Southeast CBE Regional Innovation Partnership
SCRIP Final Report

EXPANDING CBE COURSE CREDIT PROGRAMS:
EMERGING PRACTICES FOR ACCREDITATION

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Authored and edited by SCRIP members from the:
University System of Georgia
University System of North Carolina – General Administration
Tennessee Board of Regents
Wake Technical Community College
Miami Dade College
Sebesta Services

In collaboration with colleagues at:
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Executive Summary

Although the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) has detailed policy and procedures to be followed for Competency-Based Education (CBE) Direct Assessment programs to demonstrate compliance with accreditation requirements, little guidance exists for the acceptable design and implementation of CBE Course Credit programs since they do not constitute a substantive change as a delivery modality from other forms of educational course credit programs currently in existence. The SCRIP project and this report address that void and present SCRIP’s recommendations for “Emerging Practices in the Design and Implementation of CBE Course Credit Programs.” The SCRIP members and SACSCOC collaborators who share the authorship of this report trust that these recommended emerging practices will facilitate high-quality, expansion of CBE Course Credit Programs at accredited colleges and universities in the southern region in the future. This report is intended to address accreditation concerns of CBE faculty and program developers, academic administrators interested in CBE expansion, accreditation liaisons, peer evaluators of CBE programs for accreditation, and other stakeholders in higher education who want to know more about educational innovation involving the mastery of well-defined competencies by college and university students and graduates.

SACSCOC recognizes two forms of CBE programs. One, the CBE Course Credit model, emphasizes the mastery of well-defined competencies which are embedded in or associated with a conventional curriculum of courses, the completion of which yields earned credit hours toward the award of a specific degree or credential. Because this form of CBE is packaged and transcribed in courses that award credit hours, it is not considered by SACSCOC to be a substantive change from other existing course credit educational models such as those delivered in a traditional face-to-face mode, an online or distance learning mode, or a combination of those two modes, and which are also packaged and transcribed in courses that award credit hours. Curriculum developers are free to incorporate CBE elements that emphasize mastery of competencies, guided, individually-paced learning, and expanded learning resources into the course credit curriculum of currently authorized degree and credential programs without prior review and approval of the CBE modality by SACSCOC. Such CBE innovations are typically delivered in online courses and programs because
that instructional mode serves the objectives of CBE well. All course credit programs, including the CBE course credit model, are eligible for federal financial aid which is course and credit hour driven.

The CBE Direct Assessment model is the other form of CBE recognized by SACSCOC and the federal government. SACSCOC has published its “Direct Assessment Competency-Based Programs Policy Statement” aimed specifically at this CBE model. In CBE Direct Assessment programs, earned credit hours and credit courses are not used to determine degree or credential completion. Instead, degrees and credentials are awarded solely on the basis of the direct assessments of the student’s mastery of an identified set of competencies. Once half or more of a previously authorized degree program or credential is initially delivered through CBE Direct Assessment, it must have prior review and approval by SACSCOC as a substantive change because it is not based on earned credit hours in a course credit model. Furthermore, CBE direct assessment programs are not eligible for federal financial aid without prior approval of the U.S. Department of Education. The procedures for gaining such federal approval, which involve SACSCOC reviews in our region, are being tested presently in the Experimental Sites Initiative (ESI) for Competency-Based Education at SACSCOC member institutions. This report does not address the status of ESI or its possible implications for future revisions of SACSCOC policy on CBE Direct Assessment.

CBE Direct Assessment programs can be challenging to defend to SACSCOC and USDOE for their approvals. Preparing substantive change prospectuses and securing approvals for CBE Direct Assessment programs from SACSCOC are complex tasks that can take a year or two to complete. They typically involve a two-stage evaluation involving a prospectus review by the Commission’s Board of Trustees and a subsequent visiting Substantive Change Committee’s review of the implemented program’s compliance with accreditation requirements. Pursuing federal financial aid eligibility for such programs entails further review and approval from the U.S. Department of Education.

Presently, expansion of CBE innovations in collegiate educational programs can be accomplished more easily and quickly through the CBE Course Credit model than the CBE Direct Assessment model. There are numerous benefits to pursuing expansion of CBE Course Credit programs, and such innovations could serve as an important stepping stone toward the development and defense of CBE Direct Assessment programs in the future. This report advocates for the expansion of CBE Course Credit programs and provides guidance to facilitate such expansion in the context of SACSCOC accreditation requirements.
The Southeast CBE Regional Innovation Partnership

SCRIP Project

The Southeast CBE Regional Innovation Partnership (SCRIP) is a diverse and representative collective of competency-based education (CBE) advocates in higher education from five Southern states who formed a partnership in 2016 to examine, refine, articulate, and promote policies and procedures for the design and expansion of CBE program innovations. SCRIP members include representatives of the University System of Georgia, Tennessee Board of Regents, University System of North Carolina – General Administration, Wake Technical College, Miami Dade College and Sebesta Services. SCRIP’s current project and final report entitled, “Expanding CBE Course Credit Programs: Emerging Practices for Accreditation,” are funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. SCRIP is indebted to the Gates Foundation for their generous support of this project.

Since some forms of CBE are considered to be substantive changes that can affect institutional accreditation and eligibility for federal financial aid, SCRIP members engaged key officials of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) during this project for the purpose of clarifying federal and regional accrediting’s policies and requirements for the review and approval of institutional initiatives to implement competency-based education programs. The results of those collaborative engagements with SACSCOC officials and with others familiar with SACSCOC policies and procedures are incorporated into this report to provide important guidance to CBE faculty and program developers, institutional administrators, accreditation liaisons, and others about relevant accreditation standards, requirements, policies, guidelines, and substantive change reporting procedures. Most importantly, this collaboration has produced valuable insight into the need for explicit articulation of emerging practices for the design and implementation of CBE Course Credit programs that are consistent with SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation and related policies.

From the beginning of this project, SCRIP members were intent on exploring ways to lessen and remove the barriers to innovative CBE program development, especially with regard to securing SACSCOC approval for CBE programs. After consulting with SACSCOC officials, SCRIP members discovered that not all forms of CBE are subject to substantive change reporting, review, and approval processes, which can be challenging and complex to navigate. Clearly, seeking approval for CBE Direct Assessment programs from SACSCOC and the Department of Education is an
arduous and long process. However, SCRIP members were pleased to learn that CBE Course Credit programs are typically exempt from substantive change reporting, review, and approval processes because they share many common characteristics with other forms of existing non-CBE course credit programs. The most important of those common characteristics are a reliance on credit course completions and earned credit hours, which are the basis for Title IV financial aid eligibility.

