeks, monthly, or on another set schedule that allows the subscription period start/end dates to be preset and configured as terms for awarding, etc. The same 'terms' would also be used for billing the flat subscription tuition.



## Enrollment Management Questions

Is it best for learners to be able to start classes whenever they want and finish those classes on their own timeline? Should all CBE learners start courses at the same time and finish them in the term they registered for? Do you want multiple CBE cohorts operating simultaneously? Does your institution want a model that sets tuition as a flat rate covering unlimited learning in a set period, or would you rather charge by competency or competency set, courses, credits or even modules? Philosophically and pedagogically, do you want to fully separate learning from time (i.e. direct assessment), allowing learners to progress independent of institutionally set dates or do you want to keep some hallmarks of a traditional semester cadence with set start and end dates? Do you want CBE learners to have the possibility of being engaged year-round; or will there be weeks or months when learning is inaccessible and degree progression is halted?

## What are the Specific Regulatory Considerations?

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### 3. Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)

An institution must establish a reasonable satisfactory academic progress (SAP) policy in compliance with 34 CFR 668.34. SAP determines if learners are advancing in their academic studies in a manner that allows them to remain eligible for aid.

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) refers to a set of academic standards that students must meet to maintain eligibility for federal financial aid programs in the United States. SAP requirements are established by the U.S. Department of Education and apply to students receiving aid from programs such as the Federal Pell Grant, Federal Direct Loans, and Federal Work–Study.

The specific SAP standards can vary slightly between institutions, but they generally include three main components:

- 1. Grade Point Average (GPA):** Students must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA, usually measured on a 4.0 scale. The required GPA is typically set by the institution but must meet the minimum standard defined by federal regulations.
- 2. Completion Rate:** Students must successfully complete a certain percentage of the credits or courses they attempt. The completion rate is calculated by dividing the total number of successfully completed credits by the total number of attempted credits. The minimum completion rate required is usually 67% or higher, meaning that students must successfully complete at least two-thirds of their attempted coursework. This does not apply for nonterm or subscription period programs.
- 3. Maximum Timeframe:** There is a maximum timeframe within which students are expected to complete their degree or certificate program while receiving financial aid. This timeframe is typically set at 150% of the published length of the program.

In addition to these components, institutions may have additional requirements, such as limitations on the number of repeated courses or a maximum number of credit hours that can be attempted without completing a degree. It is important for financial aid professionals to educate learners with the specific SAP policy at their institution. If a student fails to meet the SAP requirements, they may be placed on financial aid probation or suspension, which means they become ineligible for further financial aid until they regain satisfactory academic progress. Institutions are required to provide students with information about their SAP status and the opportunity to appeal any adverse decisions.

It's worth noting that SAP requirements may also differ for state and institutional financial aid programs, so it's important for students to understand the specific requirements of each program they are participating in.

In some CBE programs, institutions must define and measure satisfactory academic progress based on the mastery of competencies, rather than credit hours or traditional grade point averages. This requires developing appropriate criteria and benchmarks for assessing and reporting student progress. At institutions where the size of competencies is equal to the credit hour, an institution's standard SAP calculation may apply. At institutions where competencies are variable in size, institutions should use its credit- or clock-hour equivalencies to show how the competencies will be achieved at normal and maximum time frame pacing. Some institutions group competencies into sets and the completion of a full set of competencies are used to determine SAP more readily.

Since CBE programs offer flexibility in terms of time to completion and allow students to progress at their own pace, financial aid professionals must monitor learners and proactively communicate with CBE students about the maximum timeframes and limits on the total amount of aid a student can receive.



## Enrollment Management Questions

How does your institution track SAP today? If CBE was implemented using an academic calendar other than standard term, how would you measure and track SAP? What are the challenges you might encounter with SAP in your institution's CBE program? What would you need to overcome these barriers?

