



EAB

Three Myths About Competency-Based Education

Separating Fact from Fiction

COE Forum





Three Myths About Competency-Based Education

Separating Facts from Fiction

COE Forum

Project Director

Megan Adams

Managing Director

Melanie Ho

Contributing Consultants

Jacob Rosch

Ashley Delamater

Design Consultant

Tina Lin

Practice Manager

Carla Hickman

LEGAL CAVEAT

EAB Global, Inc. ("EAB") has made efforts to verify the accuracy of the information it provides to members. This report relies on data obtained from many sources, however, and EAB cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information provided or any analysis based thereon. In addition, neither EAB nor any of its affiliates (each, an "EAB Organization") is in the business of giving legal, accounting, or other professional advice, and its reports should not be construed as professional advice. In particular, members should not rely on any legal commentary in this report as a basis for action, or assume that any tactics described herein would be permitted by applicable law or appropriate for a given member's situation. Members are advised to consult with appropriate professionals concerning legal, tax, or accounting issues, before implementing any of these tactics. No EAB Organization or any of its respective officers, directors, employees, or agents shall be liable for any claims, liabilities, or expenses relating to (a) any errors or omissions in this report, whether caused by any EAB organization, or any of their respective employees or agents, or sources or other third parties, (b) any recommendation by any EAB Organization, or (c) failure of member and its employees and agents to abide by the terms set forth herein.

EAB is a registered trademark of EAB Global, Inc. in the United States and other countries. Members are not permitted to use these trademarks, or any other trademark, product name, service name, trade name, and logo of any EAB Organization without prior written consent of EAB. Other trademarks, product names, service names, trade names, and logos used within these pages are the property of their respective holders. Use of other company trademarks, product names, service names, trade names, and logos or images of the same does not necessarily constitute (a) an endorsement by such company of an EAB Organization and its products and services, or (b) an endorsement of the company or its products or services by an EAB Organization. No EAB Organization is affiliated with any such company.

IMPORTANT: Please read the following.

EAB has prepared this report for the exclusive use of its members. Each member acknowledges and agrees that this report and the information contained herein (collectively, the "Report") are confidential and proprietary to EAB. By accepting delivery of this Report, each member agrees to abide by the terms as stated herein, including the following:

1. All right, title, and interest in and to this Report is owned by an EAB Organization. Except as stated herein, no right, license, permission, or interest of any kind in this Report is intended to be given, transferred to, or acquired by a member. Each member is authorized to use this Report only to the extent expressly authorized herein.
2. Each member shall not sell, license, republish, distribute, or post online or otherwise this Report, in part or in whole. Each member shall not disseminate or permit the use of, and shall take reasonable precautions to prevent such dissemination or use of, this Report by (a) any of its employees and agents (except as stated below), or (b) any third party.
3. Each member may make this Report available solely to those of its employees and agents who (a) are registered for the workshop or membership program of which this Report is a part, (b) require access to this Report in order to learn from the information described herein, and (c) agree not to disclose this Report to other employees or agents or any third party. Each member shall use, and shall ensure that its employees and agents use, this Report for its internal use only. Each member may make a limited number of copies, solely as adequate for use by its employees and agents in accordance with the terms herein.
4. Each member shall not remove from this Report any confidential markings, copyright notices, and/or other similar indicia herein.
5. Each member is responsible for any breach of its obligations as stated herein by any of its employees or agents.
6. If a member is unwilling to abide by any of the foregoing obligations, then such member shall promptly return this Report and all copies thereof to EAB.

Table of Contents

Top Lessons from the Study 8

Introduction 11

Myth 1: Students and Employers Are Demanding CBE 19

Myth 2: CBE Is Faster and Lower-Cost for Students 25

Myth 3: CBE Is Lower-Cost for Institutions 31

Coda: Personalized Learning Without CBE 39

Advisors to Our Work

We are grateful to the individuals and organizations that shared their insights, analysis, and time with us. The research team would especially like to recognize the following individuals for being particularly generous with their time and expertise.

With Sincere Appreciation

Kathleen O'Brien
Senior Vice President for
Academic Affairs
Alverno College

Cathy Sandeen
Vice President for Education
Attainment and Innovation
**American Council on
Education**

Ruki Jayaraman
Vice Chancellor for Academic
Affairs
Argosy University

Dale Johnson
Senior Business Analyst
Arizona State University

Michelle Glubke
Manager for Collaborative
Services
BC Campus

Lawrence Parisotto
Director, Collaborative Services
BC Campus

Mike Echols
Executive Vice President of
Strategic Initiatives
Bellevue University

Charles Bullock
Executive Vice Chancellor of
Academic Affairs and Provost
Brandman University

Laurie Dodge
Vice Provost
Brandman University

Annie Myers
TAACCCT Grant District Director
Broward College

Deborah Bushway
Chief Academic Officer
Capella University

Michael Offerman
President Emeritus
Capella University

Patrick Lyons
Director, Teaching and Learning
Carleton University

Norman Bier
Director, Open Learning Initiative
and Core Collaborations
Carnegie Mellon University

Albert Zainea
Director of Undergraduate
Programs, CMU Global Campus
Central Michigan University

Laura Portolese Dias
Program Coordinator, ITAM
Central Washington University

Tracy Pellett
Associate Provost
Central Washington University

Steven Olswang
Provost
City University of Seattle

Benjamin Beus
Director of Financial Aid
Columbia Basin College

Richard Cummins
President
Columbia Basin College

Bernard Bull
Director, Educational Design
and Technology Program
**Concordia University,
Wisconsin**

Dorothy Wax
Associate Vice President for
Career Services
**Council for Adult and
Experiential Learning**

Scott Campbell
Vice President, Higher Education
**Council for Adult and
Experiential Learning**

Edward Sargent
Director, PACE-IT Program
Edmonds Community College

Donna Ritchie
Chief Product Officer
Educate Online

Deborah Amory
Acting Provost
Empire State College

Karl Lawrence
Dean, School of Business
and Technology
Excelsior College

Gunnar Counselman
Founder and CEO
Fidelis Education

Christopher Etesse
CEO
Flat World Education

Ali Eskandarian
Dean, College of
Professional Studies
**The George Washington
University**

Jeremy Stanton
Executive Director of Technology
Georgetown University

Advisors to Our Work

Dennis Green
Director, Industry
Workforce Development
Go2Hr

Jeff Rosen
Vice President for
Accreditation Relations
Higher Learning Commission

Nick Howe
Vice President, Learning and
Collaboration
Hitachi Data Systems

Rob Abel
CEO
IMS Global

Elke Leeds
Executive Director,
Distance Learning Center
Kennesaw State University

William Ryan
Executive Director,
Learn On Demand
**Kentucky Community and
Technical College System**

James Selbe
Special Assistant to the
Chancellor
**Kentucky Community and
Technical College System**

Charla Long
Dean of Professional Studies
Lipscomb University

Jeff Sweeney
Chair, Department of
Communication Studies
Marylhurst University

Eric Dunker
Director of Extended Campus
**Metropolitan State University
of Denver**

Christine Geith
Assistant Provost and
Executive Director of MSU Global
Michigan State University

Victor DeSantis
Dean, Graduate and
Professional Studies
Millersville University

Richard Akers
Student Service Coordinator
Misericordia University

Zora Mulligan
Executive Director
**Missouri Community College
Association**

William Bajor
Acting Director, Graduate Studies
and Continuing Education
New Jersey City University

Andy Atzert
Vice President for Distributed
and Global Education
The New School

Kevin Currie
Executive Director,
Northeastern University Online
Northeastern University

Corrine Gordon
Vice Chair, Liberal Studies,
Personalized Learning
Northern Arizona University

Rebecca Garrett
Student Services Coordinator
Northern Arizona University

Jonathan Bartling
Dean of Academic Integration
Olivet Nazarene University

Angie McAllister
Senior Vice President, Data,
Analytics and Adaptive Learning
Product Management
Pearson Education

Desiree Jewell
Director of Marketing, Online,
and Blended Learning
Pearson Education

Gary Bertoline
Dean, College of Technology
Purdue University

Fatma Mili
Associate Dean, Educational
Research and Development
Purdue University

Cynthia Gallatin
Associate Vice President and
Chief Operating Officer
Quinnipiac University

Jennifer McGrath
Vice President Academic Affairs
Rio Salado College

Jennifer Shantz
Faculty Chair, English, Creative
Writing, Digital Media Studies,
and Curriculum
Rio Salado College

Rick Staisloff
Principal
RPK Group

Mary Lou DeRosa
Vice Provost for Special
Academic Programs
Sacred Heart University

Anca Micu
Associate Dean,
Welch College of Business
Sacred Heart University

Kevin Brockbank
Dean, School of Applied
Technologies and Professional
Development
Salt Lake Community College

Livia Sa
Instructional Designer
Shoreline Community College

Ann Garnsey-Harter
Executive Director, Virtual College
and Resource Development
Shoreline Community College

Advisors to Our Work

Mac Adkins
CEO
Smarter Measure

Kris Clerkin
Executive Director,
College for America
**Southern New Hampshire
University**

Van Davis
Director of Special Projects
**Texas Higher Education
Coordinating Board**

Irene Cravey
Associate Vice Chancellor
for Innovation
Texas State Technical College

Marc Singer
Vice Provost, Center for the
Assessment of Learning
Thomas Edison State College

Joel Van Amberg
Director of Commons
Tusculum College

Javier Reyes
Vice Provost for Distance
Education
University of Arkansas

Geoffrey Rubinstein
Director of Independent Learning
University of Colorado Boulder

James Broomall
Associate Vice Provost
University of Delaware

Rosa Redonnett
Chief Student Affairs Officer
University of Maine System

Raymond Rice
Provost
**University of Maine at
Presque Isle**

Linda Schott
President
**University of Maine at
Presque Isle**

John Fritz
Assistant Vice President,
Instructional Technology
and New Media
**University of Maryland,
Baltimore County**

John Vasquez
Education Program Manager,
Master of Health Professions
Education
University of Michigan