So long as CBE Course Credit programs meet the same Principles of Accreditation and Commission policies as other non-CBE course credit programs, substantive change is not a factor. This instructive finding should dispel commonly held misconceptions about perceived barriers to CBE development if the CBE Course Credit program model is pursued. The CBE Course Credit model can free CBE advocates to expand CBE curricular innovations quickly and efficiently, without having to undergo substantive change reporting and approval processes with SACSCOC.

It should be noted that the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC, 2015) issued a statement in 2015 indicating that CBE course credit programs and CBE direct assessment programs would be expected to undergo substantive change reporting and review. However, that statement also indicated that further federal direction would be forthcoming. When SACSCOC subsequently clarified its substantive change policies pertaining to CBE consistent with federal direction, the expected reporting and review of CBE programs was restricted to the CBE Direct Assessment model, and CBE course credit programs were typically not considered to be substantive changes.

Guidance on how to design and implement CBE Course Credit programs in ways that satisfy common accreditation expectations for course credit programs is lacking, however. SACSCOC has developed and published guidance for the design of distance education, which has relevancy to CBE course credit programs that are delivered online. Those documents include the Commission’s (2000) “Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs,” first published in 2000, and the (2014) “Distance and Correspondence Education Policy Statement,” first published in 2012. SCRIP’s recommended “Emerging Practices for the Design and Implementation of CBE Course Credit Programs” fills a void in guidance relative to meeting accreditation requirements and complements these published Commission guidelines related to online course credit programs. These emerging practices for CBE Course Credit programs will be formally presented in this, the final report of the SCRIP project, at the University of North Carolina’s CBE Summit 2017 conference in Chapel Hill in May 2017.
The SCRIP team is indebted to its accreditation consultant and report editor, Dr. Ed Rugg, who provided extensive editing of this report’s preliminary draft and helped sharpen its focus on emerging practices for the expansion of CBE Course Credit programs in the context of accreditation standards. His extensive experience in SACSCOC accreditation and as a university faculty member and chief academic officer were invaluable assets for the completion of this report. In addition, the information, clarification, and feedback the SCRIP team received from SACSCOC officials, especially Dr. Kevin Sightler, Director of Substantive Change, and Dr. Larry Earvin, a SACSCOC Vice President involved in CBE program reviews, were highly instructive and much appreciated.
Definitions of Key Terms in CBE

To better understand the principal components of this report, the following definitions of key terms are offered:

**Competency:** SACSCOC policy (2016) defines a competency as “a clearly defined and measurable statement of the knowledge, skill, and ability that a student has acquired” (p.1). Competencies provide common and unambiguous instructions for what the learner must know and be able to do in order to progress. CBE program competencies draw a full picture of what the proficient and prepared graduate looks like. This means competencies cover the specialized and technical aspects of a field of work or study, along with cross-cutting abilities needed to navigate the complexity and change of the real world. In a thriving CBE program, competencies are clear, precise and easy to understand (Public Agenda, 2015).

**Competency-Based Education (CBE):** The Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC, 2015) defined CBE as an outcomes-based approach to earning a college degree or other credential in which students progress through educational programs by demonstrating specified competencies. The Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) provided a more detailed definition when it stated that CBE has come to encompass a broad spectrum of theoretical, pedagogical, and technological approaches to the design, development and deployment of higher education programs. Competency-based education combines an intentional and transparent approach to curricular design with an academic model in which the time it takes individual students to demonstrate competencies varies, but the expectations about learning (i.e., competencies) are held constant. Students acquire and demonstrate their knowledge and skills by engaging in learning exercises, activities and experiences that align with clearly defined programmatic outcomes or competencies. Students receive proactive instruction, guidance, and support from faculty and staff. Learners earn credentials by demonstrating mastery of competencies through multiple forms of assessment, often at a personalized pace (C-BEN, 2017). Competency-based models allow a learner to set and change deadlines and adjust their pace as their changing circumstances and abilities warrant. This student-driven flexibility is a key advantage of competency-based models that no other model provides. This individually controlled and variable pacing has a significant impact on the pedagogical approach to CBE. SACSCOC policy (2016) notes that a CBE program “may be organized around traditional course-based units (credit or clock hours) that students must earn to complete their educational program, or may depart from course-based units (credit or clock hours) to
rely solely on the attainment of defined competencies” (p.1). That distinction reflects the key
difference between CBE Course Credit and CBE Direct Assessment programs.

**CBE Course Credit Model:** In this curriculum model, the demonstration of competencies is
embedded into or associated with a conventional curriculum comprised of courses to be completed
to earn credit hours toward the award of a degree or credential. CBE Course Credit programs
generally enroll students in traditional academic terms and award credit hours for courses
successfully completed during each term. However, students receive credit for a course once they
have demonstrated mastery of the competencies associated with the course. In the CBE model, a
student is not obligated to complete a course in a specific time period or the same time period as
other students. Consequently, students in this model may accelerate, or extend, their learning,
competency demonstrations, and course completions at a guided, individualized pace, and the
number of courses completed and credit hours earned in a term can be much more variable from
student to student than for traditional course credit programs which are more tightly controlled by
prescribed weekly schedules of clock hours. CBE students may work on demonstrating mastery of
the competencies for several courses simultaneously, or the mastery of competencies sequentially
in a laddered curriculum, or both. Typically, no single pathway to learning is prescribed by the
instructor of record in this model as is more often the case in a traditional course. Instead, a variety
of different pathways to achieving competency mastery may be pursued by students and proactively
facilitated by the instructor on an individualized basis. What distinguishes the CBE Course Credit
model most from the CBE Direct Assessment model is the former's tight alignment of demonstrated
competencies with completed and transcribed courses and earned credit hours, which are the
commonly recognized units of learning at accredited institutions and considered acceptable for Title
IV funding of federal financial aid for students.

**CBE Direct Assessment Model:** This curriculum model shares many of the same self-paced,
competency mastery characteristics of the CBE Course Credit model, except that the demonstration
of defined competencies stands alone and is not embedded in conventional courses or earned credit
hours toward degree completion. This is an educational program that utilizes direct assessment of
student learning in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning. It relies
solely on the attainment of defined competencies and may recognize the direct assessment of
student learning by others. For Title IV eligibility, the institution must obtain approval for the CBE
Direct Assessment program from the Secretary of Education under 34 CFR 668.10(g) or (h) as
applicable. As part of that approval, the accrediting agency must: (1) Evaluate the program(s) and
include them in the institution's grant of accreditation or pre-accreditation; and (2) Review and
approve the institution’s claim of each direct assessment program’s equivalence in terms of credit or clock hours (USDOE, 2017).

