Competency-Based Education in Higher Education

Academic Standards Committee

Auburn University

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Content Outline

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- Why are institutions doing it?
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- Who is doing it?
- What are some general characteristics?
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- What are the regulatory guidelines?
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- What are the potential benefits?
- Who is the potential audience?
- What are some related programs and policies already in place?

What is Competency-Based Education (CBE)?

- There is still no consensus definition of CBE, even among the institutions that provide it (*Kelchen, 2015*).

- Asks students to learn important content information and skills; **requires a student to demonstrate that learning by applying the content and skills in unique ways** (*Bramante & Colby, 2012*).

- A particular approach to postsecondary education that emphasizes **mastery of knowledge and skills** regardless of the amount of time required and the method chosen to achieve mastery (*Quality Matters*).

- An innovative approach in higher education that organizes academic content or delivery according to competencies – **what a student knows and can do** – rather than following a more traditional scheme, such as by course (*USDOE*).

Why are institutions doing it?

Pressures for reform in higher education…

- **ACCCESS** - Increase postsecondary educational opportunities to a different student population (lower socioeconomic status; non-traditional, working adults)

- **COMPLETION** - Improve outcomes and accountability for potential graduates

"Many of these programs are designed as flexible, affordable options for students who are not served well by existing postsecondary programs" C-BEN

"We have a radical idea that the aims of education ought to be the outcomes of education" -Carol Geary Schneider, AAC&U
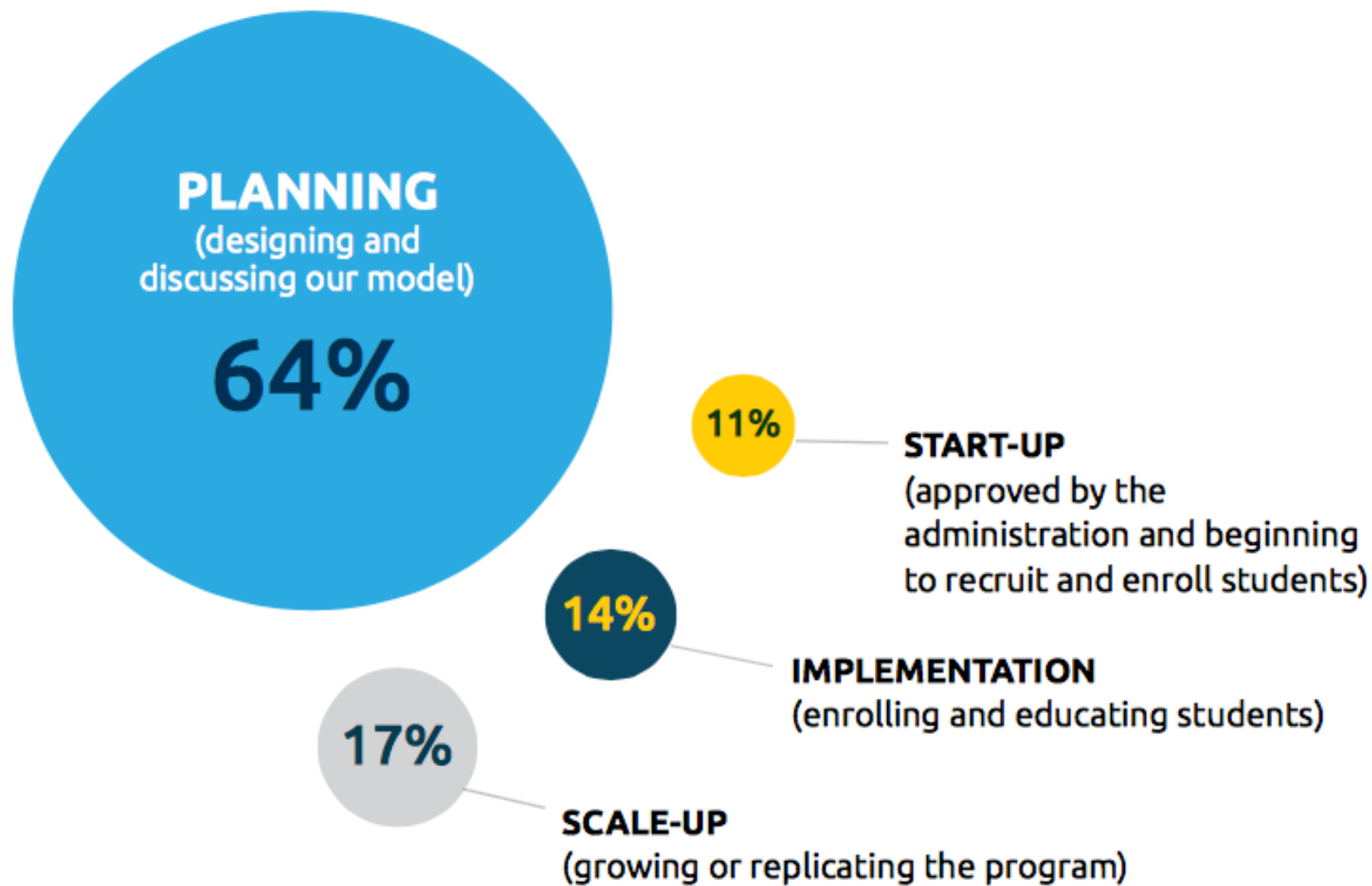
What is considered a Competency-Based Program?

