HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING COMMISSION

2022 REPORT TO THE OREGON LEGISLATURE:

Oregon Revised Statute 350.125 Competency Based Education

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Office of Community Colleges and Workforce Development
Higher Education Coordinating Commission

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2017, the Oregon Legislature passed HB 3289, codified into law as ORS 350.125.[1] The legislation required the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to submit an annual report to the Legislature that describes the progress made in providing Competency-Based Education (CBE) in Oregon public post-secondary institutions of education. In 2019 the HECC reported a limited number of public post-secondary institutions in Oregon were offering CBE,[2] citing barriers related to the way in which Oregon determines state funding for community colleges and universities. The report indicated that the Community College and University Support Funds base a significant part the funding on completion of "Student Credit Hours" making it difficult for institutions to implement competency-based models that are not on completion of a specific number of student credit hours.

In 2021 ORS 350.125 was amended by the Oregon Legislature in HB 2378.[3] This revised legislation allocated general fund dollars and required the HECC to establish a competency-based education pilot program to assist Oregon public post-secondary education institutions with expanding competency-based education (CBE). The legislation also specified additional expansion by encouraging Oregon's public post-secondary education institutions to market current competency-based education programs to out-of-state individuals. In addition, the legislation required the HECC to analyze and describe public post-secondary student outcomes in current competency-based education programs and identify funding strategies for continued expansion of CBE. This report addresses the requirements of ORS 350.125 and provides policy recommendations for continued expansion of CBE in Oregon's public post-secondary education institutions.

While implementation is limited, there are elements of CBE in a few public post-secondary certificate and degree programs and Registered Apprenticeship programs. However, none of these programs are what would be considered fully competency-based, enabling students to complete a certificate or degree in an accelerated manner. The implementation of CBE in Oregon and the support for expansion is a starting point. However, there are barriers to expansion that need to be addressed, including public higher education funding models that support credit or clock hours and can limit flexibility, clear and consistent communication about CBE, and professional development to support increasing knowledge and capacity in Oregon's public higher education institutions. As CBE expands, strategies to improve student data collection should be identified and implemented along with policies for how students access and pay for CBE. Finally, it should also be noted, that in the past several years, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also slowed expansion of CBE.

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[1] Oregon Revised Statute 350.125 https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_350.125
[2] Oregon HB 3289 (2017) Report to the Oregon Legislature 10.1a AI 2019 Competency Based Education Report.pdf (oregon.gov)
[3] Oregon HB 2378 (2021) HB2378 (oregonlegislature.gov)

OVERVIEW

As specified in ORS 350.125,[4] this report defines Competency-Based Education (CBE) and provides an overview of CBE in Oregon's public post-secondary institutions and registered apprenticeship programs, barriers to expansion, student outcomes, funding strategies, and policy recommendations. CBE is defined, for the purposes of this report, as a system or systems, of instruction, assessment, grading, and academic reporting where success is defined based on students demonstrating progress towards, or competence in, specific skills.[5] In a CBE model, students advance at the speed in which they demonstrate mastery of particular skills or competencies.[6] According to the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) the CBE approach works well for adult learners, especially those who are already working in that it allows educators to unpack and rebuild courses with more flexibility for learners.[7]

NSPCBE Survey CBE elements:

- Learning measured in competencies, quantified with no reference to seat time
- Learning measured in competencies, mapped to measures of seat time
- Course-to-course advancement based on mastering all competencies
- Program completion based on mastering all competencies
- Courses or programs flexibly paced for students

PUBLIC POST-SECONDARY INSTIUTIONS

In 2021, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) reported findings from the 2020 National Survey of Postsecondary Competency-Based Education (NSPCBE),[8] an annual survey that seeks to understand national landscape of postsecondary competency-based education. AIR reported that the majority of institutions responding to the survey continue to add CBE programs while a few have decreased these offerings. While CBE continues to grow nationally, only a limited number of Oregon Public Post-Secondary Institutions of Higher Education have adopted CBE and those that have limit availability to a small number of programs or courses. These programs include the Medical Doctorate program at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU),[9] the Bachelor of Science Innovation and Leadership Program at Southern Oregon University (SOU),[10] and the Manufacturing Technology Program at Central Oregon Community College.[11] SOU has also pilot tested a CBE approach in some of their writing courses with limited student interest. Anecdotally, institutions report that progress on implementing the CBE elements of these courses was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While all these programs include CBE components, none are fully competency-based. This is similar to a