**Hybrid CBE Direct Assessment Model:** The SACSCOC direct assessment policy (2016) references a hybrid CBE direct assessment model. The hybrid CBE program combines course-based competencies that are embedded in or associated with awarded course credits and credit hours with direct assessments of competencies that are not associated with awarded course credits or credit hours. This report treats such programs as a subset of the CBE Direct Assessment model as does SACSCOC policy, and assumes that the same substantive change obligations apply whenever the thresholds are crossed of the hybrid program’s reliance on CBE Direct Assessment at the 25% and 50+% levels.

**Traditional Course Credit Model:** The traditional curriculum of collegiate educational programs is composed of a prescribed set of courses which have assigned credit hour values (typically 3-4 semester credit hours each) in which students are expected to have a minimum of one hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately 15 weeks per semester credit hour earned. An equivalent minimum amount of student work is expected if the course is configured as another form of academic activity such as a lab, internship, practicum, studio, etc., or is offered in an alternate delivery mode other than a semester “lecture” mode (e.g., shortened term, hybrid model for class meetings, totally online, etc.) In this traditional non-CBE model, the amount of student work expended over time is emphasized more than the achievement of specific student learning outcomes or the mastery of defined competencies. Students are often graded on a normative basis in reference to each other’s performance instead of evaluated on an individualized competency mastery basis as in CBE. Such traditional courses typically follow a uniform pace set by the instructor for all students to progress and complete the course at the same time. The traditional course credit model follows federal regulations that define a credit hour as outlined in SACSCOC policy (2012).

**Clock Hour:** This term is synonymous with credit hour, the definition of which is provided above under the Traditional Course Credit Model. The federal and SACSCOC definitions of credit hour rely heavily on the amount of time that a student devotes each week or semester to a course of study, both inside and outside the classroom, expressed in hours.

**Mastery of Competency:** To be “competent” by common definition is to be well-qualified, capable, fit, sufficient, adequate, or able. To be a “master” or perform a competency at the level of “mastery” is to be highly or greatly skilled, very knowledgeable, or an expert. Rigorous CBE programs aspire to
have students and graduates perform in their competency assessments at high levels of competence or mastery. C-RAC (2015) observed that competencies which are anchored to employer expectations generally require students to demonstrate those competencies at a very good or excellent level—i.e., at the mastery level.

**Terms Not Considered to Be Synonymous with CBE:**

**Credit from Prior Learning Assessment (PLA):** PLA and CBE are not synonymous. PLA refers to learning that occurred prior to a student’s initial enrollment in the institution’s educational program. Learning associated with a CBE program refers to competency gains achieved while in the institution’s CBE program. An institution may not include for Title IV purposes learning or mastery of competencies that occurred prior to enrollment in a CBE program or from tests of learning that are not associated with substantial educational activities overseen by the institution.

**Correspondence Courses:** CBE credit courses are not correspondence courses. SACSCOC (2014) defines correspondence education as "a formal educational process under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student; courses are typically self-paced" (p.1). In CBE credit courses the student progresses at a guided, individualized pace, the academically qualified instructor of record and other student support personnel are regularly and actively engaged with the student, at their initiative as well as the student’s, and a broader array of instructional materials and learning resources are available to facilitate learning and competency achievement.
Do all CBE programs require substantive change reporting to SACSCOC? The SCRIP members have learned from SACSCOC staff that the answer to that question is, “NO!”

The good news for CBE program developers is that they have a relatively wide range of innovative CBE adaptations to course credit programs that can be implemented without triggering the need for a substantive change notification, prospectus review and approval, or visiting committee review involving SACSCOC. Unless the degree program in question is new and substantively different from others at the institution or relies heavily (at least 50%) on the use of CBE Direct Assessment as defined by the U.S. Department of Education and SACSCOC Policy on “Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs” (2016), there are virtually no substantive change expectations for the development and deployment of credit hour programs that incorporate CBE elements of educational delivery. However, the SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation (2011), as well as the related SACSCOC Policy Statements and Guidelines, apply to all educational programs of an institution, including those that fall into the CBE Course Credit or CBE Direct Assessment categories, without exception.

CBE Course Credit programs are not considered to be substantive changes since they typically represent another acceptable variation on how an institution awards its credit hours, course credits, and degrees. Furthermore, most CBE Course Credit programs are offered online, which is a delivery mode that readily supports guided, individual learning paces. Institutions with blanket approval from SACSCOC to expand their online program delivery within the course credit model may do so for CBE Course Credit programs without being concerned about reporting such expansion as a substantive change. So long as CBE elements of a course credit program are linked and aligned with an institution’s policies on acceptable use of credit hours and the use of course credits for degree completion, CBE Course Credit programs are not regarded as substantive changes from other existing forms of course credit programs at the institution. Again, all of an institution’s course credit educational programs are expected to operate in compliance with the SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation (2011), as well as the related SACSCOC Policy Statements and Guidelines, especially those on Credit Hours (2012), Distance Education (2014), and Faculty Credentials (2006).

CBE Direct Assessment programs, on the other hand, do constitute a substantive change, because they may not be explicitly aligned with the institution’s existing awards of credit hours or course
credits for degree or credential completion, relying instead solely on assessed mastery of defined competencies for the award of degrees or other credentials. The direct assessment of competencies is a substantive change from the use of earned credit hours to define student learning for degree or credential completion. Consequently, the current SACSCOC Policy Statement on “Substantive Change for SACSCOC Accredited Institutions” (2016) includes in its list of defined substantive changes, “initiating a direct assessment competency-based program” (p. 7).

That specific reference to CBE Direct Assessment programs as a substantive change directs the reader to another SACSCOC Policy Statement, “Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs” (2016). That nine-page policy statement on CBE Direct Assessment programs provides extensive detail on substantive change reporting and institutional compliance obligations for such programs. It states that once an institution begins to offer 25% of a degree program or credential through CBE direct assessment, it must notify the SACSCOC President in writing. It also states that SACSCOC approval is required before an institution initiates a degree program or credential in which 50-100% of the program relies on CBE Direct Assessment.