- **Untethered** from course material and credit hour, learners demonstrate competencies, particularly mastery, at their own pace, typically online, and progress through academic programs when they are ready to do so (*Book, 2014*).

- An academic degree program in which learners accumulate a series of competencies that are documented, **proceeding at their own pace** rather than through successful completion of scheduled courses and accumulation of credit hours (*Quality Matters*).

- A program that is **outcome-based** and assesses a student's **attainment of competencies** as the sole means of determining whether the student earns a degree or a credential (*SACSCOC*).

What is considered a Competency-Based Program?

- In general, a CBE program is one that organizes content according to what a student knows and can do, often referred to as a "competency." (*USDOE, 2015*)

- Federal definition refers to two different CBE program types:
  - **Clock or Credit Hour Equivalencies**: Must ensure that each credit hour requires sufficient educational activity to fulfill the Federal definition of a credit hour.
  - **Direct Assessment**: Student progress measured solely by assessing whether the student can demonstrate that he or she has a command of a specific subject, content area, or skill, or can demonstrate a specific quality associated with the subject matter of the program; does not specify the level of educational activity in which a student is expected to engage in order to complete the program; must provide students with sufficient educational resources, including substantive interaction with instructors, for students to develop each competency required for completion.
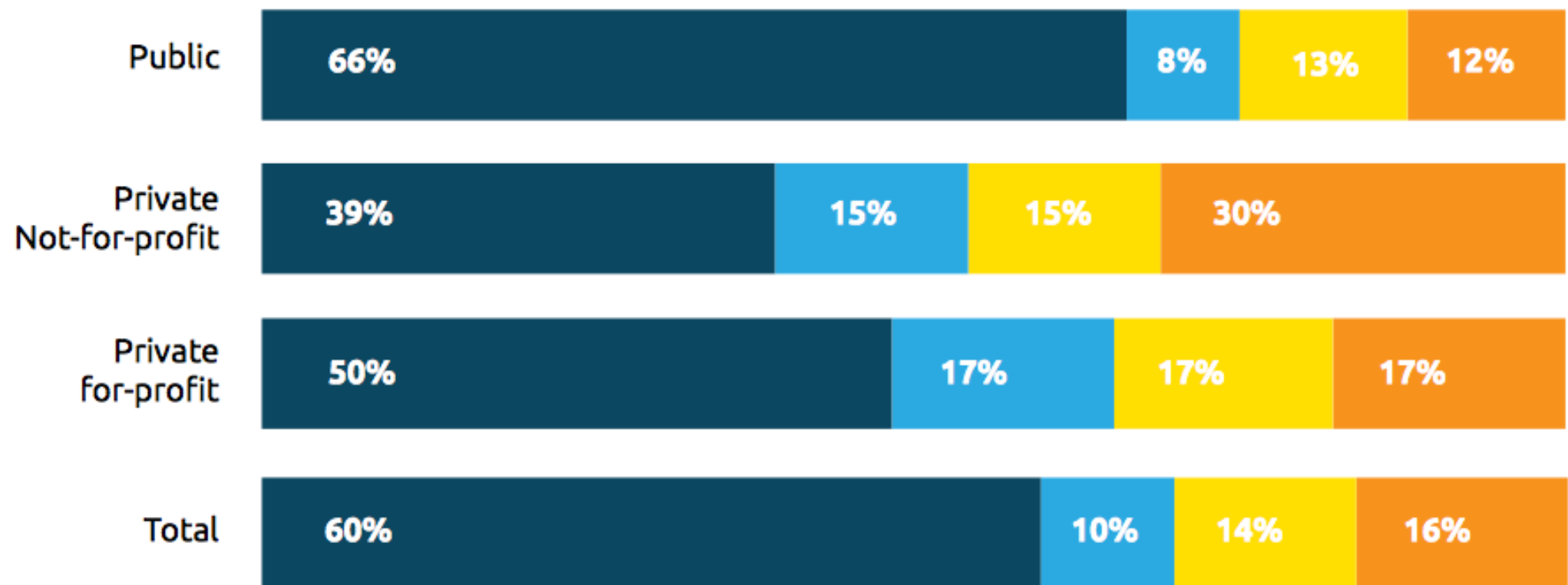
Who is doing it?