Laura Antonow
Director of College Programs
University of Mississippi

Gerry Kane
Coordinator of iStudy
University of Mississippi

Terrie Nagel
Assistant Director, Mizzou Online
University of Missouri

Kim Siegenthaler
Director Mizzou Online
University of Missouri

Katherine Stewart
Vice President for Academic
Planning and Quality
**University of North Carolina
System**

Kent Johnson
Dean, Continuing Education and
Special Programs
University of Northern Iowa

Steven Mintz
Executive Director, Institute for
Transformational Learning
University of Texas at Austin

David Schejbal
Dean, Continuing Education,
Outreach, and E-Learning
**University of Wisconsin –
Extension**

Doris Schoneman
Program Director of RN Education
**University of Wisconsin –
Milwaukee**

Connie Broughton
Project Director,
Competency-Based Education
**Washington State Board for
Community and Technical
Colleges**

Melanie Booth
Vice President
**Western Association of
Schools and Colleges**

Sharyl McGrew
Director of Substantive Change
and Committee Relations
**Western Association of
Schools and Colleges**

Sally Johnstone
Vice President for
Academic Advancement
Western Governors University

David Leasure
Provost
Western Governors University

Beth Laves
Associate Vice President for
Extended Learning and Outreach
Western Kentucky University

Dan Clark
Director, Division of Extended
Programs
Western Oregon University

James Hedges
Director, Arts Administration
Program
Westminster College

Eileen Donnelly
Dean, Online and
Experiential Learning
Wilmington University

Michael Callans
Vice President of Research
and Development
Wonderlic

Scope and Purpose of This Briefing

How We're Defining Competency-Based Education

EAB's definition of competency-based education (CBE) below reflects the program models (i.e., Western Governors University, College for America) that have attracted the most attention from higher education thought leaders, vendors, and early movers.

Two Elements of a CBE Program

- 1. Credit for competencies, not seat time:** Academic credit is awarded based on mastery of clearly defined competencies, rather than on "seat time." In traditional education, time is fixed and mastery is variable. In CBE, mastery is fixed and time is variable.
- 2. Technology-Enabled Personalization:** Technology affords each student a distinct pathway through content based on what they know/don't know and where they need most support—"personalization at scale"

See page 14 for a more in-depth definition of CBE.

Interested in PLA and Other Forms of Alternative Credentialing?

For members looking to implement personalized learning (including PLA) without launching the types of full-fledged CBE programs discussed in this publication, please see EAB's *CBE and PLA Playbook*. More details about how to order a copy are available on page 46 of this volume or online at eab.com.

Why We Take a Skeptical View in This Publication

This publication does not reflect EAB's views on the pedagogical benefits of CBE models for the appropriate students and disciplines. However, high levels of excitement (and hope) for CBE's potential by foundations, government agencies, technologists, and educators alike have led to a dearth of critical analysis of the CBE business model and whether existing programs have achieved their intended objectives. Our research has also surfaced many troubling misassumptions about what students are most likely to succeed and benefit from CBE programs.

At member urging, we have focused this publication on the predominant myths about CBE—and the associated challenges on the ground by current practitioners—that have been largely ignored in the hype over the model's potential. Our modest ambition is to better inform campus conversations about whether CBE is right for each member institution, as well as to sensitize key stakeholders to specific costs and risks that must be incorporated into implementation plans.

Need to Grow or Launch a CBE Program and Looking for Further Support?

EAB's *CBE and PLA Playbook* provides members with step-by-step guidance to determine whether launching a CBE program is the right fit for their institutions, tools to mitigate the costs and risks of launch, and resources to support continuous improvement in student screening and support. More details about how to order a copy are available on page 46 of this volume or online at eab.com.

Top Lessons from the Study

Competency-Based Education: Hype vs. Reality

- 1. The aspiration—improving access and outcomes:** The existential crisis presented by the “Year of the MOOC” has passed its zenith, but the exact impulses that drove worldwide attention to MOOCs—the spiraling cost of education, desire for tighter employer integration, and promise that technology can improve outcomes—are similarly motivating the newest opportunity and threat to traditional higher education: CBE programs.
- 2. No segment of higher education immune to the CBE bandwagon effect:** No longer the sole province of “not-like-me” outliers (i.e., Western Governors), CBE launch plans are now afoot at schools ranging from small liberal arts colleges to AAU research institutions. Across the board, EAB members find trustees, cabinets, legislators, and other stakeholders concerned that their institution will lose first-mover advantage absent quick action.
- 3. Member question—is CBE simply MOOCs 2.0?** Proponents of CBE note a stark distinction between MOOCs (a limited number of online courses) and CBE initiatives (complete degree programs), indicating larger aspirations (and institutional commitment) to the latter. But in the wake of MOOC hype, higher education leaders confess that it’s difficult not to feel beset by innovation fatigue: Is CBE the disruptor that traditional higher education critics have long predicted, or simply more hype?

Three Myths About Competency-Based Education

- 4. Over-optimistic press accounts mask deep challenges faced by early CBE adopters:** High levels of excitement (and hope) for CBE’s potential by foundations, government agencies, technologists, and educators alike have led to a dearth of critical analysis of the CBE business model and whether existing programs have achieved their intended objectives. In truth, CBE programs across the board report low levels of student demand for CBE, higher costs than anticipated, and deep challenges to student persistence and completion.
- 5. Our purpose with this briefing:** This study’s objective is to inform stakeholder discussions about the costs and risks of CBE launch, examining what’s been more challenging (and expensive) than expected by early movers. Based on 100+ interviews, EAB research uncovered three predominant myths about competency-based education.

Myth 1: Students and employers are demanding CBE

Myth 2: CBE is faster and lower-cost for students

Myth 3: CBE is lower cost for institutions

Top Lessons from the Study

Myth 1: Students and Employers Are Demanding CBE

- 6. Racing to launch despite unsubstantiated demand:** Looking to differentiate in a crowded market, many institutions are mistakenly rushing into CBE hoping to gain first-mover advantage. However, the reality is that students and employers do not (yet) see CBE as a differentiator.
- 7. Students not shopping for institutions based on CBE offerings:** Few, if any, students understand what CBE is or see it as an advantage; EAB's analysis of Google data reveals that prospective student search activity over the last eight years has been dominated by queries for "online degree"; by contrast, searches for "competency-based degree" are inconsequential.
- 8. Early-movers de-emphasize CBE in marketing materials:** After finding that explaining what "CBE" meant was unhelpfully distracting for prospects with limited attention, early movers stopped prominently highlighting CBE as a distinctive program feature. Over the past ten years, Western Governors University—by far, the largest CBE provider—has gradually phased out "competency-based" as the focal point of its homepage in favor of "flexible, affordable" degrees.
- 9. Employer-CBE program partnerships suffer all-too-familiar barriers to success:** While proponents hoped that CBE programs would provide an opportunity for tighter employer-university integration (i.e., learning objectives specifically mapped to job competencies), first movers lament that employer involvement in CBE programs has been minimal, suffering the same challenges to relationship maintenance and employer competency definition as traditional programs.

Myth 2: CBE Is Faster and Lower-Cost for Students

- 10. Even tougher barriers to student success, especially for adult degree completers:** News stories highlighting a select number of students who completed CBE degrees in record time (as little as 100 days) have led to false assumptions about CBE as an "easier" way for adult degree completers to graduate at a faster pace and rate. In reality, few students, even those with extensive work experience, can accelerate in self-paced, online programs that require mastery of every competency. This is particularly true for adult degree completers who are often less academically prepared in comparison to the general college-going population.
- 11. Students must progress at faster-than-realistic pace to achieve lower cost:** CBE programs tout that their students pay less tuition since they're able to enroll in as many classes as they would like for a flat fee per term. However, in practice, "all you can learn" subscription pricing is only lower-cost for the students with the time, self-discipline, and academic readiness to complete more than one or two courses per term. The majority of students who progress at an average pace or slower end up paying as much (or even more) under a subscription pricing model as they would for tuition in a traditional program.

Top Lessons from the Study

Myth 3: CBE Is Lower Cost for Institutions

- 12. First movers struggle to recoup investments:** Despite expectations that CBE programs will lower institutional costs, first movers have discovered that the investment in content development, systems configuration, and administrative resources required for CBE launch go far beyond the costs of a new traditional program. With limited vendor solutions available, most new CBE programs must design learning content from scratch and build their own systems and services.
- 13. Must-have intrusive advising resources strain operating budgets:** Proponents expect that online, self-paced CBE programs will be lower cost for schools to run because they can scale to serve hundreds of students. But each student requires extra attention in the form of frequent, proactive advising from success coaches, and the incremental costs of success coach salaries offsets potential savings from scale economies.
- 14. Once-automated administrative processes require manual workarounds:** The incompatibility of CBE's flexible pacing with federal reporting requirements and existing administrative systems means staff can no longer rely on automation for basic registration and reporting. Instead, tasks such as tracking student academic progress or generating financial awards must be completed manually for each student.