Such approval requires written notice of the SACSCOC President six months in advance of program initiation, submission of a substantive change prospectus, and review and approval of that prospectus by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees. Upon approval, a substantive change committee visit will typically be authorized to confirm continuing institutional compliance with SACSCOC accreditation requirements and policies once the program is operational (pp.5-6). That substantive change reporting and approval process for CBE Direct Assessment is only expected to be done once. If successful, it allows further expansion of CBE Direct Assessment programs without further substantive change reporting or approval, so long as the subsequent programs in question do not represent a significant departure from existing programs. It is also important to note that current federal government concerns about the application of Title IV funds for student aid in CBE programs, and the ongoing Experimental Sites Initiative for CBE are focused principally on CBE Direct Assessment programs since they do not align with commonly accepted and aid-eligible credit hours and course credits for the award of degrees and credentials.
CBE Direct Assessment is

Challenging to Defend to SACSCOC and USDOE

Preparing substantive change prospectuses and securing approvals for CBE Direct Assessment programs are complex and arduous tasks as the excerpts cited below from the SACSCOC Policy Statement, “Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs,” suggest. Furthermore, once such approvals are gained, pursuing federal financial aid eligibility for CBE Direct Assessment programs entails additional review and approval by the U.S. Department of Education. SACSCOC has a central role in that federal review as well, and will soon be completing its second year of engagement with the Experimental Sites Initiative (ESI) for Competency-Based Education. At the conclusion of the ESI, additional SACSCOC guidance and policy revisions can probably be expected affecting CBE Direct Assessment programs. In the near term, CBE program developers are likely to find easier and quicker routes for pursuing the advancement of CBE if they make use of a CBE Course Credit model rather than a CBE Direct Assessment model when designing and implementing their programs. CBE Course Credit programs can serve as an important stepping stone toward the development of Title IV-eligible CBE Direct Assessment programs in the future. They also can serve as a useful crosswalk for demonstrating comparability of degrees and credentials earned through CBE course credits compared to those same degrees and credentials earned through CBE Direct Assessment.

Verbatim Compliance Excerpts from SACSCOC Policy on Direct Assessment CBE Programs (2016, pp. 2-5)

Institutional Obligations. The Commission’s requirements, policies, processes, and procedures are predicated on the expectation that an institution operates with integrity in all matters, including the maintenance of academic quality in the establishment of direct assessment competency-based educational programs. An institution is responsible for the academic quality of any credit or clock hour unit or any competency-based unit recorded on the institution’s transcript, whether applied to a direct assessment or a hybrid program. In determining whether to approve a direct assessment or hybrid program, the Commission expects that the institution will comply with the following practices and procedures: (1) adhere to initial obligations and an expected framework; (2) ensure compliance with appropriate SACSCOC requirements and standards outlined in the Principles for Accreditation and with Commission policy; and (3) follow procedures for the notification and approval of the substantive change.
1. Adherence to Initial Obligations and an Expected Framework

Report the initiation of direct assessment and hybrid programs. The institution has an obligation to notify the Commission and seek approval for the offering of such programs. Once approved, the direct assessment and hybrid programs will be included in the institution’s award of accreditation. To secure federal financial aid, the institution must also seek approval from the U.S. Department of Education—only if the entire program is a direct assessment competency-based program.

Identify institutional contributions. The institution offering the direct assessment is able to identify and articulate the educational contribution it provides to students in this program. Such contribution may take the form of modules, engagement with faculty, exercises, assessment of student learning or other activities that either expand the student’s knowledge beyond any prior learning that the student may have demonstrated upon entry into the direct assessment or hybrid competency-based program or that assist the student in documenting how prior learning translates to the attainment of competencies required for receiving academic credit.

Ensure the integrity of accreditation and awards. Because SACSCOC accreditation that has been awarded to a member institution is not transferable—either in actuality or appearance—SACSCOC prohibits the use of its accreditation to authenticate courses, programs, or awards offered by organizations not so accredited. If the SACSCOC-accredited institution has contracted with an external organization to provide part of or the entire direct assessment program, including course materials provided to students, the institution ensures that it retains sufficient control of the development and implementation of the program. The Commission’s policies require the institution to seek approval of the contract at the same time it seeks approval to initiate a direct assessment and a hybrid program.

2. Compliance with Appropriate SACSCOC Requirements and Standards

Requirements and standards in the Principles of Accreditation which affect direct assessment and hybrid programs are listed below. They should be considered when developing contracts, completing the substantive change prospectus, and demonstrating compliance. In addition, the prospectus template for approval of this substantive change refers to Commission policies that are applicable to competency-based programs.
**Institutional Mission.** The institution has a clearly defined mission and philosophy undergirding its direct assessment and hybrid programs. It has clearly defined goals and a framework for its programs that ensure an appropriate design for quality and learning, as appropriate for higher education. (CR 2.4)

**Information to Students.** The institution provides clear information to students outlining the structure and expectations of the direct assessment and hybrid programs, tuition and fees, and academic policies that apply to students in the programs. This information is clearly communicated to students prior to their admission to the direct assessment and hybrid programs. (FR 4.6)

**Structure and Coherence of the Program.** The institution outlines the structure of the direct assessment and hybrid programs and establishes clearly defined competencies related to the program and the learning outcomes that students must attain to be awarded the credential appropriate to higher education. The program has a clearly defined beginning, middle and end, and the institution has a mechanism for monitoring student progress towards acquisition of competencies and attainment of the credential being awarded at the end of the program. In undergraduate degree programs, the institution requires the successful attainment of competencies of a general education component at the collegiate level that is a substantial part of the degree, ensures breadth of knowledge, and is based on a coherent rationale. The institution clearly defines expectations for student work and the means for assessing the learning and competencies acquired through that work. The competencies required for the program build a unified body of knowledge that is consistent with a program or career path; that is, they are not taken as merely discrete units. (CR 2.7.2, CR 2.7.3, FR 4.2, and FR 4.4)

**Student Admissions and Eligibility.** The institution has an appropriate mechanism for determining prior to admission in the direct assessment program whether a student has the capacity to complete an educational credential within the program and, therefore, is eligible to enroll in that program. Even an open admissions institution should have such a mechanism for direct assessment competency-based alternatives. (CS 3.4.3)

**Assessment of Programs and Student Learning.** The institution regularly reviews its direct assessment and hybrid programs in light of its mission in order to ensure that it identifies any areas of weakness in the programs and implements timely improvements. (CS 3.3.1.1)