# What are the Specific Regulatory Considerations?

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## 4. Disbursement Timing

Financial aid disbursement is often tied to enrollment status, and in CBE programs, enrollment status may not be defined by traditional credit hours. Institutions must establish policies and procedures to determine when and how financial aid is disbursed based on a student's progression and achievement of competencies, especially in a program where one competency does not equal one credit hour. This may involve adjusting disbursement schedules or implementing milestone-based disbursement methods. Implementing milestone-based disbursement methods of financial aid, typically based on the demonstrating mastery of a set of competencies, involves establishing specific criteria or milestones that students must meet to receive disbursements of aid. Schools seeking to disburse aid by the achievement of mastery of competencies often:

- **Define Milestones:** Identify key milestones or competency demonstrations that students must achieve to receive financial aid disbursements. Examples of milestones could include showing mastery on a summative competency assessment, completing specific coursework and demonstrating mastery on the corresponding performance-based assessments, or reaching a certain academic progress point through the mastery of competencies.
- **Develop Clear Policies:** Create clear and transparent policies outlining the milestones, the criteria for achieving them, and the corresponding disbursement amounts or timing. Ensure that these policies align with federal regulations and any relevant institutional guidelines.
- **Communicate with Students:** Clearly communicate the milestone-based disbursement method to students. Provide detailed information about the milestones, the requirements for each, and the impact on financial aid disbursements. This can be done through orientation sessions, student handbooks, websites, and regular communication channels.
- **Monitor Milestone Completion:** Establish a process to monitor students' progress and track their achievement of milestones. This may involve academic advisors, faculty members, or other designated staff members who can verify the completion of specific requirements. In most cases, CBE institutions acquire technology solutions to track and monitor completion.
- **Disburse Funds Accordingly:** Once students meet the specified milestones, initiate the disbursement of financial aid funds. Ensure that the disbursement process aligns with federal regulations and institutional policies regarding timing and delivery methods.

Institutions using a milestone-based disbursement method should regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the milestone-based disbursement method and adjust as needed. It is often

helpful to gather feedback from students, faculty, and staff to identify any challenges or areas for improvement and refine the process accordingly.

It's important to note that implementing milestone-based disbursement methods may require coordination among various campus departments, including financial aid, academic advising, and student services. Collaboration and effective communication are key to ensuring a smooth implementation and student understanding of the requirements.



## Financial Aid Questions

How would your institution disburse aid by milestone achievement vs. credit- or clock-hours?  
What type of technology would you need to disburse using this method?

### 5. Time-Bound Scholarships or Grants

Some institutions offer scholarships or grants specifically that have time-bound requirements. For students enrolled in CBE programs with more flexible pacing, such as a direct assessment or subscription model, they may be ineligible for these time-bound scholarships or grants. Where possible, institutions have often found it beneficial to insert the phrase *“or its equivalency”* after time-bound requirements of eligibility. Since the institution has determined how competencies are the equivalency of credit- or clock-hours, these equivalencies may also be used.



## Financial Aid Questions

At your institution, what scholarships or grants have time-bound eligibility requirements?  
How can these requirements achieve the same purpose while still be available to all CBE learners? Thinking more broadly about financial aid policies and procedures, what other time-bound policies or processes might inhibit CBE learners?

# How is Financial Aid Expertise Leveraged in CBE Design and Implementation?

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Financial aid professionals at colleges and universities play an important role in the development and implementation of competency-based education (CBE) programs. Here are some key contributions and responsibilities you can provide when your institution is designing and implementing CBE programs.

- ❑ **Collaboration with CBE Program Champions:** Financial aid professionals work closely with the CBE program staff, including academic leadership and faculty, academic advisors, registrars, business office/bursar, and program coordinators, to ensure alignment between academic progress, course completion, and financial aid disbursement. They collaborate to establish reporting mechanisms, track student progress, and resolve any issues related to financial aid and the CBE program.
- ❑ **Financial Aid Program Design:** Financial aid professionals collaborate with other stakeholders, such as faculty, administrators, and curriculum developers, to design financial aid programs that align with the unique structure and requirements of the CBE program. These groups must work together to ensure that financial aid policies and procedures are compatible with the competency-based model.
- ❑ **Compliance with Federal Regulations:** Financial aid professionals are responsible for ensuring that the CBE program and associated financial aid policies adhere to federal regulations, such as those outlined by the U.S. Department of Education. They stay updated on relevant guidelines and communicate with regulatory bodies to ensure compliance in areas such as enrollment status determination, satisfactory academic progress, and disbursement of aid.
- ❑ **Aid Eligibility Determination:** Financial aid professionals assess the eligibility of students participating in the CBE program for federal, state, and institutional financial aid programs. They evaluate factors such as enrollment status, satisfactory academic progress, and adherence to program requirements to determine aid eligibility and award amounts.