Advice for the Next CBE Pioneers

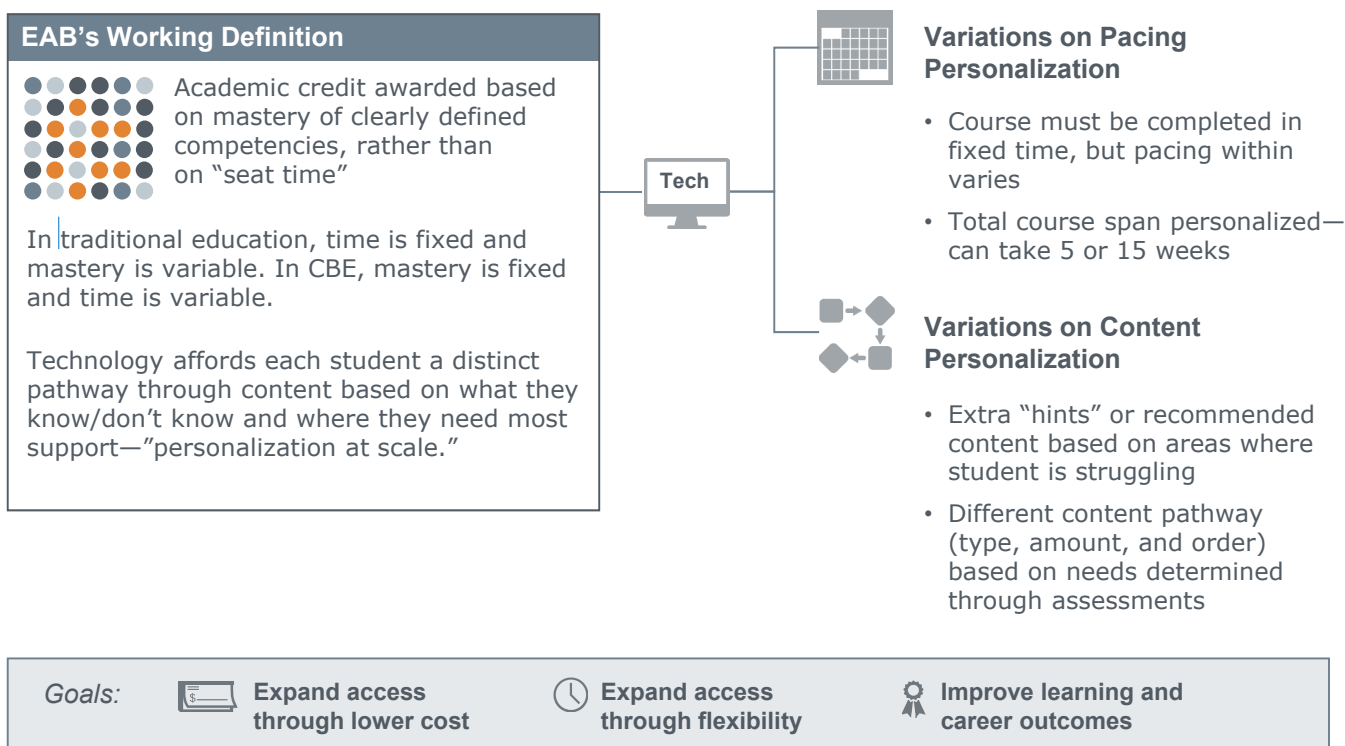
- 15. Rigorous screening critical for student success in self-paced programs:** Although CBE programs aspire to expand student access, savvy programs have learned they must screen students not only for typical barriers to online learners (e.g., computer literacy and academic preparedness) but also for the self-discipline and realistic program expectations students need to succeed in self-paced CBE programs.
- 16. Short, post-baccalaureate programs—not degree completion—best suited for CBE:** Much of the attention to CBE focuses on its potential for degree completion programs, but in fact, post-baccalaureate programs (certificates and master's degrees) are a better fit for CBE, delivering benefits to both students and institutions. Not only do short programs for bachelor's degree holders require less student support, their shorter duration makes them easier for students to complete and less expensive for institutions to develop.
- 17. Personalization at scale within reach—even to those who stop short of CBE:** Schools daunted by the expense involved in CBE launch and program operation still have the option to implement strategies such as self-paced modules and Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) that provide students with the benefits of personalized learning without the risks of a full-fledged CBE investment.



Introduction

Defining Our Terms

The term “competency-based education” has become such a buzzword that it’s often applied to any advanced or outcomes-based pedagogies—from backwards design to adaptive learning. EAB’s working definition of CBE reflects the program models (i.e., Western Governors University, College for America) that have attracted the most media coverage and attention from higher education thought leaders, and is the model most likely to be discussed by higher education vendors. First, CBE awards academic credit for the mastery of clearly defined competencies rather than time spent learning. Additionally, each student in a CBE program must achieve at least baseline mastery of every competency in order to progress.



Mastery-based learning is not a new concept; it originated in competency-based initiatives at adult-serving institutions in the 1970s and 1980s. What distinguishes new CBE programs from earlier iterations is its second key element: online technology that provides each student a distinct pathway through learning content.

This personalization at scale takes two main forms, with the potential to personalize both the pace of learning and the type of content students encounter. Variations on course pacing can take the form of students completing work at their own pace within a fixed time frame or the total time frame of the course itself can vary. For example, one student may take 5 weeks to complete a course while another may take 15 weeks. Personalized content can range from simple recommendations and extra hints in areas where a student struggles, to complex systems that provide different types and amounts of content in different sequence for each student, depending on unique individual needs.

Confusing Connotations

Among the many terms and pedagogical techniques mistaken for CBE, several stand out as the main source of confusion. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a strategy that evaluates nontraditional student learning experiences—typically that take place before a student enrolls—for academic credit. Direct Assessment is a special federal designation that allows students to receive financial aid based on assessment of student learning, not credit hours. Only a small handful of competency-based programs have Direct Assessment status. Outcomes-based learning plays a large role in CBE programs, but often programs with well-defined learning outcomes, but no other components of CBE, brand themselves as “competency-based.”

Top 3 Terms Most Commonly Mistaken for CBE

Prior Learning Assessment
Institutions assess and award credit for learning gained outside traditional classroom experiences, typically prior to student enrollment.



Direct Assessment
Specific Title IV designation that allows schools to distribute financial aid based on assessments of student learning, not credit hours.



Outcomes-Based Learning
Process whereby faculty and instructional design staff follow a standard framework for course and program design, oriented around well-defined learning outcomes.



Additional EAB Resources

The PLA Playbook

Toolkit for schools looking to build or expand PLA programs

Federal Policy FAQ
(*Tool 3 in The CBE Playbook*)

Clarifies common misconceptions about financial aid for CBE programs

Assessing Student Learning Outcomes

EAB study about designing a learning outcomes strategy

While these three terms are not the same thing as CBE itself, EAB has resources devoted to helping members with each: a toolkit to guide schools in building or expanding a PLA program, FAQs that clarify misconceptions about Direct Assessment status, and a major EAB study focused on designing a campus-wide learning outcomes strategy.



For more in-depth definitions of terms commonly associated and confused with CBE, see Tool 1: Glossary of CBE Terms in *The CBE and PLA Playbook*, available on eab.com.

Passing Fad or Inevitability?

Over the past two years, both the trade press and mainstream media have featured hundreds of stories about competency-based education and its potential to improve student access, affordability, and outcomes. Given this recent attention, universities find themselves asking whether CBE is yet another short-lived fad or a truly disruptive trend worthy of their time and investment. It is easy to draw comparisons between current excitement about CBE and the MOOC mania of 2012: like MOOCs, CBE promises to democratize access to higher education and upend the university business model with low-cost, high-volume degrees.

Community Colleges Plan to Offer Quick Competency Degree (*Seattle Times*, 5/2014)

Competency-Based Education: No More Semesters? (*NPR*, 10/2014)

From Recession's Wake, Education Innovation Blooms (*Chicago Sun Times*, 8/2013)

Traditional Ways Upended in College of Competence (*Boston Globe*, 4/2013)

Are You Competent? Prove It. Degrees Based on What You Can Do, Not How Long You Went (*NY Times*, 10/2011)

Competency-Based Health Professions Credentials from the State of Texas System (*Inside Higher Education*, 11/2014)

Lumina-Funded Group Sees Potential in Competency-Based Education (*Inside Higher Education*, 12/2013)

@readmeray

"The #Edu14 drinking game: sure inebriation in 13 from vendor claims of 'moooc' 'cloud' or 'disrupting edu'. In 2014: 'competency based.'"

University Offers First \$10,000 Bachelor's Degree: Higher Education Roundup (*Plain Dealer*, 5/2014)

20 Colleges Are Picked for Pilot Programs on Competency-Based Education (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 3/2014)

Competency-Based

Competency-Based Degrees: Coming Soon to a Campus Near You (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2/2014)

Education is the Disruptive Innovation for Higher Education (*EDUCAUSE*, 11/2014)

Accreditors' Role in the Expansion of Competency-Based Education (*Inside Higher Education*, 9/2014)

Competency-Based Learning: A Big Deal, But Not Because of the Feds (*Huffington Post*, 4/2013)

Competency-Based Education Arrives at Three Major Public Institutions (*Inside Higher Education*, 10/2014)

Some of the biggest proponents of CBE have been vendors offering solutions to help universities launch new CBE programs. At the 2014 EDUCAUSE conference, one commenter tweeted from the vendor hall that while "MOOC" or "disrupt" were the trendy terms of years past, so many start-ups and education technology companies made claims about CBE that "competency-based" could have been the new drinking game.

Source: Hill, "Competency-Based Education: Not Just a Drinking Game," e-Literate, October 2014; EAB interviews and analysis.

Coming Soon to an Institution Like You

Partial List of COE Forum Interviewees with CBE Programs or Launch Plans

No longer the province of strictly adult-serving online institutions such as Western Governor’s University or Capella University, CBE programs can now be found at nearly every type of institution—from for-profits and community colleges to small liberal arts colleges and large research universities. To capture the full scope of this wide-ranging trend, EAB interviewed over 100 institutions with CBE programs or launch plans, with just a sampling of interviewed institutions listed below.



“Three of our peer institutions recently made headlines with new CBE programs. I’m starting to feel the pressure. All it takes is one more peer school to launch CBE, and I’ll be asked why we don’t already have a program in the works?”

*Associate Provost,
Research University*

Each of these schools defines CBE differently and each new program emphasizes different pedagogical and technological elements associated with CBE of pedagogy and alternative delivery, but the sheer number and institutional range of new program launches simply branded as CBE—even if in name only—heightens pressure on universities to decide whether to launch a CBE program themselves. The announcement of new competency-based programs at large brand-name schools including University of Michigan and Purdue have intensified concerns among universities that if they do not launch their own program soon, they risk losing a first-mover advantage and will quickly fall behind.