The direct assessment and hybrid programs rely on a strong foundation for assessment established by the institution, with demonstrated capacity to evaluate student work at the course and program...
level in general education and in the major or concentration. At all levels, assessment supports academic improvement. The comprehensive student learning outcomes in the academic program area are reviewed regularly and reflect concepts generally agreed on by the related academic program(s). (CS 3.3.1.1, CS 3.5.1, and CS 3.5.3)

The institution has a mechanism for determining how modules and competencies in the direct assessment program are equivalent to traditional courses and credit or clock hours in a conventional course-based program, and how the modules and competencies are related to accepted expectations of academic achievement and rigor, as based on the following principles:

- Student work performed in courses/units comprising direct assessment and hybrid programs (e.g., demonstrated mastery of tasks, assignments, competencies, etc.) are equivalent to student work performed in traditional courses (e.g., successful completion of tests, assignments, projects, etc.)
- Student learning outcomes and program outcomes in direct assessment programs offered by the institution are equivalent to student learning outcomes defined by the academic program in a traditional academic program.
- The application of student learning assessments (e.g., examinations, portfolios, projects, capstone presentations, and other recognized demonstrations of mastery, etc.) in direct assessment and hybrid programs are equivalent to the outcome assessments that are used in traditional courses.

These strategies will be responsive to the complexity of learning and the accumulation and integration of knowledge expected for the educational degree or credential. (CR 2.7.1, CS 3.4.6, and FR 4.1)

Faculty. Faculty or instructors with subject matter expertise in the student’s academic program and in general education play a formative role in the competency-based student’s academic program. While qualified faculty with subject matter expertise design the competency-based program’s curriculum, this faculty or other similarly qualified faculty or instructors also regularly engage with students during the course of the program, provide expert assistance and support to students in the program, and have a meaningful role in directing and reviewing the assessment of competencies. Program faculty are well suited for this role by qualifications and experience and receive appropriate professional development and support from the institution in executing this role. While mentors or counselors may have an important role in competency-based programs in supporting or assisting
students, they do not replace faculty or instructors with subject-matter expertise. In addition, the number of mentors and counselors assigned to the competency-based program is sufficient to work with enrolled students and qualified to advise students at the college level. (CR 2.8, CS 3.4.1, CS 3.4.10, CS 3.4.11, CS 3.7.1, CS 3.7.3)

Institutional Responsibility for Awarding the Credential. The institution offering a direct assessment program is able to identify and articulate the educational contribution it provides to students in this program. Such contribution may take the form of modules, engagement with faculty, exercises, assessment of student learning or other activities that either expand the student’s knowledge beyond any prior learning that the student may have demonstrated at matriculation or that assist the student in documenting how prior learning translates to the attainment of competencies required for receiving academic credit. For an undergraduate program, the institution demonstrates its contribution to be at least 25 percent of the academic program; for a graduate program, it demonstrates a contribution of at least one-third of the direct assessment program. (CS 3.5.2 and CS 3.6.3)

Application of Academic Policies. The institution determines how its already-established academic policies in such areas as academic discipline, probation and suspension apply to students in the direct assessment program, and it makes appropriate amendments to its academic policies where appropriate. It is clear how the institution determines when a student in the program is not making sufficient progress and should be moved to a traditional course-based format to complete his or her academic program or when other disciplinary action should be taken. The institution develops policies that address SACSCOC and/or federal requirements, including credit hour definitions, transcript recording and reporting, the assessment and award of credit for prior learning, and the roles of faculty members and other educational professionals. (CS 3.4.5 and 3.4.6)

Acceptance and Awarding of Credit or a Unit of Competency. The institution demonstrates that students in the direct assessment or hybrid competency-based program are achieving at least the same outcomes and at the same academic rigor as in traditional programs and courses offered by the institution. The institution prepares and maintains a transcript for each student documenting both the competencies earned and the equivalent courses or credit hours based on expectations noted above. The transcript is prepared and updated during the course of the student’s academic program so that it is available in the event that a student transfers to another institution or drops out prior to completing the competency-based program. Such equivalencies are also available at the program level for state and federal agencies and for the Commission in their review of the program. In
addition, the transcript provides clear and sufficient information for other institutions and employers to understand the student's accomplishments. (CS 3.4.6 and FR 4.9)

The direct assessment programs provided by the institution are clearly distinguished from assessment of prior learning that may take place at the outset of the program. When students demonstrate competencies at the beginning of a program on the basis of prior learning, transcripts and other documents should make clear that these competencies are awarded as “prior-learning credit.” Once the institution has identified prior-learning credit for each student, other competencies should be awarded only after the student has completed the modules that form the program or demonstrated mastery of the competencies defined by them. (CS 3.4.4, CS 3.4.6)

Contractual Agreements. The institution provides notification to SACSCOC of agreements involving direct assessment programs, providing signed copies of agreements, and providing any other documentation or information required by SACSCOC policies and procedures for review. In addition, the member institution ensures that SACSCOC has timely access to its contracted external organization’s materials and accreditation-related activities. (CS 3.4.7)

Student Support Services and Access to Academic Resources. The institution offers student support services that appropriately guide students in these competency-based programs. In addition, the institution is prepared to assist students in a timely manner who drop out of these programs in making the transition back to a traditional course-based format so as to ensure that those students can continue to progress towards a degree or certificate. (CR 2.10 and CS 3.4.9) The institution provides and supports student and faculty access and user privileges to learning resources consistent with the competency-based academic programs. (CR 2.9)

Fees and Compliance with Title IV Funding. While the institution may charge a fee for its assessment of a student’s prior learning as well as its transcription of competencies, the institution charges tuition only for those courses, modules, components, and services that the institution contributes in the development or formation of the student or for the term in which the student is enrolled in the direct assessment program. Similarly, the institution assists students in seeking Title IV student aid funds for those courses, modules or components of the academic program that the institution contributes to the development or formation of the student. It develops policies that address the disbursement of financial aid, and tuition charges and refunds. (FR 4.3 and FR 4.7)

3. Procedures for the Notification and Approval of Direct Assessment and Hybrid Programs
Before initiating direct assessment or hybrid competency-based educational programs (degree, diploma, and certificate), an institution must seek prior approval when the programs have either of the following characteristics:

- The entire program is direct assessment and relies exclusively on measured achievement of competencies rather than student learning through credit or clock hours, or
- At least 50 percent of the competency-based program is direct assessment.