- "Roughly **600 colleges are in the design phase** for a new competency-based education program, are actively creating one or already have a program in place. That's up from an estimated 52 institutions last year" (*Fain, 2015*).

- C-BEN (2014) cohort of 19 institutions was expanded with a second cohort to **30 institutions and 4 large public university systems representing 82 campuses to have active CBE programs** (*Cleary, 2015; Kelchen, 2015*).

- **6 colleges have direct assessment programs** approved by both the USDOE and a regional accreditor.

- **Lipscomb University was the first SACS institution** to submit an application for a competency-based program. SACS gave Lipscomb's program a green light a year ago.

- Additional institutions in the SACS's region have submitted applications. One, **Texas State Technical College at Harlingen, is seeking to create a direct-assessment track** (*Fain 2014*).

PLANNING
(designing and discussing our model)
64%

11% — **START-UP**
(approved by the administration and beginning to recruit and enroll students)

14% **IMPLEMENTATION**
(enrolling and educating students)

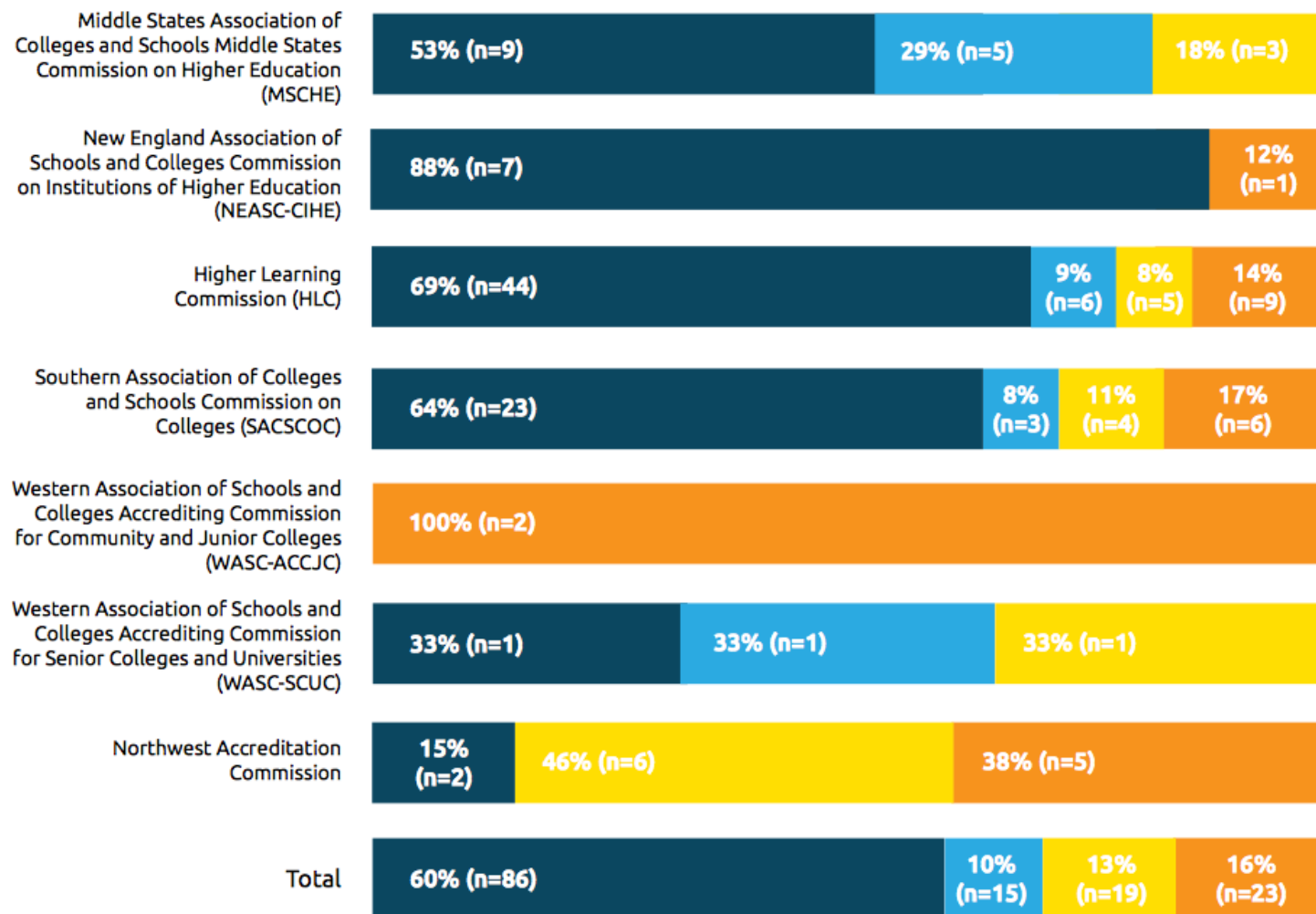**17%** **SCALE-UP**
(growing or replicating the program)

The *Survey of the Shared Design Elements & Emerging Practices of Competency-Based Education Programs* took place from July 8, 2015, to August 7, 2015. It was administered to 754 individuals representing 586 programs. The survey response rate was 24%, with 324 individuals starting the survey and 179 individuals completing the survey. The survey was administered to only individuals known to be designing or delivering a CBE program.