Before Racing for Grant Dollars

Fueling this wave of new program launches is a combination of public support from high-level government officials and the availability of multimillion-dollar grants for experimental programs from both public and private sources. White House and Department of Education officials have praised CBE programs and called for their expansion. External grants have channeled nearly \$100 million into higher education experiments with CBE or similar alternative delivery programs. But while these agencies encourage and fund experimentation with CBE, universities launching new programs find themselves carrying all of the risk and bearing the ongoing expense of new program launches.



While competency-based programs are now the exception, “I want them to be the norm.”

Arne Duncan, The New York Times (11/2011)



BILL & MELINDA GATES foundation

Next-Generation Learning Challenges




\$14M program funding tech-enabled innovation—Breakthrough Delivery Models including College for America and NAU Personalized Learning



First in the World Grants

\$75M program to support innovations that increase access and completion and make college more affordable (\$1.5M to \$4M over 48 months)

Critical Questions for Each Institution

-  Will we be able to afford the costs when our grant runs out?
-  Is this right for our students?
 - Is there demand?
 - Can we help them succeed?
-  Are we ready?
 - Back-office
 - Faculty

Before accepting a grant and launching a new program, universities must first consider whether they can support initial and ongoing program costs once grant funding runs out, whether the CBE model is appropriate for their students, and whether they have the back-office and faculty support necessary to help students succeed in a new type of program.

Some recipients of this initial grant funding caution that external financial support cannot cover the start-up and operational costs of a CBE program, and programs incurred significant, unanticipated operating expenses without generating enough new revenue to cover these costs.



EAB’s CBE Readiness Diagnostic helps institutions assess whether they are prepared for a CBE launch. See Tool 4 of *The CBE and PLA Playbook*, available on eab.com

Source: Lewin T, “Official Calls for Urgency on College Costs,” *New York Times*, November 2011; EAB interviews and analysis.

Three Myths About Competency-Based Education

1

Myth 1: Students and Employers Are Demanding CBE

In reality, students are not searching for CBE and few know what it means. Employers' interest in CBE is no different than their engagement with traditional programs.

2

Myth 2: CBE Is Faster and Lower-Cost for Students

Most students progress at an average pace in CBE and end up paying tuition similar to traditional programs.

3

Myth 3: CBE Is Lower-Cost for Institutions

An immature vendor market and the cost of supporting self-paced learning make CBE programs more expensive to launch and to run than traditional programs.



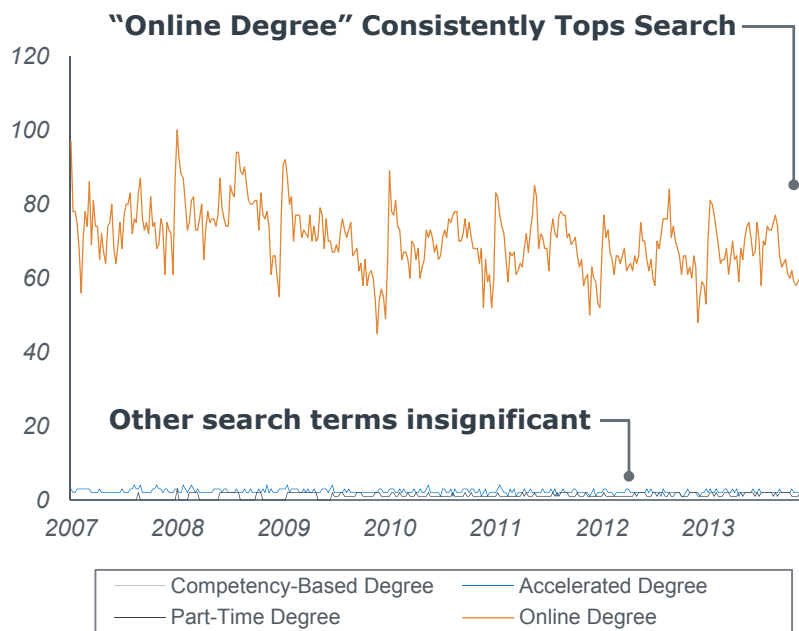
Students and Employers Are Demanding CBE

MYTH

1

Are Students Looking for CBE Programs?

Many institutions expressed to EAB a concern that students are starting to “search” for CBE programs—and that their universities will be left behind if they don’t launch a program. However, Google Trends analysis of search behaviors over time shows that, since 2007, searches for online degrees far outrank searches for both competency-based and other types of degree programs, including accelerated and part-time degrees. When compared to Google searches for online degrees, searches for these other types of degrees are not only insignificant, but virtually indistinguishable from one another.



”
“We learned the hard way that most students have never heard the term ‘competency-based’ before. We spend a lot of time explaining.”
Academic Program Director

Google™ Trends Analysis

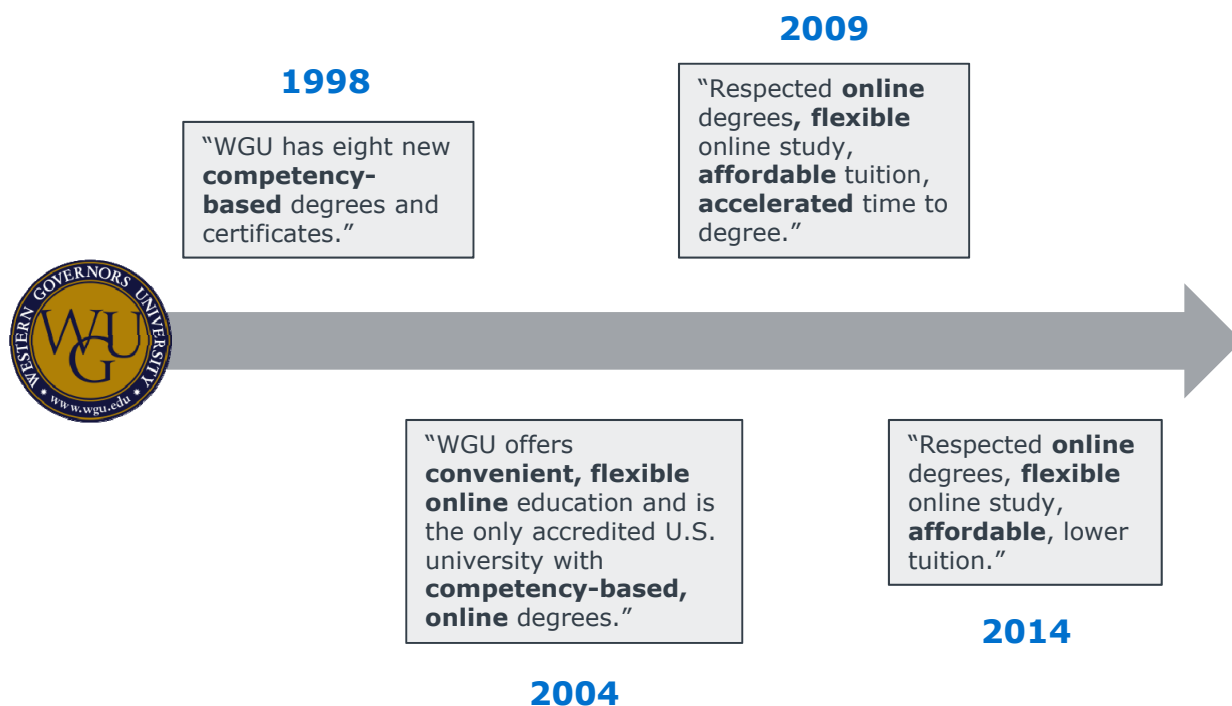
One reason students are not searching for CBE is that they simply do not know what it is. First-mover CBE programs explain that the vast majority of students have not heard of CBE before; even those who have heard of it are confused about what it means or how it differs from traditional online programs. Understandably, if higher education institutions have difficulty agreeing on a definition of competency-based education, it comes as no surprise that students have trouble understanding what CBE is.

Source: Goggle Trends, www.google.com/trends; EAB interviews and analysis.

First Movers De-emphasizing CBE

EAB Analysis of Western Governors University Homepage Across the Years

Low student awareness of CBE has shaped the marketing and recruitment strategies of first-mover programs to downplay CBE in favor of its distinguishing features, which include flexible pacing and affordable tuition. Since its founding in 1998 as an online institution offering only CBE programs, Western Governors University (WGU) exemplifies this shift away from CBE in its marketing messages.



To illustrate this trend, EAB analyzed WGU's homepage messages over the past 16 years using an Internet archiving tool called the Wayback Machine, which shows webpages at different points over time. In 1998, WGU featured its then eight competency-based degrees as the centerpiece of the site. By 2004, however, WGU began emphasizing the convenience and flexibility of its online degrees before mentioning competency-based. Since 2009 its main homepage messages have all but omitted CBE, focusing almost entirely on the fact that its degrees are online and offer students a flexible, affordable option.

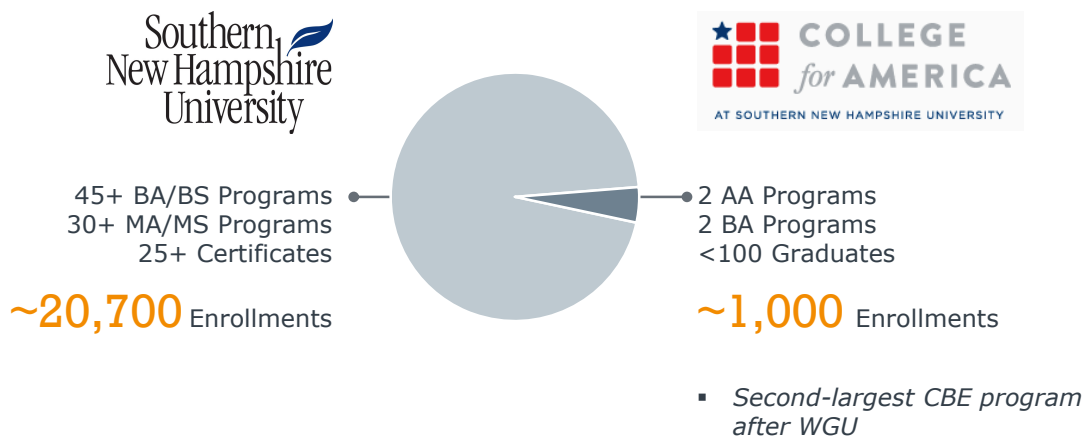
Source: Internet Archive, archive.org/web; EAB interviews and analysis.

