COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION

Report of the *ad hoc* Committee, February 2017

Committee Charge and Membership

Charge:

to study whether it would recommend that Auburn University take the necessary steps to begin offering academic credit for competency-based education. ...to issue a final report that includes either a recommendation to proceed, identifying specific degree programs that would appropriately be served by a CBE option; or a recommendation not to pursue CBE at this time.

Committee Members:

Constance Relihan, APUS, Chair

Shawndra Bowers, AuburnOnline

Katie Boyd, Office of Academic Assessment

Toni Carter, RBD Library

Elaine Coleman, CVM

Tony Cook, Extension/4-H

Erica D. Kierce, Nursing

Jimmy Lawrence, HCOB

Margaret Marshall, Office of University Writing

Donald Mulvaney, Agriculture

Kelley M Noll, Nursing

What is CBE?

- **Outcomes- or Performance-based**

  Student success is measured by mastery of individual learning outcomes, not by completion of a Carnegie-unit based course

- **Personalized and Adaptive**

  Because student learning is based upon mastery of individual outcomes, a program can be tailored to the specific needs of each student

- **Formal Definitions in flux**

  Definitions and strategies for assessing CBE programs are not fixed

CBE Models

- **Direct Assessment**

  Completion of the program is based entirely upon mastery of individual learning outcomes. It is self-paced.

- **Blended Approach**

  Competencies used as gateway to assess credit for prior learning (PLA) and determine starting point. Traditional course structures used for additional credit/program completion.

- **Carnegie-Hour Based**

  Operate as traditional programs, but competency mastery is incorporated into course structures.

- **Digital Badges & Microcredentials**

  Online record of achievement. Usually distinct from credit-bearing activities.

(See EAB, 2014)

Pros and Cons

Pros

- Flexible

- Financial savings for the right student

- Online delivery extends campus reach

- Possible links to employer/industry needs

- "Unbundling" of faculty roles may lead to cost savings and increased focused expertise

Cons

- Infrastructure needs/costs

- Substantial faculty commitment in curriculum development

- Regulatory issues—SACSCOC & DOE

- Potential overloading of academic resource capacity

- Staffing—"unbundling" of distinct roles may be costly and may undermine traditional faculty roles.

Recommendations

- the committee does not recommend the creation of the purest forms of CBE, which would require institutional-level support and have a mostly negative impact on existing university units such as the Registrar, the Miller Writing Center, and academic support units;

- CBE in its purest form would create complications for institutional accreditation and student financial aid eligibility with little evidence of improvement in student success or financial benefits.

- The committee also found no demonstrated interest in or need for such programs on the Auburn University campus.

(See *Report*, p. 2)

But…

- ■ The committee was more neutral, however, about CBE-type teaching strategies or hybrid programs that might be developed by programs interested in pursuing them.

- ■ Hybrid versions of CBE, including credit by exam or other Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) programs, also carry with them costs and consequences that should be carefully considered before they are proposed.

- ■ Online learning or short-term instruction (like workshops) that do not result in a degree or official credit-bearing certificate may be better solutions to meet specific needs, and mechanisms for offering such limited-scope instruction are already available to departments and academic support units.

(See *Report*, p. 2)

If a Department wants to develop a CBE program, consider . . .

1. *The relationship between the proposed competency-based education and the institution's mission.*

2. *The on- and off-campus approval process.*

3. *The needs of prospective students.*

4. *Faculty control of the program.*

5. *Cost. Up-front investment will be needed.*

6. *Current developments in the field. Understanding of CBE is rapidly evolving. (Start by reading our report.)*

Questions?