



AT SOUTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE UNIVERSITY

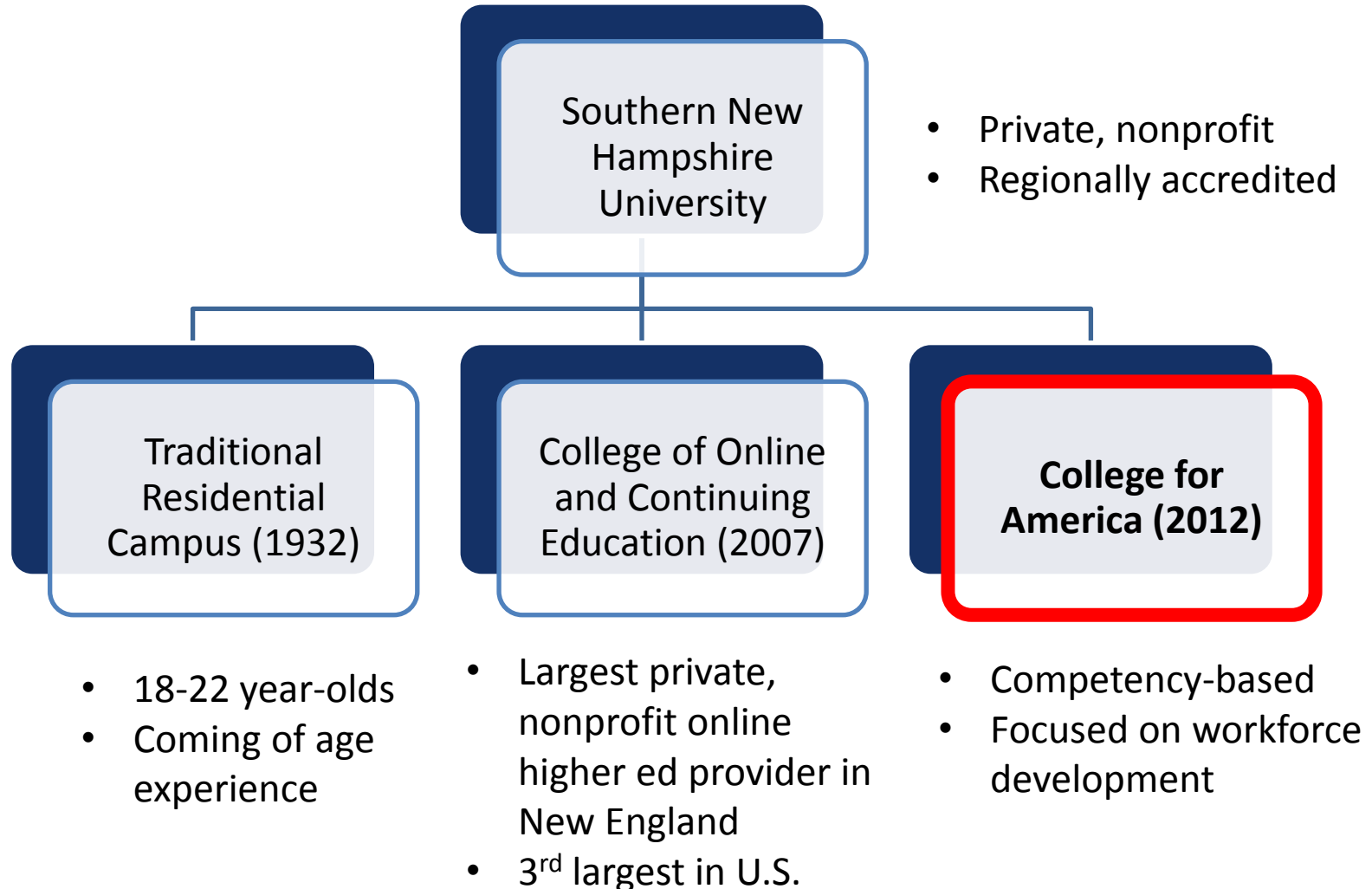
# Competency-Based Education in the U.S.