- **Financial Aid Counseling:** Financial aid professionals provide guidance and counseling to students enrolled in the CBE program. They help students understand the financial implications of CBE, explain aid eligibility criteria, assist with completing financial aid applications, and address any concerns or questions related to financial aid and CBE. In programs where aid is disbursed based on competencies and not credit hour, this counseling is absolutely essential to program success.
  
- **Communication and Outreach:** Financial aid professionals are responsible for communicating with students, faculty, and staff about the financial aid opportunities and requirements specific to the CBE program. They conduct informational sessions, workshops, and orientations to educate students on financial aid options, timelines, and responsibilities in the CBE context.
  
- **Ongoing Evaluation and Improvement:** Financial aid professionals participate in the evaluation and improvement of the CBE program from a financial aid perspective. They provide feedback on the effectiveness of financial aid processes, identify areas for improvement, and suggest modifications to ensure optimal support for CBE students

It's important to note that the level of involvement and specific responsibilities of financial aid professionals may vary depending on the institution, the CBE program's structure, and the resources available. Collaboration and coordination with various stakeholders within the institution are crucial to successfully integrate financial aid into a competency-based education program.

Reading through the next portions of the guide is a great step toward being a champion for student success, quality learning, and equity through innovative approaches. As you can see, there is a way to create federal aid compliant CBE programs, but it takes a willing financial aid professional on the instructional team to help design programs, implement and support every learner to mastery of the competencies that will unlock their future.

# How is Registrar Expertise Leveraged in CBE Design and Implementation?

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**As a member of the enrollment management team, the registrar function plays an important role in the life of every faculty, staff, and learner at the institution as they are responsible for managing and maintaining learner records and academic information. Primary to this role is overseeing learner registration, enrollment, and academic progress.**

Colleges and university teams implementing CBE should communicate with the registrar as early as possible and include the registrar office in planning meetings with faculty, especially as it relates to decisions such as credit- or clock-hour equivalencies, academic calendar, satisfactory academic progress, transcription, degree/credential audits, and enrollment processes.

Often, faculty and staff are unaware of the implications of innovative design decisions on practices in enrollment management. Registrars can be proactive by developing relationships with academic department chairs and college deans and letting them know that innovations that support learner learning and success are welcome at the institution and that the registrar is a willing partner in learner success.

## **Overview of CBE Impacts on Policies and Practices Under Registrar Function**

As previously mentioned, CBE has many impacts at the institution since the business model and tracking of learning is built on measures of time, whether as a credit hour in courses or a length of time in semesters and terms. For many institutions, this has meant a rigid 3 semester system (fall, spring, summer) with one start and end time for each semester. Faculty who are implementing a CBE model are encouraged to consider time as flexible and may wish to allow for multiple start dates or allow learners to progress in the program as soon as they demonstrate mastery rather than wait for the next semester to start.

Below is a list of functions under the supervision of the registrar where challenges to traditional time-based processes often arise as CBE programs are implemented.

- Academic Calendar Maintenance:** The registrar's office is responsible for maintaining the official academic calendar, which includes important dates such as registration periods, add/drop deadlines, examination schedules, and holidays. Calendars must be published to the college community and ensure they align with institutional policies.