	Planning	Start-up	Implementation	Scale-up
Public	66%	8%	13%	12%
Private Not-for-profit	39%	15%	15%	30%
Private for-profit	50%	17%	17%	17%
Total	60%	10%	14%	16%

KEY

■ Planning (e.g., designing and discussing our model)

■ Start-up (e.g., approved by the administration and beginning to recruit and enroll students)

■ Implementation (e.g., enrolling and educating students)

■ Scale-up (e.g., growing or replicating the program)

Accreditor	Planning	Start-up	Implementation	Scale-up
Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)	53% (n=9)	29% (n=5)	18% (n=3)	
New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE)	88% (n=7)			12% (n=1)
Higher Learning Commission (HLC)	69% (n=44)	9% (n=6)	8% (n=5)	14% (n=9)
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)	64% (n=23)	8% (n=3)	11% (n=4)	17% (n=6)
Western Association of Schools and Colleges Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (WASC-ACCJC)				100% (n=2)
Western Association of Schools and Colleges Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (WASC-SCUC)	33% (n=1)	33% (n=1)	33% (n=1)	
Northwest Accreditation Commission	15% (n=2)		46% (n=6)	38% (n=5)
Total	60% (n=86)	10% (n=15)	13% (n=19)	16% (n=23)

KEY

■ Planning (e.g., designing and discussing our model)

■ Start-up (e.g., approved by the administration and beginning to recruit and enroll students)

■ Implementation (e.g., enrolling and educating students)

■ Scale-up (e.g., growing or replicating the program)

What are some general characteristics?