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[4] Oregon Revised Statute 350.125 https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_350.125

[5] Competency-Based Education Network, Competency-Based Education "What is Competency-Based Education?" Close-Captioned Video - C-BEN (cbenetwork.org)

[6] Western Governors University-Competency Based Education https://www.wgu.edu/about_WGU/competency-based-education#

[7] Partners in a New Learning Model: Competency Based Education and Credit for Prior Learning ED617339.pdf

[8] American Institutes for Research Findings From the 2020 National Survey of Postsecondary Competency-Based Education (2021) State-of-the-Field-Findings-from-2020-Postsecondary-CBE-Survey-July-2021.pdf (air.org)

[9] Oregon Health and Sciences University School of Medicine, MD Program MD Program | OHSU

[10] Southern Oregon University, Innovation and Leadership Program Innovation and Leadership - SOU Academic Programs

[11] Central Oregon Community College, Manufacturing Technology Program Manufacturing Technology - Central Oregon Community College - Central Oregon Community College (cocc.edu)

finding in the NSPCBE survey in which AIR notes many institutions choose to implement elements of CBE depending on context and goals.

Some programs in Oregon that offer CBE elements also include Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) assessments. This combination provides a great deal of flexibility and can enable students to accelerate progress through courses in multiple ways, recognizing skill acquisition and prior knowledge.[12] In these programs students may complete courses by demonstrating competencies, challenging courses by examination, providing evidence of an industry certification or professional license, transcription of military experience, developing a portfolio that demonstrates prior knowledge, and other forms of CPL.[13] This gives students a great deal of flexibility to meet the academic requirements to earn certificates and degrees.

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

CBE has been a recognized strategy in Registered Apprenticeship Programs for many years. In 2015 the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Apprenticeship published Guidelines for Competency-based, Hybrid, and Time-based Apprenticeship Training Approaches.[14] These guidelines specified a competency-based approach as one of three methods to measure completion of an apprenticeship. The Department of Labor guidelines describe the competency-based approach as one that measures the acquisition of skills through successful demonstration of acquired skills and knowledge. These programs still require the completion of the required on-the-job training component of a Registered Apprenticeship Program but allow an open entry and open exit design which allows apprentices to accelerate their rate of competency achievement or extend the time as needed to meet performance requirements.

To support the expansion of competency-based approaches in Registered Apprenticeship, the Department of Labor has contracted with the Urban Institute to develop Competency-Based Occupational Frameworks for Registered Apprenticeships.[15] These frameworks have been designed with input from employers, educators and other workforce and training experts. The frameworks are available for seven industry sectors and are designed to improve the quality and consistency of apprenticeship programs. Employers can use the frameworks as a starting point in developing competency-based apprenticeship programs that emphasize ability over memorized knowledge and skill acquisition over hours spent on a specific task.

The Department of Labor guidelines also specify a hybrid training approach which allows apprentices to measure skill acquisition through a combination of minimum hours of on-the-job-training and successful demonstration of identified and measured competencies. In Oregon this approach specifies in order to complete, an apprentice must attain a set of competencies within a range of hours.[16] According to the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries, there are four Registered Apprenticeship Programs that utilize this model. Each program requires a minimum number of hours, but when apprentices can demonstrate the competencies, they are able to move on to other competencies instead of being required to spend a minimum number of hours on each competency. One of these programs, the Commercial Building Energy Analyst,[17] offered through the Building Energy Controls Apprenticeship Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee,

