
Policy on Competency Based Education

June 2020

Background

A. Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) Definition of Competency Based Education

The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC), of which ACCJC is a member of, adopted a Statement on Competency-Based Education (CBE), defining it “as an outcomes-based approach to earning a college degree or other credential.

Competencies are statements of what students can do as a result of their learning at an institution of higher education. The curriculum is structured around the specified competencies, and satisfactory academic progress is expressed as the attainment or mastery of the identified competencies. Because competencies are often anchored to external expectations, such as those of employers, to pass a competency, students must generally perform at a level considered to be very good or excellent.”¹

B. Federally Recognized Approaches to Competency Based Education

While there is no federal definition for competency based education in general, federal guidelines recognize three approaches which institutions may pursue:

- 1) Credit-based approach using credit hour or clock hour;
- 2) Direct assessment approach based on student's demonstration of competencies, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours, as a measure of student learning;²
- 3) Hybrid approach which uses a combination of credit hours or clock hours and direct assessment of student learning competencies.

C. Title IV Funding Requirements

To be eligible for Title IV funding, competency based education programs must meet federal requirements.

- 1) Credit-hour or clock-hour competency based programs can be accommodated under current Title IV funding statutory and regulatory provisions.
- 2) Institutions seeking to offer a direct assessment or a hybrid approach to their programs, must obtain ACCJC approval through the substantive change process.
- 3) Institutions must apply to the United States Secretary of Education for the first program they offer as a direct assessment or hybrid approach in order to be eligible for Title IV funding. Subsequent programs from the same institution will not require the Secretary's approval for Title IV funding.

¹ [C-RAC Statement on Competency-Based Education \(June 2015\)](#)

² 34 C.F.R. § 668.10

Policy Requirements

A. Institution Responsibility

For the purposes of complying with applicable regulatory requirements, institutions seeking to offer a direct assessment approach must establish and document a methodology to reasonably equate the direct assessment program to credit or clock hours.

B. Commission Responsibility

In order for a direct assessment program to be eligible for Title IV funds, ACCJC is required to do the following:

- 1) Evaluate the institution's offering of direct assessment program(s) based on ACCJC's standards and include the program(s) in the institution's grant of accreditation or pre-accreditation, and
- 2) Review and approve the institution's methodology for each direct assessment program's equivalence in terms of credit hours or clock hours.

Applicant institutions seeking ACCJC accreditation and offering only CBE- based programs will follow the eligibility and candidacy process, in addition to having the relevant aspects of their application reviewed by the Commission using these principles.

Adopted June 2020

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