- Learner-centered
- Focus on learning versus time (in-person, online or both)
- Flexible pace (self-directed)
- Adaptable
- Connection to real world challenges
  - Authentic assessments
  - Professional partnerships
- Alignment between valid, explicit outcomes and assessments
- Changing role of faculty

What are faculty roles and responsibilities?

- Curriculum (design)
- Instruction (deliver)
- Coaching, advising, and/or mentoring
- Assessment

How are these programs being structured?

Federal Experimental Sites Initiative (ESI):

- **Prior Learning Assessment**-Provides that a student's title IV cost of attendance (COA) can include costs incurred by the student for assessments of prior learning and that a student's Federal Pell Grant enrollment status may, with limitations, take into account a student's efforts to prepare materials for a prior learning assessment.

- **Competency-Based Education**-Provides flexibility in how institutions provide Federal student aid to students enrolled in self-paced competency-based education programs.
  - programs that charge a flat fee for a period of time rather than charging by course or by competency (**subscription period model**)

- **Limited Direct Assessment**-Provides flexibility for an institution to provide a mix of direct assessment coursework and credit or clock hour coursework in the same program.

- **Direct Assessment**- 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.
  - Examples of direct measures include projects, papers, examinations, presentations, performances, and portfolios.
  - 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 requirements.

Cost Structures of Portfolio and Prior Learning Assessment Programs

Name	Maximum Portfolio/ PLA Credits	Per-Credit Cost (Traditional)	Portfolio Assessment Costs	Potential Savings from Portfolio/PLA (Excluding One-Time Fees)
Charter Oak State College	No limit	$263 per credit (CT resident) $346 per credit (nonresident)	3-credit portfolio writing class plus $320 assessment fee for 3 credits	$569 for 3 credits (in-state) $718 for 3 credits (out-of-state)
Colorado State University-Global	24	$350 per credit	1-credit portfolio writing class, $150 assessment fee for 3 credits	$900 for 3 credits
Empire State College	96	$257 per credit (NY resident up to 11 credits) $360 per credit (nonresident)	$315 initial fee plus $350 for first 8 credits requested and $300 for each additional 8 credits (up to $1,550)	$558.50 for 3 credits (in-state), $967.50 for 3 credits (out-of-state)
Excelsior College	No limit	$465 per credit	3-credit portfolio writing class plus $125 assessment fee for 3 credits	$1,270 for 3 credits
Granite State College	60	$285 per credit (NH resident) $315 per credit (nonresident)	$275 for first year after admission, $275 per 3 credits after that	$580 for 3 credits (in-state) $670 for 3 credits (out-of-state)
Ivy Tech Community College	45	$126.15 per credit (IN resident) $154.50 per credit (online)	$50 assessment fee for 3 credits	$328.45 for 3 credits (in-state) $413.50 for 3 credits (online)
Lipscomb University	30	$499 per credit	$1,500 assessment fee	$1,503 for 6 credits max of $13,470 for 30 credits
Marylhurst University	45	$451 per credit	1-credit portfolio workshop ($100), 6+ credit seminar, $515 portfolio evaluation fee per semester	$3,093 for 8 credits (minimum submission) $6,250 for 15 credits (recommended max)
Rio Salado College	30	$84 per credit (AZ resident) $215 per credit (online)	3-credit instructor-led portfolio workshop ($895 with 1 portfolio review) or 0-credit DIY workshop ($149), $125 assessment fee for 3 credits	$127 for 3 credits (in-state) $520 for 3 credits (online)

Kelchen, 2015

Lipscomb University – Hybrid Approach

- College of Professional Studies (launched December 2013)
  - 24 credits worth of competencies (15) embedded in the curriculum (NOT SELF-PACED)
  - Applied to 22 adult-focused bachelor degree programs including accounting, social work, psychology, and IT
- Each degree requires 126 credits
  - Up to 30 through CBE assessment
  - Up to 94 previously earned credits (63 from 2-year institutions)
  - Last 30 through coursework at the university
- $1,500 PLA – 8 hours with small group of students and 3 faculty assessors
  - Up to 30 credits
  - 3 credits for the assessment itself
  - Group projects, mock job assignments, presentations, etc.
- Also issues digital badges for achievements in e-portfolios