**Time of Notification** An institution offering direct assessment or hybrid competency-based educational programs must provide written notification of the change to the President of SACSCOC when it begins to offer 25 percent of a direct assessment program; that is, when a student can earn 25 percent of an educational credential (e.g., degree, diploma, certificate) based on measured achievement of competencies rather than credit or clock hours. The institution seeking approval to offer an entire program that is direct assessment or where at least 50 percent of the competency-based program is direct assessment must notify the President of SACSCOC six months in advance of the initiation of 50 percent of the educational credential based on measured achievement of competencies rather than credit or clock hours.

**Submission of a Prospectus** An institution seeking approval of a direct assessment competency-based program or a hybrid direct assessment program should complete the screening form included as Appendix B of this document. After Commission staff have reviewed the document, the institution will receive a response either asking it to complete a full prospectus for approval of the proposed program or notifying the institution that the program does not constitute either a direct assessment or hybrid direct assessment competency-based program.

If the institution is directed to complete a prospectus, it must be submitted by March 15 for consideration at the June meeting of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, or by September 1 for consideration at the December meeting of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees to allow ample time for review and approval. The institution will be provided a link to the appropriate prospectus form when it is sent the SACSCOC letter requesting a prospectus. Four copies should be submitted to the President of SACSCOC as a print document, or an electronic device (e.g., flash drive, CD or DVD). Upon receipt of the prospectus, it will be forwarded to the SACSCOC Board of Trustees for review and approval at its next scheduled meeting: June or December.

**Options of the Committees on Compliance and Reports Following Review of the Prospectus**
The Committee on Compliance and Reports, a standing committee of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees, will review the prospectus and any additional material submitted, and will take one of the following actions:

1. accept the prospectus, recommend approval of the program, and authorize a substantive change committee visit. A committee visit is required within six months after the initiation of the program,
2. defer action and seek additional information, or
3. recommend denial of approval and continue the institution's accreditation. The reason for denial of approval may have been caused by an institution's current non-compliance with a standard or policy. Consequently, denial may be accompanied by monitoring or imposition of a sanction.
SCRIP Recommends Emerging Practices for Ensuring Accreditation of CBE Course Credit Programs

Although CBE Course Credit programs are not considered to be substantive changes from other course credit forms of educational programs, there are CBE elements of those programs that warrant special consideration if we are to ensure the quality, effectiveness, and student success of those CBE programs. In the absence of guidance from SACSCOC as well as the CBE literature in that regard, the SCRIP project has generated a list of recommended emerging practices for the design and implementation of CBE Course Credit programs that take into account SASCOC accreditation concerns.

There are clear advantages to blending certain qualities of traditional course credit models with key elements of CBE to create CBE Course Credit programs. Transferability of credits and courses, eligibility for federal financial aid, ease of adaptation in existing information systems, constituent familiarity with credit hour/course credit curriculums and transcripts, and speed of program review and approval are just a few of such advantages. There are many others. The challenge is to blend some of the best features of CBE with features of contemporary versions of course credit program delivery to generate quality CBE Course Credit programs that provide effective learning experiences for college and university students. SCRIP members and collaborators trust that the following recommended list of emerging practices will facilitate the achievement of that objective and help ensure compliance with SACSCOC requirements.

Emerging Practices for the Design and Implementation of CBE Course Credit Programs

Because most CBE course credit programs will rely on online program delivery, CBE developers and accreditation liaisons are encouraged to consult SACSCOC’s “Best Practices for Electronically Offered Degree and Certificate Programs” (2000) and the Commission’s “Policy Statement on Distance and Correspondence Education” (2014) as supplements to the following recommended emerging practices for the design and implementation of competency-based education course credit programs. Although the SACSCOC Policy Statement, “Direct Assessment Competency-Based Educational Programs,” (2016) does not give much explicit attention to CBE Course Credit programs, many of the institutional obligations cited in that policy and excerpted for the previous
section of this report have applicability to CBE Course Credit programs as indicated below. Readers of the following list of emerging practices are also reminded that CBE Course Credit programs are, like all other forms of course credit program delivery, subject to compliance with the SACSCOC *Principles of Accreditation* as well as relevant Commission Policy Statements and Guidelines.

**Distinguishing CBE Course Credit Programs from CBE Direct Assessment Programs.** When referencing competency-based education programs, it is important to recognize the distinctive characteristics that exist between a CBE Course Credit model and a CBE Direct Assessment model in matters of curriculum design and implementation. The two models diverge in substantive ways, the most important being the CBE Direct Assessment model’s singular focus on assessing mastery of defined competencies that are not embedded in or associated with credit courses and do not earn credit hours or traditional grades toward degree completion. The CBE Course Credit Model also relies on assessing mastery of defined competencies, but does so in the context of completing credit courses and earning credit hours for degree completion. As far as the federal government and SACSCOC are concerned, initiating a CBE Direct Assessment program represents a substantive change from existing course credit models, but initiating a CBE Course Credit program does not constitute a substantive change because it is simply another variation of the course credit model. Some additional distinguishing characteristics between these two CBE curriculum models are referenced in more specific terms below.

**Defining Competencies for CBE Credit Courses and CBE Course Credit Programs.** The CBE Course Credit curriculum associates its identified competencies with credit courses similar to those of traditional course credit programs. At the course level, the CBE program may have one or several competencies identified for a particular course in which demonstrated mastery would yield course credit. Such competencies should be clearly defined, measurable, and inclusive statements of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that a student should master in that course component of the degree program or credential. At the end, or in the capstone course, of the degree program or credential, a number of key competencies are typically identified for assessment that reflect the cumulative knowledge, skills and abilities that a program graduate should master. Those too should be clearly defined and measurable, as well as inclusive of the competencies that internal and external stakeholders expect to see in program graduates. Competency statements are typically richer, more multidimensional, and more comprehensive than the lists of narrow and specific course objectives or student learning outcomes that are commonly found in traditional credit course syllabi or for traditional course credit programs, although all such expected outcomes are related to one another to some degree.
Justifying Credit Hour Awards in CBE Course Credit Programs. In CBE credit courses and CBE Course Credit programs, compliance with the federal definition of a credit hour and the SACSCOC policy statement on “Credit Hours” is expected since credit hours are awarded. Fortunately, those credit hour policies are flexible and permit justifications of compliance based on reasonable equivalencies of the amount of student work associated with each earned credit hour. CBE courses and programs should have no difficulty justifying the minimum amount of student work typically expended by students to master particular competencies and earn the associated credit hours for that mastery. Credit hour policies aim to ensure course and program rigor, and CBE courses and programs are typically very rigorous, with comparable learning outcomes to traditional course credit models for the same educational program.