- **Registration:** The registrar’s office handles the registration process, ensuring that learners enroll in the appropriate courses or modules and meet any necessary prerequisites. Registrars are responsible for coordinating class schedules, managing enrollment procedures, and maintaining accurate records of learner enrollment information in an official system of record for reporting to various internal and external stakeholders, such as government agencies, accreditation bodies, and institutional management.
- **Academic Records Management:** Registrars are responsible for maintaining and safeguarding learner academic records. This includes managing transcripts, grades or mastery, transfer credits, and other relevant documents. Registrars are often tasked with governing campus protocols to comply with data protection laws and institutional policies regarding learner privacy and confidentiality. As new Learning and Employment Records that are competency-based are being issued to learners using digital platforms, registrars are a key resource for implementation and establishing the systems that can record, store, and communicate necessary information for learners to use in employment application processes or to continue their education.
- **Degree/Credential Auditing and Certification:** Registrars administer the systems that review learners’ progress towards completing degree/credential requirements and verify that learners have fulfilled all necessary program learning requirements (course credits or competencies mastered), major/minor requirements, and general education requirements for graduation. Audits result in official certifications and diplomas being issued upon successful completion of programs.
- **Academic Policies and Regulations:** Registrars serve as a resource for learners, faculty, and staff regarding academic policies and regulations. While these policies may be adopted by faculty senate, administrative committees, or executive teams, registrars are responsible to interpret and enforce policies related to registration, grading systems, credit hour definitions, competency definitions, attendance, academic deadlines, and other academic matters.
- **Course/Module Management:** Registrars collaborate with departments to schedule courses/modules, assign instructors, allocate physical space if needed, and ensure adequate resources are available for teaching and learning. For in person or hybrid programs, registrars may assist in resolving scheduling conflicts and coordinating the use of facilities for in-person learning opportunities, labs or demonstration centers, assessments, or specialized activities related to learning and assessment.
- **Curriculum Coordination:** Registrars work closely with academic departments to update and maintain accurate course catalogs and degree/credential program requirements. Once set, registrars ensure that curriculum changes are properly implemented and communicated to learners and faculty.

Overall, the role of a registrar is crucial for the smooth functioning of academic operations and play a significant role in supporting learner success by ensuring accurate record-keeping, facilitating enrollment processes, and maintaining compliance with academic policies and regulations.

## Tracking Mastery of Competencies

For the registrar function to support CBE, it is important to determine how the function will support the following steps to track mastery of competencies for enrollment, satisfactory progress, and achievement. It's important to note that the specific processes and systems for tracking competencies may vary across institutions, as competency-based education approaches can differ. The registrar's role is to facilitate the implementation and administration of competency tracking processes in accordance with institutional policies and practices.

- ❑ **Establish Program Competency Set:** Faculty and academic departments will establish the set of competencies that outlines the specific skills, knowledge, and abilities that learners are expected to demonstrate to earn their respective credential or complete the program. The result is a competency framework that serves as a guide for tracking and auditing learner progress. Registrars will need to receive these competencies and embed them into processes for tracking student progress, program catalogs, and reporting.
  
- ❑ **Course or Module Competencies and Levels of Mastery:** In a CBE program, learning outcomes are defined for each competency and packaged in a sequential learning journey that becomes the curriculum. Faculty may wish to package these sequential learning opportunities in a traditional course model, or in direct assessment it could be learning modules. Along with these competencies, faculty will define levels of mastery that describe the expected level of proficiency or mastery required to progress or award the competency. Rubrics are then developed to provide clear criteria for evaluating learner performance and determining the extent to which competencies have been achieved.
  
- ❑ **Recording Learner Performance:** The registrar supports faculty to implement pre-defined assessment methods aligned with the levels of mastery competencies. The registrar's office ensures that learner performance on assessments is accurately recorded. This may involve utilizing a learner information system or learning management system to capture indicators of competency mastery and grade equivalencies.
  
- ❑ **Transcript or Academic Record:** The registrar maintains learner transcripts or academic records, which provide a comprehensive overview of a learner's academic progress. In the case of competency-based education, the transcript may include specific notations or indicators that highlight the levels of mastery achieved per competency and sometimes includes the performance criteria as well as demonstrations or assessments. These new Learning and Employment Records are quickly growing in popularity with employers and learners as they provide a more transparent record of what someone knows and can do.