Still a Small Slice of the Pie at SNHU

One reason that perceptions of student demand for CBE far exceed the reality is how easily CBE programs can be confused with much larger online counterparts. A common misperception about the CBE market conflates the success and large online enrollments at Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) with its much-smaller CBE initiative, College for America, which does not pose nearly the same competitive threat to universities as SNHU online.

“One of our board members keeps calling the president and saying, ‘I’m seeing advertisements for Southern New Hampshire everywhere—are we going to lose students to them if we don’t do competency-based education too?’”

Provost, Public University



Southern New Hampshire has roughly 100 online programs and well over 20,000 students, but College for America is a separate, smaller organization at SNHU that delivers exclusively CBE programs. With about 1,000 enrollments and 4 degree programs, College for America is the second-largest CBE program after WGU; it does not represent the norm across the CBE landscape, where most programs enroll between 20 and 40 students.

For more information about College for America and other fully operational CBE programs, see Tool 2: Comparison Chart of Key CBE Programs in *The CBE and PLA Playbook*, available on eab.com

Source: “CFA’s Best Outcomes, One Year After Official Launch,” CFA Blog, www.collegeforamerica.org, October 3, 2014; EAB interviews and analysis.

No Clear Signals of Employer CBE Demand

Much of the current excitement about CBE focuses on its potential to align the skills students learn with the specific hiring needs of employers, but EAB research found little evidence that employers are demanding CBE programs or are more engaged in the development of CBE than with traditional continuing and professional education partnerships. CBE first movers and schools with launch plans report little to no additional employer involvement in promoting programs or designing a CBE curriculum.

What We Expected to Find

New Models of Employer-Customization

- ✓ Specific competencies matched to each job
- ✓ Employers design and review assessments
- ✓ Significant direct pipelines of students, hiring pathways for graduates

What We Heard—Look Familiar?



Industry advisory council feedback



Program promoted (with others) on company internal site



Occasional phone conversation to discuss program



Want vague skills: critical thinking and communication

No Ready-Made List of Employer Competencies

“During one focus group, HR staff and plant managers talked about what new graduates need to be able to do. Their message was, ‘We just need people who don’t do drugs and can work in teams.’”

*Beth Laves,
Associate VP, Division of Extended Learning and Outreach,
Western Kentucky University*

In fact, the employer partnerships described by existing CBE programs closely resemble the ways employers already engage with many continuing and professional education programs. Employers share feedback about CBE program content via industry advisory councils or the occasional phone conversation and promote CBE programs alongside traditional programs on internal company websites. Employer thinking about competencies also has not changed with the availability of CBE programs offering more specific skills development. Instead, employers ask CBE programs to develop the same broad skills they normally ask for, such as critical thinking and communication. One program reached out to manufacturing plant managers specifically for the purposes of launching a CBE degree in advanced manufacturing, only to discover that these employers were not looking for specific competencies, but for bare minimum requirements: workers who did not do drugs and could work in teams.



CBE Is Faster and Lower-Cost for Students

MYTH

2

Overhead on Good Morning America

Among the many purported benefits of CBE, perhaps the most well-publicized is its potential to offer students fast, low-cost degrees. Motivated students who can leverage existing skills and work experience, the thinking goes, can accelerate in a self-paced online degree program that recognizes the knowledge and skills that students already have. Recent national news stories about students who earn their degrees in record time are a powerful testament to CBE and create the impression that most CBE students can earn their degrees quickly and cheaply.

Michelle, CfA



Account rep at Anthem-BCBS
Mother of two
Twenty-five years work experience

Earned degree in 5 months

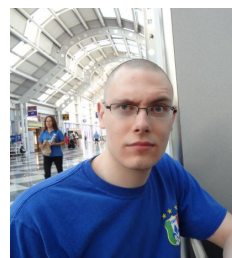
Dan, UW-Flex



Senior programmer Wisc. Legislature
Aspiring neuroscientist
Sixteen years work experience

Earned 33 credits in 3 months

Zach, CfA



Sanitation worker at ConAgra plant
Manufactures Slim-Jims
Twenty-one years old

Earned degree in 100 days

Indication that CBE can help meet completion goals?

Taken individually, these student stories are indeed awe-inspiring. Michelle, an insurance account representative with 25 years of experience and a mother of two earned her degree from College for America in five months. Dan, a computer programmer and aspiring neuroscientist earned 33 credits in three months from UW-Flex. And Zach, a 21-year-old student and sanitation worker, earned his College for America degree in just 100 days. But when taken as representative of the returning student population as a whole, these stories can tempt universities into believing that CBE is a silver bullet solution that will rapidly expand access to working adults and help meet ambitious institution, state, and national degree completion goals.

Source: Alssid JL, and Patricia Shields, "College in the Call Center," Association for Talent Development, 2014; Fain P, "Experimental College's First Graduate," Inside Higher Education, 2013; UW-Extension, "How One Ambitious Student Saved \$7,500 and Nine Months in His Very First UW Flexible Option Subscription Period," 2014; EAB interviews and analysis.

...But Are Michelle, Dan, and Zach the Norm?

How Often Can Degree Completers Speed Ahead?

However, attention to individual stories of rapid degree completion in CBE programs obscures the significant challenges faced by the broader population of adult degree completers. CBE programs require mastery of each competency demand more self-discipline and more rigor than traditional online programs, and this from a student population that is already less academically prepared than the college-going population as a whole.

Significant Barriers Already

“This is a student segment with low academic preparedness. We absolutely have to figure out how to support degree completers, but a CBE program—online, self-paced, demanding mastery of every concept—is going to be challenging for a student without developed study skills.

Schools launching CBE programs are doing it because they believe in the pedagogy, not because it’s an easy way to serve the degree completion market. It’s a lot harder.”

*Dean, College of Continuing Education
Public Research University*

Non-completers Less Prepared Than College Population at Large

3x

Likelihood of possessing learning disability

6.6

Mean gap in self-reported composite ACT score

22%

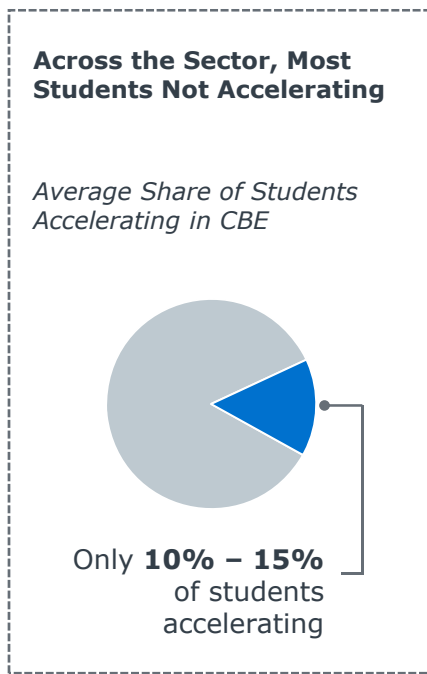
Percentage-point gap on math/verbal assessment

Overall, degree completers are three times more likely to possess a learning disability than students in the general college population. Degree completers also report test scores that are on average 6.6 points lower on math and verbal skills than the typical college student. Given this level of academic preparedness, the very flexibility and mastery-based approach of CBE makes it more difficult, not less, for degree completers to succeed in a CBE program.

Source: Velez ED, “America’s College Drop-Out Epidemic: Understanding the College Drop-Out Population,” National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, 2014; EAB interviews and analysis.

Lower Price Often Relies on Speed

The average pace of student progress in CBE programs reflects the challenges of accelerating in a self-paced, mastery-based CBE program. Data from existing CBE programs refutes the idea that students can simply “speed through” CBE programs and earn a degree inexpensively. Across the sector, first-mover programs report that only about 10%-15% of students can accelerate in a CBE program while the vast majority of students progress at an average pace or slower.



Illustrative Example

Subscription Price Rewards Swift Pace...

The “All-You-Can-Learn” Price

\$2,500

Three-month subscription

...But Marginal Difference Between Costs

Comparison of Degree Completion Program Pricing

\$20,000

two years at subscription price

Vs.

\$24,000

two years at regular price

Compounding this problem, the low-cost “all you can learn” subscription pricing of CBE programs relies on a rapid student pace to deliver savings. A student who takes three or four courses during a subscription period costing \$2,500 receives more value than a student who can complete only one or two courses in the same amount of time. EAB analysis of the cost of CBE tuition prices across the sector shows that over the course of two years, these prices resemble the cost of paying tuition for a traditional program in the same time frame. Because the majority of students do not accelerate in CBE, they also do not receive the low-cost benefit of subscription prices.

Searching for the Mythical Bookkeeper

We Lost Count the Number of Times This Came Up

Even though most students struggle to accelerate in CBE programs, some proponents mistakenly believe that students with the right type of work experience can progress more quickly than others. Bookkeepers are the most common example given in support of this argument, in the belief that they will be able to apply their experience with accounting to move rapidly through a business degree. However, only a small portion of the typical CBE business degree curriculum is devoted to accounting subjects, which is unlikely to confer a meaningful advantage to bookkeepers, and a limited national pool of degree-eligible bookkeepers makes it difficult to launch a CBE program on the premise of serving this group.

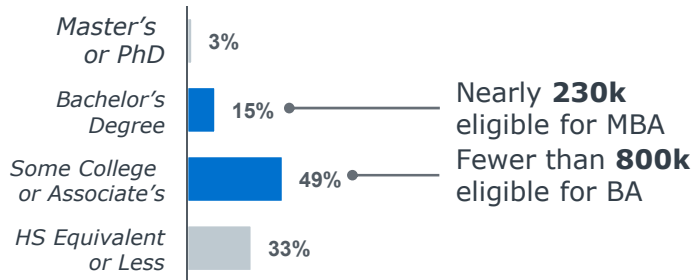
The Mythical Bookkeeper

“We’re here for someone like a bookkeeper who’s been working in a small business his whole life. With the [accounting] work he does every day, he can speed through and get a degree in no time.”

