Competency-Based Education in the U.S.

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January 28, 2015
Southern New Hampshire University

- Private, nonprofit
- Regionally accredited

Traditional Residential Campus (1932)
- 18-22 year-olds
- Coming of age experience

College of Online and Continuing Education (2007)
- Largest private, nonprofit online higher ed provider in New England
- 3rd largest in U.S.

College for America (2012)
- Competency-based
- Focused on workforce development

• Competency-Based Education (CBE)
• College for America (CfA) Model
• CBE as a workforce solution
COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION
What is Competency-Based Education (CBE)?

- Focuses on the demonstration of articulated skills, knowledge and abilities
- Defines learning but makes time flexible
- Is not based on credit hours or seat time (though may need to “translate’ to credit hours for administrative or regulatory purposes)
What do we mean by a “competency”?

“Can do” statement representing observable and measurable behavior Claim we would like to make about what a graduate knows and can do

• Can **negotiate** with others to resolve conflicts and **settle** disputes
• Can generate a variety of approaches to addressing a **problem**
• Can **convey** information by creating charts and graphs
• Can distinguish **fact from opinion**
• Can recognize & articulate the **ethical and moral implications** of an issue
• Can support interpretations and analyses of **literary texts** with textual evidence
• Can represent practical problems as **mathematical expressions**
COLLEGE FOR AMERICA MODEL
CURRENT STATE

- Time fixed, learning undefined
- Faculty centered
- Single faculty expert
- High cost/price
- Transcript black box
- "Big chunk" courses
- Learners come to institution

- Time variable, learning defined
- Student centered
- Robust academic support
- Drive cost out of model
- Proof of learning
- Granular competencies
- Learning comes to student
### Unbundling the traditional faculty role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Model</th>
<th>CfA</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Single faculty member</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dedicated experts</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Advises students</td>
<td>• Coach students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provides subject matter expertise</td>
<td>• Provide subject matter expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Designs curriculum</td>
<td>• Design curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Instructs students</td>
<td>• Curate instructional resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develops assessments</td>
<td>• Develop assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evaluates student work</td>
<td>• Evaluate student work</td>
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CfA Generic BA Degree

120 Core Competencies (AA) + 120 Advanced Competencies = BA

- Communication Skills
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Digital Fluency and Information Literacy
- Quantitative Skills
- Personal Effectiveness
- Teamwork and Collaboration
- Ethics and Social Responsibility
- Science, Society and Culture
- Concentration*

- Professional Communication Skills
- Creativity and Innovation
- Research Skills and Web Design
- Applied Quantitative Skills
- Cultural Competency
- Leadership
- Community and Civic Engagement
- Adv. Content Knowledge*
- Concentration*

Key:
- Foundational/Cross Cutting Skills
- Personal and Social Skills
- Content Knowledge

*Degree-specific
Project-based Learning and Assessment

Students demonstrate mastery of competencies by completing Projects: authentic, engaging activities that enable them to learn by doing

Examples:
- Curating a virtual art exhibit
- Creating a marketing plan
- Developing a budget for international travel
Professional Reviewers evaluate student work

- Trained educators with advanced degrees, subject-matter expertise and real-world experience evaluate Projects
- Students receive detailed feedback within 48 hours of submission
- Students can revise and resubmit projects until they demonstrate mastery
- Students’ work is assessed as mastered or “not yet” —there is no failure
- Every competency must be mastered to achieve degree.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rubric</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Rubric is used to evaluate your Project. Satisfying all of the Rubric criteria shows that you have mastered the relevant competencies.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>Mastery?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercials are “deconstructed” thoroughly and critically</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms are defined accurately and applied appropriately</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claims are supported with relevant, meaningful evidence</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing is clear and easy to understand</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing has no major errors in spelling or mechanics</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is expressed in student’s own words</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas are communicated effectively and persuasively</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slides are visually appealing, readable and formatted appropriately</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CfA results so far

• 1000+ students enrolled
• 92% would recommend CfA to friends and family
• 100% plan to stay enroll, graduate, or go onto BA
• 85% said study closely maps to work
• 94% rate coaches as good or very good (75%)
• 95% rate reviewers as good or very good
• 100% believe CfA is a good value
• 75 major companies signed on and more in pipeline
CfA groundbreaking accomplishments

• Nation’s first competency-based higher education program—indeed of the traditional credit hour model—approved for federal financial aid for our associate’s degree in 2013.

• Announced the approval of the first nationally available, accredited $10,000 bachelor’s degree in communications in May 2014.

• Awarded a $3.9 million “First in the World” innovation grant from the U.S. Department of Education to build student-centered solutions, based on the College for America model, to support learners in need of additional academic support in September 2014.
CBE AS WORKFORCE SOLUTION
Why do employers across the country sponsor CfA?

- Build talent and leadership
- Develop promotable skills
- Lower turnover
- Support succession planning
- Drive employee engagement
“Leading employers are equipping front-line workers with the skills necessary for not only productivity in their current role, but also for career progression over time. The following employers are expanding their use of these best practices and leading the charge in response to the President’s call to action:

Anthem, Grifols, McDonald’s, Partners HealthCare, Gap, Inc., and University of Pennsylvania Health System are working with College for America at Southern New Hampshire University to give tens of thousands of employees nationwide the opportunity to earn an associate’s or bachelor’s degree, in most cases 100 percent reimbursed by their employer. College for America helps employers access online college degree program designed to build skills that can lead to promotions.”
Why does this matter?

96%  versus  11%

Chief Academic Officers who think they’re doing a good job

Business leaders who strongly agree that graduates have the necessary skills and competencies to succeed in the workplace

Inside Higher Ed 2014 survey of chief academic officers
Gallup 2013 Survey of Business leaders
How can CBE help address this yawning gap?

Focus is on what individuals know and can do (not how long they sat in class)

- Employers “speak competency”
- Claims are explicit and supported by evidence
- Time is removed as a barrier – students can progress at their own speed
To continue the discussion

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