- **Competency Tracking Systems:** Some institutions may have specialized systems or software that facilitate the tracking and reporting of competency mastery. These systems can provide a centralized repository for competency data, allowing the registrar to monitor learner progress, generate reports, and provide feedback to learners, faculty, and other stakeholders. If the institution does not have a specialized system, registrars have found creative ways to use student information systems or emerging learning management systems to track mastery.
  
- **Advising and Learner Supports:** The registrar’s office may collaborate with academic advisors or other support services to ensure learners receive guidance and support in maintaining progress and tracking their competency mastery. These individuals may help learners understand competency requirements, review performance criteria, advise on progress, and support learners to make informed decisions regarding their academic pathways. Furthermore, if learners experience barriers to progress, advisors and supporting staff can often provide personalized support to assist the learner, assist them in taking a short break, and re-engage the learner to get back on track.
  
- **Reporting and Accreditation:** The registrar may be responsible for generating reports and providing data on competency mastery for accreditation purposes or other external reporting requirements. This can involve compiling and analyzing data from various sources to demonstrate institutional effectiveness and quality of learning provided.

Overall, the role of a registrar is crucial for the smooth functioning of academic operations and play a significant role in supporting learner success by ensuring accurate record-keeping, facilitating enrollment processes, and maintaining compliance with academic policies and regulations.

## CBE Technology Architecture and the Registrar

In 2022, Unicon issued guidance on the overall technology architecture that is needed to support competency-based education programs. It's worth noting that technology systems used by the registrar should align with the institution's overall technological infrastructure and support interoperability with other systems. The choice of system will depend on factors such as institutional requirements, budget, scalability, and integration capabilities with existing software solutions. Registrars often collaborate with IT departments, faculty, and other stakeholders to select and implement the most suitable technology systems to support the overall goals of the CBE program and learner success.

Here are some common technology systems that registrars may utilize.

- ❑ **Learner Information System (SIS):** An SIS is a comprehensive software solution that helps manage learner data and academic records. It typically includes functionality for course registration, grade management, and transcript generation. Some SIS platforms may also have features to track and assess competencies, allowing registrars to record competency-based assessments and track learner progress.
- ❑ **Learning Management System (LMS):** An LMS is a digital platform used for delivering and managing online courses and resources. While its primary purpose is to support teaching and learning activities, some LMS platforms include competency tracking features. These features allow instructors and registrars to monitor learner performance on competency-based assessments and track their mastery levels.
- ❑ **Assessment Management Systems:** There are specialized assessment management systems designed to track and assess learner competencies. These systems often include features such as rubric-based assessments, progress tracking, and reporting functionalities. They provide a more focused approach to tracking competencies and it is advised to ensure these systems can integrate with other systems, such as the SIS or LMS.
- ❑ **Learning and Employment Records:** Digital learner record platforms allow learners to showcase their work and provide evidence of their competency mastery. These platforms often include assessment features that allow faculty and registrars to evaluate and provide feedback on learner artifacts or evidence. They can be used to track competencies and compile comprehensive records of learner achievements.
- ❑ **Custom-built Systems:** In some cases, institutions may develop or customize their own technology systems to track competencies based on their unique needs. These systems may be designed to align specifically with the institution's competency framework and assessment processes, providing a tailored solution for tracking and reporting competency data.



# Enrollment Management Questions

From your perspective, what concerns you most about CBE? How do you think CBE could be helpful to learners? What's the most effective way for you to share your support and hesitations with the CBE leadership team?

# Final Considerations

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## What is the Role of Distance Education in CBE?

CBE is distinct from distance education but often paired together. People often think all CBE programs are offered via distance education, but this is not true. Although one-third of CBE programs are fully online, most CBE programs use some form of distance education technologies in the delivery of their academic offerings. Distance education refers to a method of learning that allows students and instructors to engage in education remotely, without being physically present in a traditional classroom setting. It involves the use of technology and various instructional delivery methods to facilitate teaching and learning at a distance. Also known as distance learning or online learning, distance education enables students to access educational materials, interact with instructors and peers, and complete coursework from their own locations.