Texas Affordable Baccalaureate Program

- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, South Texas College and Texas A&M University-Commerce:

- Flat-rate tuition model: $750 each 7-week period of enrollment

- Blended Model
  - First 90 credit hours required for the degree through self-paced online competency- based modules (42 semester credit hours in general core curriculum and 48 semester credit hours in lower division electives)
  - Maximum 75% of degree requirements can be met through combination of transfer and PLA credits
  - Last 30 credit hours (upper division, applied) offered in either a hybrid or online format

Brandman University – Direct Assessment

- Bachelor of Business Administration (launched October 2014)
- To be admitted, student must complete a 3-week introductory model
- Mobile and iPad-ready program
- $5,400 yearly tuition includes all textbooks and course materials
- Student progress as quickly as they wish
  - Competencies are bundled with very intentional learning strategy
  - Must complete one set before moving on to the next bundle
- To complete, must demonstrate 56-59 competencies
  - 13 general education, 34 business, 9-12 in area of emphasis
- Assessments are currently 60% performance-based, 40% objective
- Unbundled faculty model

University of Michigan – Direct Assessment

- Master of Health Professions Education (2014)
- 12 competencies across 5 domains
  - Entrustable Professional Activities – self-contained activity typical in profession
  - Each EPA is associated with one credit with appropriate documentation
  - Papers, video presentations, grant applications, portfolios, etc.
  - Minimum 32/maximum 39 credits and mapping to each competency at least twice
- Tuition paid in 6 equal installments (completion in three years)
- No classes or courses in traditional sense – key unit of learning is the professional activity (resembles independent study)

What are the regulatory guidelines?

- Federal
  - "The Department relies in part on institutions and accrediting agencies to determine whether a program constitutes CBE. Therefore, in order for an institution to participate in this experiment, one or more of its programs must be approved, recognized, or designated as a CBE program by the institution's accrediting agency." (USDOE, 2015)
- Regional accreditation
  - June 2015 – Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions released a joint statement outlining criteria that will use to define and approve CBE programs.
- State (authorization/legislation)
- Institutional

Academic Year and Instructional Time

- Semester- based or trimester-based CBE program under the experiment
  - minimum of 24 semester hours
  - minimum of 36 quarter hours

- Direct assessment program using credit hour equivalencies
  - includes competencies equivalent to an amount of learning associated with a minimum of 24 semester hours or 36 quarter hours **and** at least 30 weeks of instructional time

- Direct assessment program using clock hour equivalencies
  - includes competencies equivalent to an amount of learning associated with a minimum of 900 clock hours **and** at least 26 weeks of instructional time