Program Director, Public Institution

- How many bookkeepers are in your state?
- How many bookkeepers can accelerate progress?
- How many bookkeepers want to go back to school?

Small Share National Workforce



Typical BBA Curriculum



Percentage of curriculum devoted to accounting **even smaller (6%)** in typical CBE MBA

Analysis of the typical curriculum in a CBE program shows that just 13%-16% of coursework and competencies are devoted to accounting, which means that bookkeepers could use their work experience to accelerate for only a small portion of a program, but could not sustain this pace across the degree as a whole. Additionally, new CBE programs will likely find a limited audience of potential bookkeepers. Nationwide, fewer than 800,000 bookkeepers are eligible for a bachelor’s degree—and of these a much smaller proportion likely want to return to school or have the aptitude to succeed in a CBE program.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012; EAB interviews and analysis; EAB interviews and analysis.

Selecting the Right Program to Launch

For those institutions that do decide to launch a new CBE program, serving proven learners who already hold at least a bachelor's degree and choosing fields where competencies are already well known minimizes their initial investment and promotes student success.

Students Most Likely to Succeed



Proven Learners

Students with a bachelor's degree or higher
Master's and post-baccalaureate certificates

Reducing Up-Front Time Investment



Strong Outcomes History

Fields with long history of curriculum design based on outcomes
Health professions



Relevant Work Experience

Career advancers rather than career changers
Master's in Strategic Communication
Master's of Business Analytics



Certificates

Lower financial risk and up-front investment; faster completion for students
Project Management Professional
Digital Marketing

Choosing CBE programs in fields where competencies are already well-defined and well-known, such as in health professions, can reduce initial investments necessary for content development. Simply selecting credentials that require less content to develop, such as short-format certificate programs, also lowers the required investment and can be easier for students to complete.



For more resources to inform campus conversations about CBE degrees, see Tool 6: CBE Program Selection Guide in *The CBE and PLA Playbook*, available on eab.com



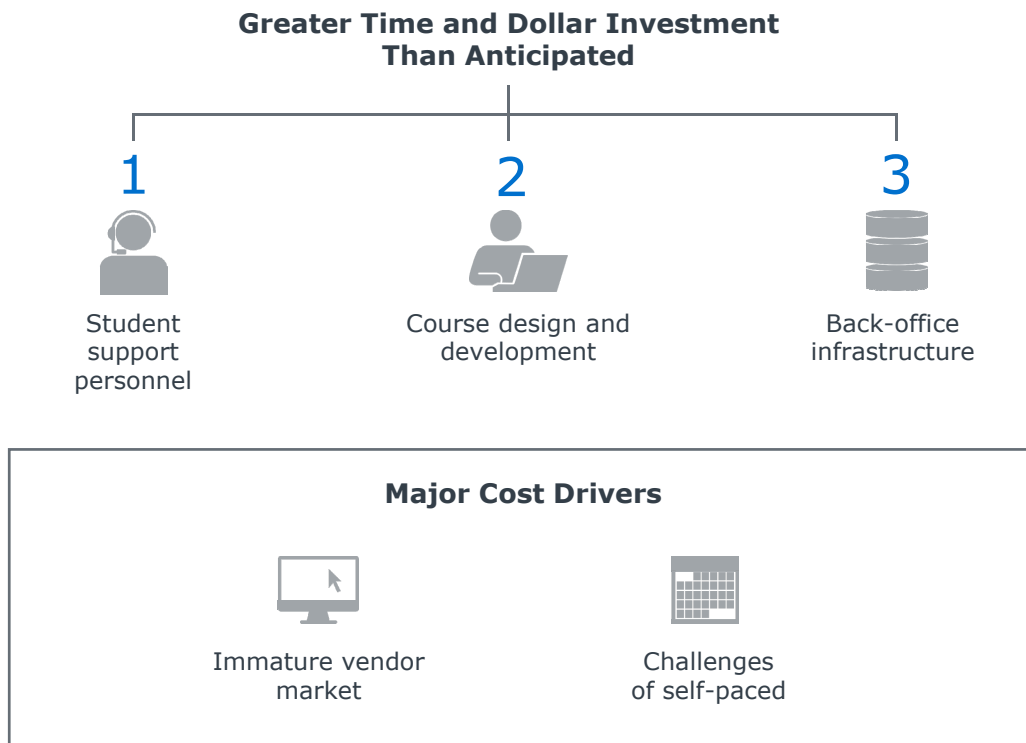
CBE Is Lower-Cost for Institutions

MYTH

3

Unanticipated Expenses

Not only do proponents believe that CBE programs will save students money, they also argue that CBE programs are ultimately less expensive for institutions because they can be scaled to serve high volumes of students at only additional marginal cost. In reality, first movers report that CBE programs are more expensive to launch and operate than traditional programs, while a lack of automated administrative processes limit their scale ambitions.



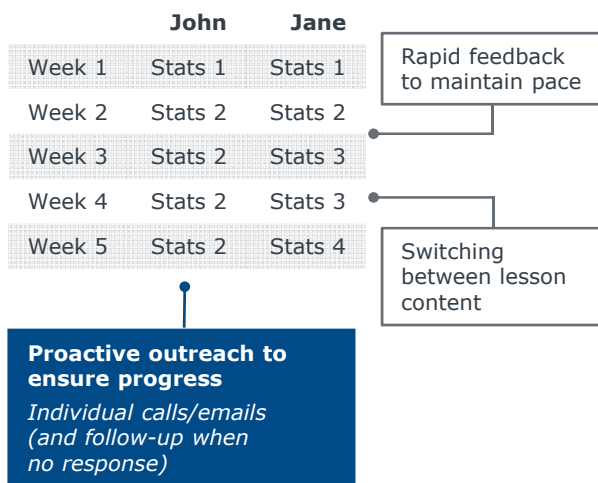
First movers encountered greater expenses than they originally anticipated in three key areas: the ongoing cost of student support personnel, the initial investment in designing customizable course content, and configuring back-office systems and processes for a flexible, self-paced program. Driving costs higher in all three of these areas is a lack of established vendor solutions to automate or outsource work and the difficulty of operating an self-paced program within the strictures of a system built around the credit hour and standard academic term.

‘Our Faculty Were Buried’

While personalized pacing offers students more flexibility, these students in turn require more advising support to stay on track in their programs. The largest cost of running a self-paced CBE program is the additional staff needed to support student success, especially when existing faculty resources are insufficient to meet the widely varying needs of students in self-paced programs. These students have different learning needs at different times: a student who accelerates needs an instructor to keep up with her progress and provide rapid feedback to help maintain her pace, but a struggling student needs regular, proactive outreach and remedial tutoring in order to progress.

Self-Paced Programs Require Even Greater Instructor Effort

Instructor Workload (Illustrative)



First Movers Find Success Coaches Necessary for Ensuring Progress



Quick Responses

- Answering logistical and administrative questions
- Alerting faculty when students have academic questions

Even small delays matter in a self-paced course



Personalized Planning

- Intake interview with students each term to set goals and timelines for work
- Weekly or bi-weekly check-ins on pacing throughout term

Added benefit: able to track stop-outs for financial aid

Faculty can become easily overwhelmed by these student needs, finding themselves unable to keep up. For this reason, CBE first movers have turned to success coaches to provide regular, proactive advising to their students. In a self-paced course where even a small delay can disrupt a student’s momentum, coaches provide students with rapid responses that address administrative or logistical hurdles and quickly connect struggling students to academic support at the first indication of trouble. Success coaches also help students develop the study skills and discipline to succeed in self-paced programs through individualized goal-setting and planning sessions at the beginning of each term and through regular check-in meetings throughout the term.

Examining the (Partial) Costs of Student Support

Nearly every operational CBE program, no matter the institution or program size, relies on success coaches, counting the additional staffing costs as simply the cost of doing business in the CBE market. A common misperception about success coaches—and an unbundled faculty model in general—is that they reduce operational program costs by allowing faculty to teach more students. However, increased faculty teaching loads are often not enough to offset the additional cost of hiring success coaches, though the cost-to-savings ratio will differ for each institution depending on workloads and faculty and success coach salaries.

“Success coaches would be ideal for any program serving adult and online students, but it’s really an essential cost of doing business in CBE.”

VPAA, Public University

Across All Program Sizes



Not Exactly “Scale” Illustrative¹

	Traditional Faculty Model	Success Coach Model
Faculty Salary	\$80,000	\$80,000
Faculty Workload	1:40, 4/4	1:200, 4/4
Total # Students	320	1,600
Coach Salary	--	\$35,000
Coach Workload	--	1:150
	\$250	\$283
	cost per student	cost per student

The illustrative model above shows that success coaches do allow CBE programs to increase faculty-to-student ratios, but the additional cost of the coaches often offsets any potential savings, resulting in higher per-student instruction costs for program using success coaches in addition to faculty.

Estimate the potential cost of success coaches at your institution using EAB’s Success Coach Investment Estimator, available both as an interactive online tool and in Tool 10 of *The CBE and PLA Playbook*, both available on eab.com.

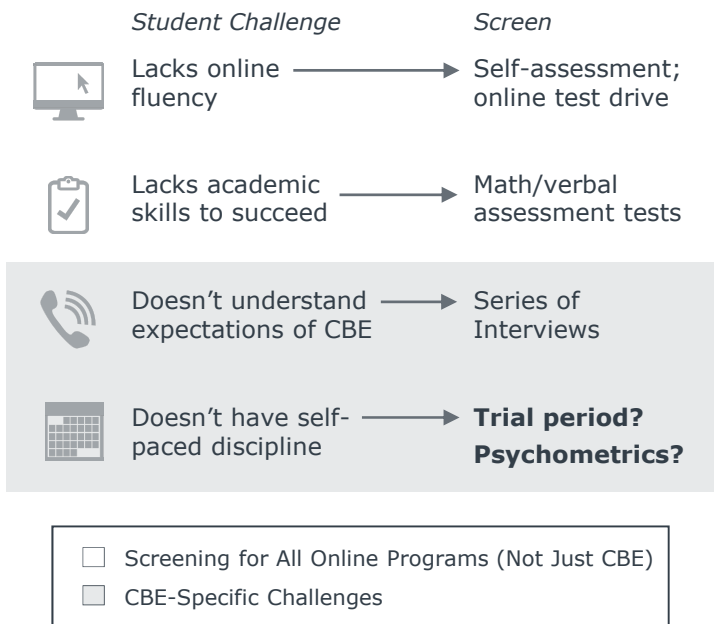
1) This illustrative model assumes that students take courses one at a time. Instructional costs per student may be somewhat lower if students consistently take multiple, simultaneous courses each term.