Distance education can take various forms, including:

- **Online Courses:** Courses that are delivered entirely over the internet through a learning management system (LMS). Students access course materials, participate in discussions, engage with faculty and peers, submit assignments, and take assessments online. Courses typically are structured to be either synchronous or asynchronous, depending on the needs of the academic content.
  - **Synchronous Online Learning:** Learning experiences that require students to participate at specific times scheduled by the instructor. This may involve live lectures, discussions, or group activities conducted through virtual platforms.
  - **Asynchronous Online Learning:** Learning experiences that allow students to access course materials and complete assignments at their own pace and convenience. There are no specific scheduled class times, and students can engage with the course materials and interact with peers and instructors asynchronously.
- **Blended or Hybrid Learning:** A combination of online and face-to-face instruction, where students engage in both virtual and in-person learning experiences. This approach is quite popular in CBE models because it offers flexibility while also allowing for some in-person interaction.

Accelerated by the pandemic, distance education has become increasingly popular and prevalent due to advancements in technology, the need for flexible learning options, and the ability to reach learners

across geographic boundaries. It provides opportunities for students to access education remotely, pursue degree programs, enhance skills, and engage in lifelong learning. Distance education can be offered by various educational institutions, including colleges, universities, and online learning platforms, allowing learners to engage in education regardless of their location.

Competency-based education (CBE) and distance education are both innovative approaches to delivering education, but they have distinct characteristics. Here’s a comparison and contrast of competency-based education and distance education:

	Competency-Based Education	Distance Education
<b>Definition</b>	CBE is an approach to education that focuses on measuring and validating student mastery of specific competencies or skills, rather than relying solely on traditional measures such as credit hours or seat time.	Distance education refers to a method of learning that allows students to engage in education remotely, without being physically present in a traditional classroom setting. It relies on technology and various instructional delivery methods to facilitate teaching and learning at a distance.
<b>Learning Emphasis</b>	CBE emphasizes the acquisition and demonstration of specific competencies or skills. The focus is on mastery, ensuring that students attain proficiency in each identified competency before progressing further.	Distance education encompasses a broad range of learning objectives, with the emphasis being on remote access to educational resources and instruction. While competencies may be integrated into distance education programs, the focus extends beyond competencies to cover more traditional curriculum.
<b>Measurement of Learning</b>	In CBE, learning is often measured through direct assessments or demonstrations of competency. Students are evaluated on their ability to apply knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with specific competencies.	Learning in distance education is typically measured through various assessments, including quizzes, exams, projects, or papers, that are often automatically graded. Evaluation methods can be similar to those used in traditional face-to-face education, adapted to suit remote learning environments.

## Final Considerations

	Competency-Based Education	Distance Education
<b>Time and Pace</b>	CBE allows for flexibility in terms of time and pace. Students can progress through the program at their own speed, completing competencies as quickly or as slowly as needed.	Distance education offers flexibility in terms of time and place, allowing students to access educational materials and complete coursework remotely. However, the pace of learning may still be determined by fixed course durations or semester-based schedules.
<b>Instructional Delivery</b>	Instructional delivery in CBE often includes a combination of self-paced learning resources, personalized coaching, and targeted assessments. It may leverage online platforms, simulations, or real-world applications to facilitate competency acquisition.	Distance education utilizes various instructional delivery methods, including online courses, video conferencing, virtual classrooms, or asynchronous learning materials. It can involve a mix of self-paced learning, instructor-led sessions, or collaborative activities depending on the program and course design.

It's worth noting that CBE and distance education are not mutually exclusive. They are often combined, with competency-based approaches being integrated into distance education programs, to provide a more flexible and personalized learning experience. If a program is offered in a distance education format, the program must comply with the regulatory requirements for both competency-based and distance education.

## Enrollment Management Questions



- Will your institution's CBE program include distance education components?
- Will the program be fully online, partially online, or fully in-person?
- Will the program have synchronous and asynchronous components?