- Institutional policy must establish clock or credit hour equivalencies

Instruction, Activities and Interaction

- For institutions providing CBE programs under the CBE Experiment, there are two important considerations regarding the "regular and substantive interaction" requirements:
  - ▶ Students must have **access to qualified faculty**.
    - Appropriate **academic credentials and experience** in the applicable knowledge domain
    - Learning coaches, online tutoring, and other support can be offered and used (and **may even account for the majority of student support**)
  - ▶ Programs must be designed to ensure **regular** and **substantive** interaction between students and those faculty members.
    - Regular – means **periodic, predictable** and built into program design; can be event driven
    - Substantive – **relevant to the academic subject matter** in which the student is engaged; may include direct instruction, feedback on assessments, etc.
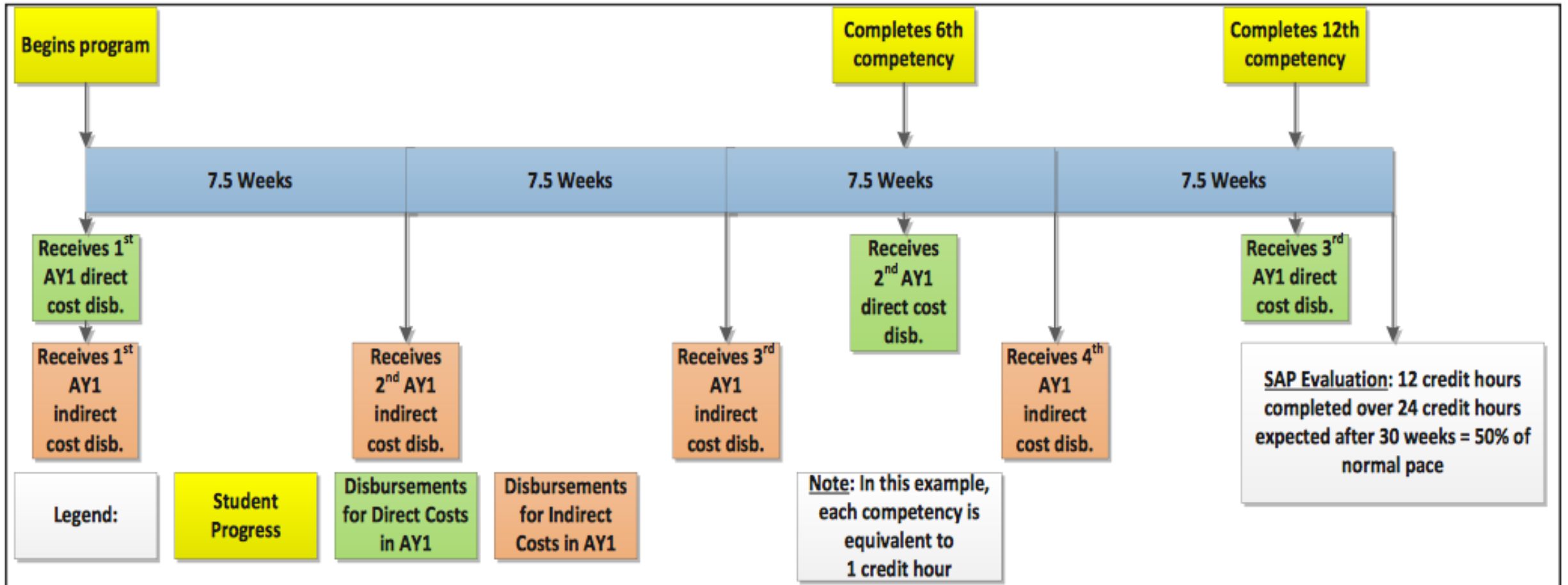
Instruction, Activities and Interaction

- For all CBE programs, including direct assessment programs, educational activity includes (but is not limited to):
  - ▶ Participating in regularly scheduled learning sessions (where there is an opportunity for direct interaction between the student and the faculty member);
  - ▶ Submitting an academic assignment;
  - ▶ Taking an exam, an interactive tutorial, or computer-assisted instruction;
  - ▶ Attending a study group that is assigned by the institution;
  - ▶ Participating in an online discussion about academic matters;
  - ▶ Consultations with a faculty mentor to discuss academic course content; and
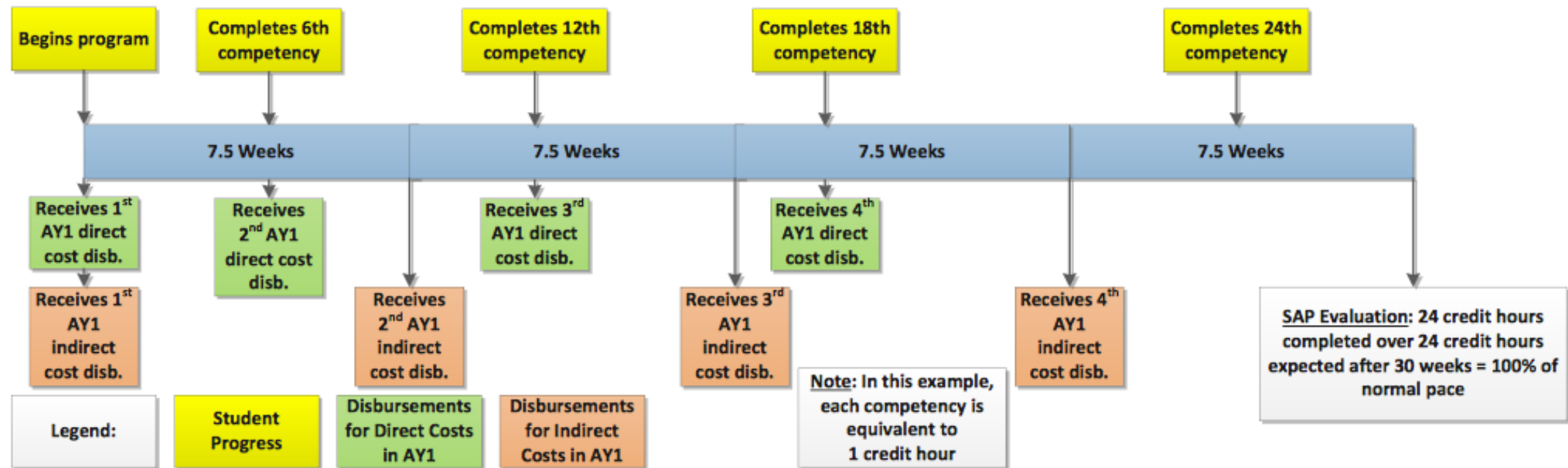 - ▶ Participation in faculty-guided independent study (as defined in 34 CFR 668.10(a)(3)(iii)).