Source: Busted B, “The Biggest Blown Opportunity in Higher Ed History,” Gallup, October 2014; “Great Jobs Great Lives: The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index Report,” Gallup, 2014; EAB interviews and analysis.

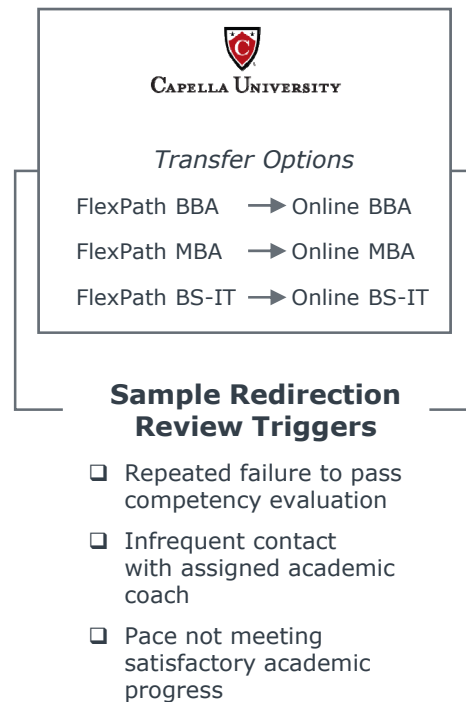
New Emphasis on Learner Fit

Not only do CBE students face many of the same obstacles as adult students in online programs (e.g., low academic preparedness or difficulty using online technologies), but they also face new challenges specific to the CBE format, including a lack of discipline to persist in a self-paced program or simply not understanding how a CBE program differs from a traditional online program. First movers have realized that not only are success coaches necessary to supporting positive student outcomes during a program, but that it is essential to select students likely to succeed before they start a CBE program in the first place.

Screening for Those Likely to Succeed



Soft Landing for Strugglers



In addition to assessing students for pitfalls common to adult learners, CBE programs also often deploy interviews or trial periods to screen for student traits essential to CBE success. Interviews help ensure that students understand the unique expectations of a CBE program, while trial periods assess whether students have the discipline necessary for a self-paced program.

However, even the best screening methods cannot detect every problem a student might encounter, and for students struggling with CBE despite screening and coaching, some first movers have designated exit paths into traditional online programs. At Capella University, for example, students in its FlexPath program who fail to progress or communicate with coaches are redirected into a traditional online Capella degree.



For student screening templates and resources see Tool 11 of *The CBE and PLA Playbook*, available on eab.com

Personalized Learning Pathways

In addition to personalized pacing, personalized content also increases the cost of CBE programs. New adaptive learning technologies enable personalization at scale by automatically creating customized content pathways for every student. The effort involved in developing these pathways, however, is labor-intensive and can add thousands of hours to the course design and development costs of a CBE program. In surveying the emerging the adaptive learning vendor market, EAB identified two main types of technologies. Both types respond to learners in real time, creating content pathways with different frequency and levels of nuance.

Responding to Learner Actions in Real-Time



Rule-Based Adaptive

- Branched learning paths following “if...then...” logic
- Example: Different required or recommended pathways for high-level, middle-of-road, and struggling learner



Algorithm-Based Adaptive

- Content sequence calculated dynamically—a different path for every learner

A True Production—Cue the Rolling Credits

- Faculty Member
- Instructional Architect
- Curriculum Specialist
- Assessment Specialists
- Instructional Designers
- Project Managers
- Quality Assurance Analyst
- Lead Media Designer
- Media
- Editing
- Production
- Learning Scientist

How Many *Faculty* Hours to An Adaptive Curriculum?

1,500 Hours
Per Course

86 Years
For All Gen Ed Courses

571 Years
For Typical University Entire Catalog

Illustrative Example

Rule-based adaptive learning is based on if/then logic and creates branching learning paths resulting in a different learning pathway for a student who struggles versus those already performing at a high level. Algorithm-based adaptive learning responds to students in real time as they work through content, calculating a unique content sequence for each learner dynamically.

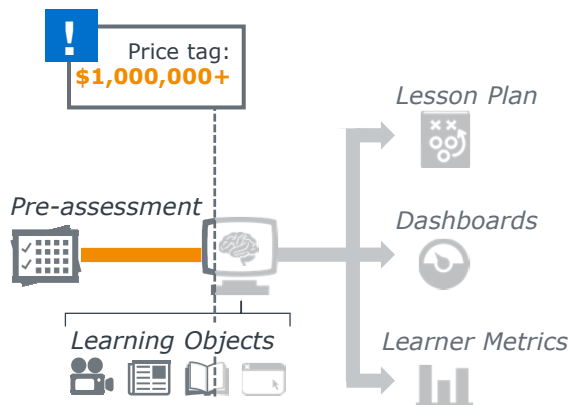
The effort required to develop even a single adaptive course requires the involvement of many faculty and staff members who must design every aspect of each possible learning pathway, a roster that includes everyone from instructional designers to IT staff and project managers.

Source: “Adapting the Content,” www.realizeitlearning.com; “Adaptive Learning Models and Case Studies,” OLC International Conference, October 2014; EAB interviews and analysis.

The Million-Dollar Question (Pun Intended)

One reason personalized content takes so much time from so many different stakeholders is that few well-developed vendor solutions exist to expedite or automate all of the different components involved in course development. A cautionary tale from one CBE program shows how expensive it can be to develop an adaptive learning platform in-house. Initially this program had ambitious plans for a system of customized assessments and lesson plans with an integrated learning analytics system. After spending \$1 million, the program was able to develop only the first platform component of customized assessments, concluding that it would have been better to wait for a vendor solution.

One Early Mover’s Lessons Learned



“You can buy a lot of different pieces, but no one’s figured out how to put it all together or how to make it really work. We’ve already spent so much money we’re going to keep going, but we’d have been better off waiting.”

Program Director, Private Institution

Hedging Bets

ASU’s Adaptive Learning Partners



“It’s too early to figure out whose analytics are best. We’re going to work with multiple vendors until we find someone doing things practical and scalable for multiple disciplines.”

*Dale Johnson
Sr. Business Analyst, ASU Adaptive Learning*

Meanwhile, ASU has decided to work with multiple adaptive learning vendors for different courses until a clear winner emerges. With this strategy, ASU hopes to avoid future switching costs and to gain a first-mover advantage if a dominant vendor overtakes the market. The result has been a multimillion-dollar investment in at least a half-dozen vendor partnerships—a level of spend that very few colleges and universities can afford.

Snippets from Our Research Conversations

Self-paced programs are especially challenging administratively for CBE programs, most of which must operate within a system built for the credit hour and standard academic term. CBE first movers explained that this incongruity affects every student administrative process, from enrollment to billing to tracking academic progress.



Student Billing

Admin staff create bills by hand for each students



LMS Downloads

Staff manually download student data from the LMS and input into the SIS



Course Enrollment

Registrar staff manually input course enrollments into SIS after course completion



SIS Calendars

Registrar staff manually generate calendars in SIS for weekly program start dates



Financial Aid Awards

Admin staff create and mail financial aid award letters from Word template

”Creating a non-term program outside the traditional semester structure requires modification to almost every administrative aspect—from the student experience to official reporting.”

*Rebecca Garrett,
Northern Arizona University*



Course Exits

Registrar staff input student withdraws into the SIS by hand



Enrollment Reporting

IR staff manually re-shape enrollment files for IPEDS data upload



Student Tracking

Institution uses Excel document to track student interaction in courses for R2T4 compliance



Transcription

Institution manually creates traditional transcript from course/module completion



Student Payments

Bursar staff manually process student subscription payments

To accommodate CBE students, programs must complete these processes manually or undergo extensive systems configuration. Not only does this drain valuable staff time, but lack of administrative automation for CBE limits the ability of these programs to scale up to serve hundreds or thousands of students.



Coda: Personalized Learning Without CBE

Personalized Learning within Reach

Faced with the costs and challenges of CBE implementation, universities may decide to forgo investing in a full CBE program. Still, wanting to attract adult learners and give their students the benefits of personalized learning, some schools are implementing the pedagogical techniques and component parts of CBE without making an investment in a full-fledged CBE program.