# What Role Does Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) Play in CBE?

Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) and CBE are different but related concepts in the realm of education and learning. CPL refers to the process of evaluating and recognizing the knowledge, skills, and competencies that individuals have acquired through non-traditional learning experiences. This can include work experience, military training, certifications, self-study, or other forms of learning outside of formal academic settings. CPL involves assessing and awarding academic credit or recognition for this prior learning, allowing individuals to potentially shorten the time needed to complete a degree or program.

The costs associated with credit for prior learnings (CPL) can vary depending on the policies and practices of the educational institution offering the assessment. Here are some potential costs institutions often charge or learners might incur:

- **CPL Fees:** Some institutions charge fees for the evaluation and processing of credit for prior learnings. These fees may vary depending on the number of credits being assessed or the complexity of the assessment process. The fees can cover administrative costs, faculty review, and assessment materials.
- **Portfolio Development:** If a portfolio assessment is part of the CPL process, there may be costs associated with developing the portfolio. This can include gathering documentation, organizing evidence of prior learning, and possibly seeking guidance or assistance from faculty or advisors. However, some institutions may not charge additional fees for portfolio development.
- **Testing or Examination Fees:** In cases where credit-by-examination options, such as CLEP or DSST exams, are used for credit for prior learning, there may be fees associated with these exams. The fees typically cover the cost of test administration and scoring.
- **Transcript Evaluation:** Institutions may charge fees for the evaluation of transcripts from other educational institutions or organizations to determine if prior coursework or credentials can be considered for credit. These fees cover the administrative costs of reviewing and assessing the transcripts.

## Final Considerations

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Credit for prior learning (CPL) offers several benefits to individuals seeking recognition for their knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through non-traditional learning experiences. Here are some key benefits of CPL:

- **Accelerated Degree Completion:** CPL allows individuals to receive academic credit for their prior learning, which can significantly shorten the time needed to complete a degree or program. By recognizing their existing knowledge and competencies, CPL helps individuals progress more efficiently toward their educational goals.
- **Cost Savings:** CPL can lead to substantial cost savings by reducing the number of courses or credits required to complete a degree. This can result in lower tuition expenses, as individuals can bypass duplicative coursework and focus on areas where additional learning is needed.
- **Increased Flexibility:** When CPL and CBE are paired together increased flexibility is provided to individuals, particularly adult learners, who have acquired knowledge and skills through work experience, military service, certifications, or self-study. CBE programs can incorporate their experiential learning into their academic journey, making education more relevant while personalizing the pathway to credential achievement.
- **Validation of Skills and Knowledge:** CPL validates the skills and knowledge individuals have gained outside of formal academic settings. It recognizes their expertise and demonstrates to employers, educational institutions, and professional organizations that they possess the necessary competencies required for specific fields or industries.

Yet, despite all of these benefits and the related charges, current federal financial aid regulations do not consider the fees associated with CPL to be eligible for federal financial aid. Therefore, financial aid professionals must work with CBE leaders to ensure CPL fees are not included in financial aid awards.

## Enrollment Management Questions

How is CPL used on your campus? How do financial aid professionals help learners evaluate the cost of CPL, which may be paid out of pocket, against the cost of paying tuition, which may be paid for using financial aid?



## How Does CBE Impact the Benefits Cliff?

The term “benefits cliff” refers to a situation where individuals or families experience a sudden and significant reduction or loss of public assistance or benefits as their income increases. When a person’s income reaches a certain threshold, they may no longer qualify for certain means-tested benefits or assistance programs, resulting in a sharp decline in their overall income or benefits.

The benefits cliff can occur in various social welfare programs, such as government-funded healthcare, housing assistance, food stamps (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP), childcare subsidies, and other income-based benefits. These programs are designed to provide support to low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs and improve their economic well-being.

The problem arises when the reduction or loss of benefits due to an increase in income outweighs the financial gains from the higher income. In such cases, individuals or families may face a disincentive to earn more or work additional hours since the loss of benefits can result in a net decrease in overall income. This creates a “cliff effect” where individuals feel trapped in a situation where it is financially disadvantageous to earn more income and improve their economic standing.

The benefits cliff is often seen as a flaw in the design of social welfare programs, as it can discourage individuals from pursuing higher-paying jobs or striving for economic self-sufficiency. It can perpetuate a cycle of poverty and make it challenging for individuals to break free from dependency on public assistance.