CBE Course Credit Programs in Catalogs and Transcripts. Comparability of earned course credits and credit hours, regardless of the mode of instruction, is important to students, stakeholders, and accreditors. Course descriptions in university catalogs and course listings in student transcripts typically do not reflect identified differences between traditional and online modes of instruction for those courses, and that should also be true for CBE course credit modalities. When CBE’s emphasis on competency mastery is packaged in course titles, course descriptions, credit hours, and program completion requirements that are similar to those of traditional course credit programs, transferability of CBE course credits is facilitated for students, and stakeholders are ensured that traditional and CBE Course Credit programs are comparable. When such comparability is present, it is also easier to justify the quality and coherence of CBE Course Credit programs for meeting accreditation requirements. Having comparability of CBE credit courses with traditional credit courses is especially important for program graduates in professions requiring transcript review for licensure. It can be very challenging to map a CBE Direct Assessment program’s and transcript’s listing of mastered competencies to expected completed courses and earned credit hours required for licensure.

Accommodating Self-Paced Learning for Mastery of Competencies. In traditional course credit programs, the pace and schedule of course and program completion is rather uniform. The instructor of a traditional credit course typically sets a common schedule for progress in and completion of the course that applies to all students in the course. Students who could progress more quickly toward course completion are often held back by those who cannot or will not progress as quickly, or by other factors, including the instructor’s discretion. In CBE credit courses and CBE Course Credit programs, each student has substantial control over scheduling his or her progress toward demonstrating competency mastery and completing CBE courses. Each student also has substantial control over his or her rate of progression through the overall program. The pace in CBE models is
personalized to the student’s ability to progress, negotiated with the instructor and thus heavily individualized in that regard. The policies, procedures, and systems supporting such courses and programs should adequately accommodate and facilitate such distinctive CBE features of student control over the pace of completion. Competency mastery velocities vary widely among CBE students. Institutions have been surprised at how quickly some students progress through their CBE programs. Consequently, institutions need to have systems in place to not only deal appropriately with students who are not making satisfactory academic progress in CBE programs, but also to serve students in a timely manner who progress exceptionally quickly through these programs.

**Accommodating Mastery of Competencies.** Traditional credit courses frequently put an emphasis on one-shot, high-stakes assessments where achievement levels are often graded on a normative scale that can put greater emphasis on how each student performed relative to other students in the class, rather than on how much was learned. True mastery of a competency often requires students to practice and undergo repeated formative assessments before a summative assessment demonstrating mastery of a competency is attained. CBE credit courses and programs need to be designed to permit and facilitate such criterion-oriented, mastery-learning processes where repeated attempts to achieve mastery of a competency, sometimes through alternate learning pathways and assessments, may be needed and are appropriate for student success.

**Providing a Multitude of Relevant Learning Resources and Alternative Learning Pathways to Help Students Achieve Mastery of Competencies.** The CBE curriculum model provides students, who have different learning styles and interests, access to a wide variety of learning resources beyond the assigned textbooks, library resources, and recorded lectures of the instructor in traditional credit courses. The information technology represented by the internet and the World Wide Web is particularly useful in that regard. As a result, students in CBE credit courses may customize and pursue, under the regular guidance and direction of their academically qualified instructor of record, one or more different learning pathways toward the achievement of competency mastery. CBE credit courses need to be appropriately configured and technologically supported to facilitate access to a multitude of relevant learning resources and to accommodate the many alternate learning pathways and learning styles that can lead to student success in competency mastery.

**Appropriate Screening of CBE Program Applicants and Course Registrants.** As is often the case in asynchronous online courses and programs, students are expected to have substantial commitment and ability to be disciplined, independent, self-directed, and technology-oriented in order to successfully complete either CBE Course Credit programs or CBE Direct Assessment programs. Although CBE program instructors are expected to proactively and regularly engage and support
their students, there may be less, or different types of, direction and control over learning provided by those instructors than is the case in traditional course credit programs. Appropriate student screening mechanisms should be in place for CBE programs and courses that direct program applicants and course registrants who do not have the requisite qualities for CBE program success into other instructional models in which they would be more successful. In addition, communications with prospective students should be detailed and clear about the distinctive characteristics and expectations of CBE courses and programs compared to traditional courses and programs so that students may elect to steer themselves to other learning environment options in which they might be more likely to succeed academically.

**Policies and Procedures for Transitioning Students Out of CBE Programs.** When students in CBE programs discover that other pedagogical options such as those in traditional course credit programs might be more suitable or preferred, there should be policies and procedures in place to facilitate the transitioning of students out of a CBE program to other options as seamlessly as possible and with minimal penalties. Likewise, when the institution or a CBE program determines that a student is not making sufficient academic progress to remain in good standing, policies and procedures should be in place to transition students out of the CBE program and/or the institution. In general, transitioning students out of CBE Direct Assessment programs will be more complicated and difficult to do than transitioning students out of CBE Course Credit programs. The greater difficulty exists when mastered competencies do not map readily to credit courses. In a related matter, policies and procedures should also be clearly stated for the determination of a CBE student’s satisfactory academic progress and good standing.

**General Academic Policies and Procedures that Accommodate CBE.** The scope of revision required in all academic and administrative policies and procedures when CBE programs are first initiated should not be underestimated, especially when CBE Direct Assessment programs are offered. All general academic policies and procedures should be inclusive and specific enough to address and accommodate CBE Course Credit programs appropriately. This should be true for CBE Direct Assessment programs as well, if offered.

**Providing Regular and Substantive Interaction with Faculty.** CBE credit courses are not expected to operate like correspondence courses in which there is minimal faculty/student interaction, and when it occurs, it is usually initiated by the student. SACSCOC policy for CBE Direct Assessment programs explicitly calls for regular and substantive faculty/student interaction, initiated by faculty members who are appropriately credentialed subject matter specialists, to ensure sufficient student, course, and program oversight by well-qualified faculty. Similar expectations for regular and
Roles of Academically Qualified Faculty. CBE programs assign different roles to the instructor of record than those typically assumed by faculty teaching traditional credit courses. The instructional role of faculty in traditional credit courses typically features a major “lecture” function that is sometimes characterized as “sage on the stage.” In CBE, that function is often replaced with a subject-matter facilitator role that supports active and self-directed student learning, sometimes referenced as “guide on the side.” In addition, CBE developers often speak of unbundled or disaggregated faculty roles that separate the instructional functions that are mostly assumed by the instructor of record in traditional credit courses and assign those unbundled functions to different individuals (e.g., to an Instructional Designer, Assessment Developer, Instructor, Assessor, Mentor/Coach, Tutor, Advisor, etc.). In reality, some of those functional roles are also unbundled for traditional courses as well, but have been labeled with different terms such as common course syllabus, teaching assistant, supplemental instruction, subject-matter labs, tutors, etc.