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[12] Partners in a New Learning Model: Competency Based Education and Credit for Prior Learning ED617339.pdf
[13] Oregon Credit for Prior Learning Standards 2017-CPL-Standards-2017-Final.pdf (oregon.gov)
[14] U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, Office of Apprenticeship, Guidelines for Competency-based, Hybrid and Time-based Apprenticeship Training Approaches BULLETIN 2001- DRAFT (apprenticeship.gov)
[15] Urban Institute, Competency-Based Occupational Frameworks for Registered Apprenticeships Competency-Based Occupational Frameworks for Registered Apprenticeships | Urban Institute
[16] Start and Apprenticeship Program in Oregon Report (oregon.gov)
[17] Commercial Building Energy Analyst Apprenticeship 1178_2005.0.pdf (oregon.gov)

partners with Lane Community College for the related classroom instruction. This Registered Apprenticeship Program covers Clackamas, Lane, Multnomah, and Washington counties with the related training available online through Lane Community College. The college supports students in the program to complete their related training requirements and earn an associate degree in the Energy Management with Controls Degree.[18] The degree requires apprentices to demonstrate competencies but is not accelerated. While offered online asynchronously, some of the courses provide apprentices unique hands-on learning experiences through a field experience component. In these courses, apprentices are connected with vetted industry practitioners to conduct in person, hands on field experiences.

BARRIERS TO EXPANSION

The most significant barrier to the development and implementation of CBE in Oregon continues to be the way Oregon determines state funding for community and universities. As noted in the HECC's 2019 report to the Oregon Legislature, both the Community College and Public University Support Funds base much of their funding on completion of "Student Credit Hours."[19] Currently institutions that are offering CBE components should consider completing a crosswalk for how the CBE components map to the traditional credit hours in the course. This issue could also be taken into consideration as the community colleges and public universities consider changes in how the support funds are distributed.

Additional barriers are noted by AIR in the results of the 2020 NSPCBE survey. These include internal institution business systems and process, program start-up costs, education technology, limited on-campus expertise about CBE, and faculty perceptions of CBE.[20] Some of these barriers could be addressed with dedicated funding and professional development. As noted above, the COVID-19 Pandemic has also created a barrier to CBE implementation in Oregon.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission does not currently collect data that identifies programs or courses as competency based. That limitation coupled with small number of programs utilizing CBE in the state, does not provide sufficient student outcomes for meaningful analysis. However, nationally for institutions responding to the NSPCBE survey, CBE programs are serving more adult students (over 25) and students with prior credits.[21] In their report on the findings of the NSPCBE, AIR noted that CBE programs may save students money, depending on the pricing model and how quickly students are able to move through the competencies. However, most programs in Oregon are still using the traditional student pricing model of tuition and fees. While students may be able to complete a course or courses more quickly than the time scheduled, they still pay full tuition and fees.

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[18] AAS Energy Management with Controls, Lane Community College Energy Management - Building Controls | Science Department | Lane Community College (lanecc.edu)
[19] HB 3289 (2017) Report to the Oregon Legislature 10.1a AI 2019 Competency Based Education Report.pdf (oregon.gov)
[20] American Institutes for Research Findings From the 2020 National Survey of Postsecondary Competency-Based Education (2021) State-of-the-Field-Findings-from-2020-Postsecondary-CBE-Survey-July-2021.pdf (air.org)
[21] American Institutes for Research Findings From the 2020 National Survey of Postsecondary Competency-Based Education (2021) State-of-the-Field-Findings-from-2020-Postsecondary-CBE-Survey-July-2021.pdf (air.org)

FUNDING STRATEGIES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2021 the Oregon Legislature allocated $200,000 to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to establish a competency-based education pilot program to assist public post-secondary institutions of education in the state. The application for these funds has been released and applications will be reviewed in October 2022. The application was distributed to the community colleges and public universities in the state through a Letter of Interest process. Additional funding strategies should be considered in discussions about the state funding mechanisms for community colleges and public universities.

The expansion of Competency-Based Education (CBE) called for in ORS 350.125[22] has also been supported in recommendations from the Oregon Workforce and Talent Development Board (WTDB). In 2021 the WTDB published Equitable Prosperity for All.[23] In this whitepaper, the Board recommends establishing a grant program to develop a pilot program to fund promotion, expansion, and implementation of competency-based education programs. Citing equity gaps identified by the Lumina Foundation that could be reduced by implementing CBE programs, the Board aligned their recommendations to what was proposed and later passed by the Oregon Legislature in ORS 350.125.[24] These gaps, achievement, attainment, opportunity, and skills are outlined below.