16 Ideas for Delivering Personalized Learning without CBE

I	II	III
Content	Pacing	Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Project-based curriculum• Problem-based learning• Adaptive technologies• Learning analytics• Active learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-paced courses• Subscription pricing• Flexible start dates• Emporium-style learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital portfolios• Success coaches• Backwards design• Skill-based competencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adaptive release	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remedial self-paced modules	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prior Learning Assessment

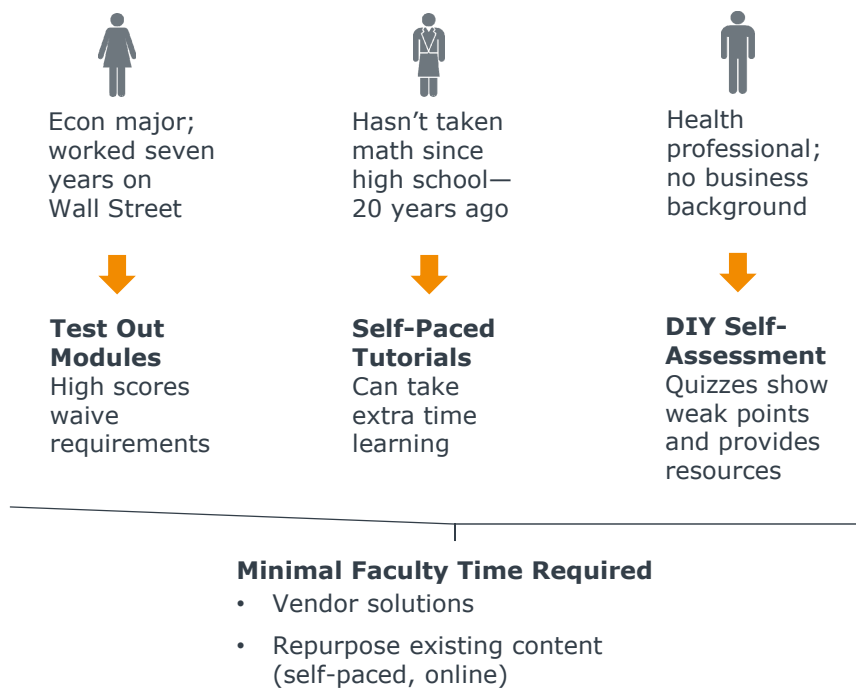
Explored in greater depth on the following pages

The list above shows just 16 different personalized learning methods that can be launched separately from CBE, and the following pages explore in greater depth how schools can capitalize on three of these methods: remedial self-paced modules, adaptive release, and Prior Learning Assessment.

MBA Prep School

Some programs have already been offering self-paced, personalized content and mastery-based learning at low cost (without offering CBE) for years. Remedial self-paced modules for new MBA students are one example of a strategy used by MBA programs and sought out by new MBA students to solve the problem of students enrolling with widely varying levels of preparation in key areas like finance or English language skills.

Self-Paced Modules Support Variation of Preparation Within MBA Programs



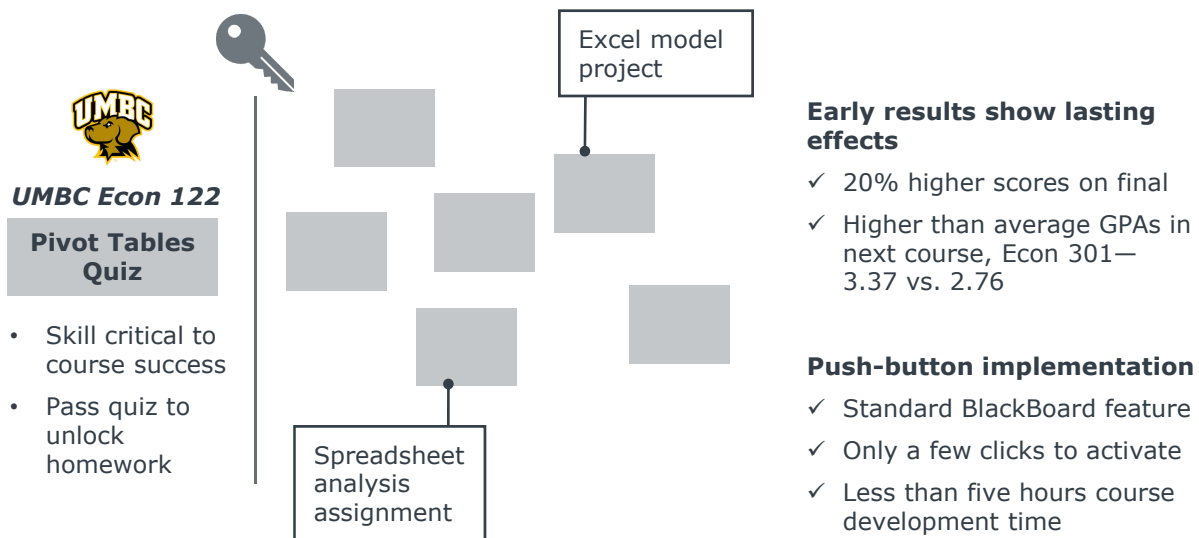
Self-paced pre-MBA modules provide tailored instruction for different types of new MBA students—mostly by repackaging existing online content. While a professional with Wall Street experience can test out of a module, a student who has not taken math in decades can use as much time as necessary in a self-paced tutorial. Students with no business background can take self-assessment quizzes to identify their weak points and locate the right resources to cover their learning gaps.

Source: "Welcome to Pre-MBA Boot Camp," Fortune, 7/25/2012; Harvard Business Publishing for Educators: Online Courses, <https://cb.hbsp.harvard.edu/cbmp/pages/content/onlinecourses>; EAB interviews and analysis.

No Choice but to Learn Fundamental Conceptsx

Pre-MBA modules address student gaps before they begin a program, but at UMBC a feature called Adaptive Release ensures that students do not develop new learning gaps as they progress in their coursework. Adaptive Release is a simple, built-in Blackboard setting that requires students to pass quizzes about fundamental concepts before they can “unlock” access to their homework. For example, in Econ 122 at UMBC, students need to understand pivot tables in order to do well in the course and must pass a short quiz about pivot tables to access homework and spreadsheet analysis projects.

“Adaptive Release” Ensures Mastery of Foundational Skills



UMBC has found that students in course sections using adaptive release perform better than students in sections without it. Econ 122 students using adaptive release not only scored higher on the class final, but their improved performance persisted into the next course, Econ 301, where students who had used adaptive release in their prior course earned above-average course GPAs. Implementing adaptive release, a standard built-in feature of BlackBoard, takes only a few extra hours of course development time and no technological expertise.

Source: Fritz J, "Using Analytics at UMBC: Encouraging Student Responsibility and Identifying Effective Course Designs," EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research, April 30, 2013; EAB interviews and analysis.

Beyond the Traditional Credit Award

While Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is easily confused with CBE programs, universities commonly implement PLA programs separately from CBE. PLA programs evaluate students' prior work, training, and other nontraditional learning experiences for academic credit using standardized tests, portfolios, and other methods. Often, PLA is part of an overall strategy to serve adult learners and recognize the existing skills and experiences they bring to a post-secondary program.



Toolkit: *The PLA Playbook*

Resources for members building or expanding Prior Learning Assessment programs.

Tools included in *The PLA Playbook*:

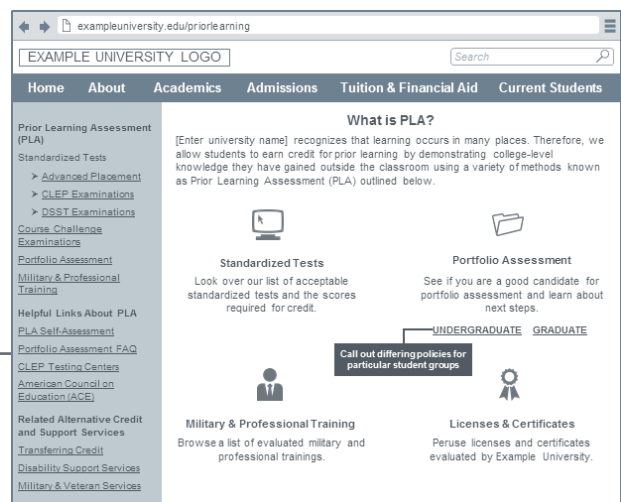
Clarifying Prior Learning and Portfolio Processes

- Prior Learning Primer
- PLA Portfolio Process and Risk Maps
- Sample PLA Organizational Models
- PLA Policy Builder

Building and Staffing a PLA Program

- PLA Stakeholder Communication Manual
- Faculty Assessor Training Curriculum
- PLA Landing Page Template

Sample PLA Web Page Template from *The PLA Playbook*



The PLA Playbook is a suite of EAB tools and resources designed to help schools develop or grow PLA programs. These tools clarify PLA terminology and evaluation methods and give step-by-step guidance for creating a portfolio review process, staffing a PLA program, developing a PLA policy, and communicating with students and faculty about PLA.

Unlimited Copies for Members

Copies of EAB publications are available to members in unlimited quantity and without charge. Additional copies can be obtained through our website, by email, or by telephone. Electronic copies are also available for download from our website.

To Order on eab.com

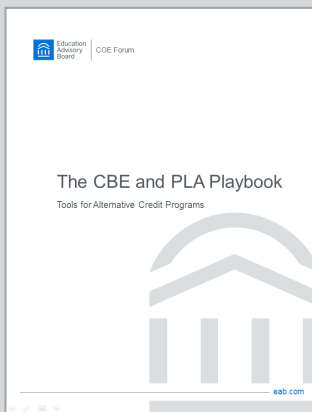
Publications can be ordered at eab.com.

To Order by Email

Please address your email to research@eab.com or reach out to your Dedicated Advisor.

In your email, please include: the title of the desired publication(s), the quantity desired, your name, your institution, a contact phone number, and your shipping address. We apologize that we cannot ship materials to a P.O. Box.

Additional Resource: *The CBE and PLA Playbook*



For members looking to incorporate personalized learning (including PLA) without launching full-fledged CBE programs:

Given that most universities decide not to invest in full-scale CBE programs because of their significant costs and risks, this playbook contains tools for members looking to implement alternative and personalized methods without a full CBE launch.

- First, a glossary of CBE terms helps members understand the different components of CBE that can be implemented separately from a full CBE program.
- Second, success coach resources and student time management tools can be used to implement intrusive advising models and coaching for self-paced courses and programs.
- Third, *The PLA Playbook* gives members tools to build or expand Prior Learning Assessment programs that award credit by evaluating students' prior work, training, and other nontraditional learning experiences.

For members launching or growing full-fledged CBE programs:

For colleges and universities launching or scaling full CBE programs, *The CBE and PLA Playbook* provides members with step-by-step guidance to determine whether launching a CBE program is the right fit for their institutions, tools to mitigate the costs and risks of launch, and resources to support continuous improvement in student screening and support.



Washington DC | Richmond | Birmingham | Minneapolis

P 202.747.1000 | F 202.747.1010 | eab.com