Addressing the benefits cliff typically involves implementing policies that gradually phase out benefits as income increases or adjusting eligibility thresholds to provide a smoother transition. By reducing the sudden drop-off in benefits, individuals and families can have better incentives to increase their income without fear of losing essential support. Policy discussions around the benefits cliff often center on finding ways to create a more supportive and sustainable safety net for low-income individuals and families.

## Final Considerations

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Universities and community colleges can play a role in mitigating the potential benefits cliff for students by implementing certain strategies and support mechanisms. Here are a few approaches that institutions can consider:

- **Creating CBE Programs to Enable Economic Advancement:** When creating CBE programs, institutional leadership teams should consider the earning potential of graduates. Creating academic programs in areas where learners may not make enough money to offset lost public assistance benefits will actually cause harm to the learner, in the short-term, until they are able to earn promotions or gain the next higher credential that leads to greater pay.
- **Financial Aid Counseling:** Institutions can provide comprehensive financial aid counseling to students to help them understand the potential impact of their earnings on their eligibility for benefits. This includes educating students about the benefits cliff and assisting them in making informed decisions about employment, income reporting, and financial planning. This counseling should include information on how short-term losses may yield substantially higher wage opportunities once additional credential are earned.
- **Benefit Awareness and Referral:** Universities and community colleges can raise awareness among students about available public benefits and assistance programs, such as healthcare, childcare subsidies, and housing support. They can also establish partnerships or referral systems with local agencies or organizations that can assist students in accessing these benefits. By ensuring students are aware of and connected to available resources, institutions can help minimize the negative impact of the benefits cliff.
- **Financial Literacy and Budgeting Support:** Institutions can offer financial literacy workshops, seminars, or online resources to help students develop essential money management skills. This includes budgeting, saving, and understanding the financial implications of increased earnings. By empowering students with financial knowledge, they can make informed decisions about their income, benefits, and overall financial well-being.
- **Gradual Benefit Phase-Out:** Institutions can advocate for policies that promote a gradual reduction in benefits as income increases, instead of an abrupt cut-off. This approach allows individuals to experience a smoother transition and maintains some level of support until they achieve financial stability. Collaborating with policymakers and community organizations to advocate for such policies can be beneficial.

- **Assistance Bridge Partnerships with Employers:** In some situations, institutions have partnered with employers to aid those pursuing additional education after earning the first credential that resulted in the loss of benefits. For example, an education paraprofessional may lose benefits after earning an associate degree in early childhood but a local school district assists with housing and food, as the learner continues to earn the bachelor's program where wages will exceed previous public assistance financial support.
- **Work-Study Programs and Internships:** Offering work-study programs and internships that align with students' academic pursuits can provide them with valuable work experience, income, and networking opportunities. By integrating these programs into the curriculum, institutions can help students earn income while studying and potentially avoid the benefits cliff as they transition into higher-paying employment.
- **Career Services and Job Placement:** Strong career services and job placement support can be instrumental in helping students secure well-paying jobs or internships in their fields of interest. By assisting students with resume writing, interview skills, and job search strategies, institutions can help students find employment opportunities that align with their career goals, minimizing the likelihood of experiencing the benefits cliff.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Universities and community colleges can engage in advocacy efforts at local, state, and federal levels to promote policies that address the benefits cliff issue. This can involve working with lawmakers, government agencies, and community partners to shape policies that provide a more supportive safety net and encourage economic mobility.

By implementing these strategies, universities and community colleges can support their students in navigating the challenges associated with the benefits cliff, promoting their overall well-being and educational success.



## Enrollment Management Questions

Where have you seen the benefits cliff harm learners? How can CBE programs design to overcome this challenge? How can you share the benefits cliff with the leadership team to inform their choices on program selection, credential type, and employer partners? What programs on your campus cause learners to experience the benefits cliff? What can be done to help these learners?



**[c-ben.org](http://c-ben.org)**

1417 Hanson Drive  
Franklin, TN 37067  
615-517-1256