- Achievement Gap – The achievement gap is the difference in learners' academic standing often connected to race, class, and/or gender

- Attainment Gap – Closely related to the achievement gap, this is the difference between those who earn a postsecondary credential and those who leave without completing

- Opportunity Gap – The opportunity gap is the difference in the quality and quantity of opportunities and supports available to learners, often because of who they are or where they live

- Skills Gap – The skills gap is the difference between what individuals can do and the skills they need for a role or responsibility, oftentimes in the workplace

In Equitable Prosperity for All, the WTDB also recommended creating a shared language to better communicate competency, credentialing, and other hiring requirements of critical jobs.[25] This recommendation is equally important in how higher education institutions communicate about competencies. CBE can be confused with the competencies students must demonstrate in completing career and technical education programs. While the requirements in these programs are based on competencies and skill gain, they are not necessarily accelerated, and students are still required to complete credit or clock hours specified by the institution.

As noted above, CBE and Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) can be used together to accelerate student progress toward credential attainment. However, CBE is sometimes confused with CPL. In Oregon, CPL is defined "the knowledge and skills gained through work and life experience, through military training and experience,

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[22] Oregon Revised Statute 350.125 https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_350.125
[23] Oregon Workforce and Talent Development Board – Equitable Prosperity for All (2021) Equitable-Prosperity-Task-Force-Whitepaper-June-2021.pdf (oregon.gov)
[24] Oregon Revised Statute 350.125 https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_350.125
[25] Oregon Workforce and Talent Development Board – Equitable Prosperity for All (2021) Equitable-Prosperity-Task-Force-Whitepaper-June-2021.pdf (oregon.gov)

through formal and informal education and training from institutions of higher education in the United States and in other nations."[26] While CBE can enable students to demonstrate competency in an accelerated way utilizing a variety of assessment methods, CPL supports students in earning credit for what they already know.[27] Although these methods are different, CBE and CPL can complement each other. In most cases institutions map CPL to an entire course and all the competencies in that course must be met for the student to earn the credit through CPL. Therefore, if the student has partial knowledge, they will not receive the CPL credit. However, if the institution also utilizes a CBE framework, CPL assessments can be developed to meet the requirements for specific competencies in the course and paired together, can accelerate student progress.[28]

The state funding for a pilot program as well as clear and consistent communication about CBE are a strong start in supporting the expansion of CBE in Oregon. Additional policy recommendations include providing resources for professional development in colleges and universities to help faculty and administrators better understand CBE and how it can support student progress toward academic and career goals. CBE models should also be considered as changes are discussed in both the Community College and University Support Funds to support institutions with the flexibility to implement CBE components into existing programs or establishing CBE programs. As CBE programs or program elements are expanded, policy and data collection tools will need to be developed to ensure student outcomes are captured. The way that students access and pay for CBE are also factors that need to be considered in expansion. Finally, achieving the goal of expanding CBE will also rely on champions in community colleges and universities who are willing to take on local leadership needed to convene stakeholders and change the culture to accept models that are outside of the traditional credit hour model.

CONCLUSION

There is clear evidence that CBE is a strategy that is increasingly being used nationally to accelerate post-secondary student progress toward skill gains, and certificate and degree completion. While CBE is limited in Oregon, there is support for expansion of this model and implementation of CBE elements into existing programs. Future editions of this report will focus on expansion of CBE though the pilot program funded by the legislature, discussions of changes to public post-secondary funding that could support CBE, and enhanced data collection for student outcomes as programs expand. The HECC will continue to support expansion through the pilot program, convening policy conversations, and sharing information and resources with institutions interested in CBE expansion. This work will support the effort to close achievement gaps and support HECC's Strategic Roadmap which states that "postsecondary education in Oregon and nationally must undergo fundamental transformation to heal a society riven by wealth and ideology gaps that higher education has helped to create."[29]

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[26] Oregon Revised Statute 350.110 ORS 350.110 - Coordination between Higher Education Coordinating Commission, public universities, community college districts and independent for-profit and not-for-profit institutions of higher education
[27] Partners in a New Learning Model: Competency Based Education and Credit for Prior Learning ED617339.pdf
[28] Partners in a New Learning Model: Competency Based Education and Credit for Prior Learning ED617339.pdf
[29] HECC Strategic Roadmap: https://www.oregon.gov/highered/policy-collaboration/Documents/Featured/Strategic-Roadmap-2021.pdf