Dr. Heidi Wilkes

CfA Sr. Director for Curriculum and Assessment Development

January 28, 2015

# Part of a nonprofit, traditional university





# Outline

- 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

## Traditional Model

### Single faculty member

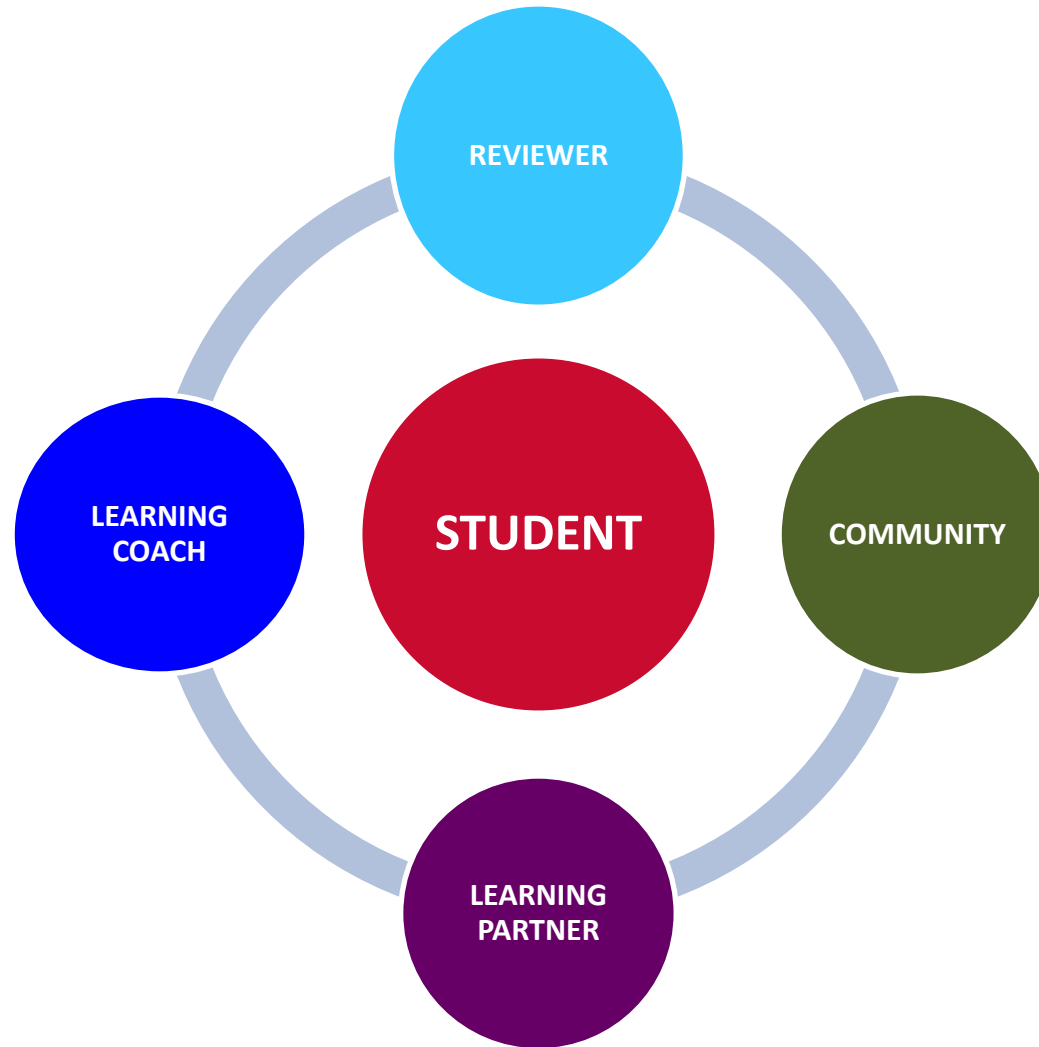
- Advises students
- Provides subject matter expertise
- Designs curriculum
- Instructs students
- Develops assessments
- Evaluates student work