For direct assessment programs only, educational activity also includes development of an academic action plan developed in consultation with a qualified faculty member that addresses competencies identified by the institution.

Satisfactory Academic Progress

STOP. Student is not making SAP. Therefore, no further disbursements can be made unless student files an appeal according to institution's SAP policy.

Begins program

Completes 6th competency

Completes 12th competency

7.5 Weeks | 7.5 Weeks | 7.5 Weeks | 7.5 Weeks

Receives 1st AY1 direct cost disb.

Receives 2nd AY1 direct cost disb.

Receives 3rd AY1 direct cost disb.

Receives 1st AY1 indirect cost disb.

Receives 2nd AY1 indirect cost disb.

Receives 3rd AY1 indirect cost disb.

Receives 4th AY1 indirect cost disb.

SAP Evaluation: 12 credit hours completed over 24 credit hours expected after 30 weeks = 50% of normal pace

Legend:

Student Progress

Disbursements for Direct Costs in AY1

Disbursements for Indirect Costs in AY1

Note: In this example, each competency is equivalent to 1 credit hour

Satisfactory Academic Progress

What are some potential issues?

- Business Models
- Validity of Assessments (PLA/Direct)
- Quality Assurance/Accreditation
- Transferability of Credits
- Financial Aid
- Faculty Roles/Engagement
- Student Services and Support
- Scaling/Supporting Technologies
- Liberal Education

What are the potential benefits?

- Personalized

- Flexible

- Affordability

- Efficiency

- Persistence

- Retention

"Competency-based education is about providing an alternative way for millions of adult learners to get through the system and earn their credentials."

Holly Morris, Director of Postsecondary Model Development and Adoption, EDUCAUSE

(Slaton, 2014)

Who is the potential audience?

"I know this may sound silly, I just want to graduate from Auburn, a degree in any study that would work with distance learning. My background is Law Enforcement (retired), & I am also a veteran. Graduating would not benefit me professionally, its more of a "bucket list" type thing. Cost is a big concern, probably the one thing that might change my mind. It really depends on what is available that meets my need. I do have interest in agriculture, lawn & garden type stuff. Its one of those things that if I at least didn't try, I might regret over time. I will look over the undergraduate programs. Thanks for your help."

"I am a older (61) who has always wanted to attend Auburn, my Dad attended Auburn in 1947. However due to military service & raising a family I was not in a position to pursue higher education. I have recently seen where other Universities, such as Alabama, offer degree programs on-line for those who cannot attend the campus. Is there a similar program at Auburn? Over the years I was able to attend a local College (Northern California). I did not graduate, but came close in credit hours for a degree."

What are some related programs and policies already in place?

- AP Test and IB Credit
- Military Credit
- Study Abroad
- Internships/Practicums

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