## CfA

### Dedicated experts

- Coach students
- Provide subject matter expertise
- Design curriculum
- Curate instructional resources
- Develop assessments
- Evaluate student work





# CfA Generic BA Degree

## 120 Core Competencies (AA)



## + 120 Advanced Competencies



= BA

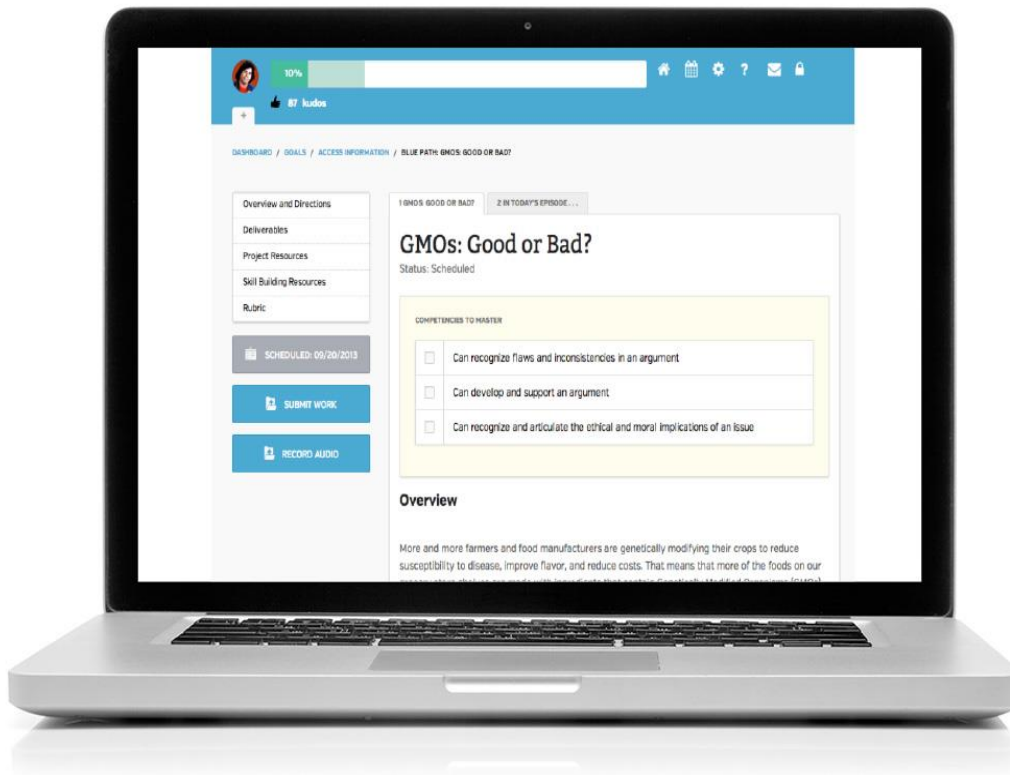
Key:



\*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

## Rubric

The Rubric is used to evaluate your Project. Satisfying all of the Rubric criteria shows that you have mastered the relevant [competencies](#).

Criteria	Mastery?
Commercials are "deconstructed" thoroughly and critically	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> Not Yet
Terms are defined accurately and applied appropriately	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> Not Yet
Claims are supported with relevant, meaningful evidence	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> Not Yet
Writing is clear and easy to understand	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> Not Yet
Writing has no major errors in spelling or mechanics	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> Not Yet
Information is expressed in student's own words	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> Not Yet
Ideas are communicated effectively and persuasively	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> Not Yet
Slides are visually appealing, readable and formatted appropriately	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> Not Yet

- 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.



# 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—independent 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



# White House SOTU Fact Sheet 1/21/15

“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

[h.wilkes@snhu.edu](mailto:h.wilkes@snhu.edu)