Regardless of how the faculty roles are bundled or unbundled in course credit programs, there are fundamental characteristics of the CBE Course Credit curriculum that SACSCOC expects to see for compliance purposes. Those are that: 1) the degree program’s curriculum is developed, coordinated, assessed, and improved by subject matter specialists who have appropriate faculty credentials, consistent with SACSCOC Guidelines on “Faculty Credentials” (2006); 2) the instructor of record in credit courses has appropriate subject matter expertise and faculty credentials; 3) the institution and its appropriately qualified faculty have sufficient control over the quality, content, and delivery of all credits accepted for degree completion in compliance with SACSCOC standards and policies and directly provide at least a quarter of the credits for an undergraduate degree and at least a third of credits for a graduate degree; and 4) the subject matter experts and qualified faculty are ultimately responsible for ensuring the integrity and validity of the assessments of competency mastery.

Measurable Evidence of Competency Mastery. As with all other educational programs, CBE programs are expected to be regularly assessed as to the extent to which their expected outcomes are being achieved. Assessment results should focus on the collection of measurable evidence of the students’ mastery of identified competencies. Uses of the analysis of those assessment results to improve the expected outcomes of CBE Course Credit programs should be recorded and tracked.

Competency Mastery and Grades. CBE Direct Assessment programs often do not involve the award of grades. CBE Course Credit programs not only align with courses and credit hours, they
may also involve the award of grades reflecting different achievement levels in competency assessment. However, the definitions of letter grades in CBE Course Credit programs are expected to be different from normative grading scales often present in traditional programs. The former should reflect commonly understood differences between being competent (a "C"), highly competent or masterful (a "B"), or exceptionally competent or an expert (an "A"). Just as many traditional undergraduate programs require at least a "C" grade for course credit to count toward program completion, CBE Course Credit programs should expect at least a competent level of performance in their assessments before course credit is awarded. However, rigorous CBE Course Credit programs should expect mastery of competencies before course credit is awarded.

Faculty Development and Administrative Support for CBE. Online program delivery has expanded rapidly in recent years, in part because institutions have invested in new and expanded academic support services to facilitate their online program growth and related faculty development initiatives. Making similar investments for expanding CBE is advisable and consistent with accreditation expectations. When investing in support services for CBE program expansion, it is vital to maintain a commitment to having academically qualified faculty directly responsible for coordinating the development and implementation of CBE Course Credit programs in compliance with accreditation requirements.

Student and Academic Support Services for CBE Programs. Effective CBE Course Credit and CBE Direct Assessment programs are reinforced by student and academic support services that specifically and appropriately assist students in successfully navigating completion of their programs, changing direction if needed, and finding suitable placements after graduation. Such expected student and academic support services include providing adequate access to library and learning resources.

Flexible Systems for CBE Program Enrollment and Fee Payments. Traditional systems of registering and paying for enrollment in educational courses at the beginning of a term do not always serve self-paced CBE students well. Acceptable practices in support of CBE programs are those which have incorporated flexibility for on-demand access to CBE program components and managed enrollment and fee payments in ways that do not penalize students unfairly or undercut the student’s financial aid eligibility. Required fees and fee payment schedules are expected to be clearly defined and published for students in all CBE programs.

Adapting to Changing Technologies. Learning Management Systems (LMSs) have been widely adopted to enhance and support course credit programs of all types, including traditional programs,
online programs, and CBE programs. Expansion of CBE has spawned recent developments of an enhanced form of LMS called LRM—Learning Relationship Management Systems. LRMs have features that are especially relevant for CBE students and CBE program management. The LRMs are relatively new developments in technology which should continue to evolve and could soon replace LMSs. As proven technology evolves in support of educational program delivery and student learning, CBE programs should adopt such advances for improved efficiency and effectiveness.
The Future of CBE Course Credit Programs

Over the last thirty years, there has been an increasing emphasis in SACSCOC accreditation requirements on outcomes assessment, especially student learning outcomes assessment. Federal interest in learning outcomes assessment has grown substantially during this time as well. The national conversation on student learning outcomes years ago initially focused on what students at the end of their educational programs should know, be able to do, and be like behaviorally and attitudinally. Over the years, application of the concept of student learning outcomes assessment spread from the overall or end of an educational program to the course level and components of educational programs, including the general education component in undergraduate programs. In 2004, SACSCOC initiated an institution-wide five-year Quality Enhancement Plan requirement that focuses on improving student learning outcomes at any stage of educational delivery that is identified as needing improvement.

Competency-Based Education is a natural outgrowth of such national and regional attention on learning outcomes assessment. In many ways, CBE could be described as a student learning outcomes model on steroids. CBE Course Credit programs require the identification of competencies to be mastered at every level and for every credit course in an educational program, including the end-of-program capstone experiences. Rather than focus on a small group of narrowly defined student learning outcomes, CBE focuses on a comprehensive and substantive set of competencies for every aspect of an entire program of study. Furthermore, expecting mastery of competencies to earn course credits instead of clock hours or seat time in traditional courses generates authentic learning outcomes. As the national movement toward student learning outcomes assessment continues to grow, it becomes more like CBE. Consequently, CBE Course Credit programs are in a leadership position for innovation and advancement of learning outcomes assessment in higher education. The future of the CBE Course Credit model is bright as a leader in quality higher education.

The future of CBE Course Credit programs is also bright because such educational models can be more efficient and cost-effective than traditional course credit programs. Ever-evolving advances in information technology make learning resources more accessible, convenient and affordable than ever before. The guided, individualized pace and 24/7 nature of CBE Course Credit programs allows the individual student to accelerate, or extend, his or her learning and complete course credits and degree requirements more efficiently and often in less time and at
less cost than in traditional course credit programs. With the costs of higher education rising sharply, along with crushing accumulated student debt, such efficiency and cost-effectiveness matter to more and more students and their families.

The rising tide of interest in learning outcomes assessment represents a sea change for the future of educational delivery in higher education. Catching the wave of CBE Course Credit program expansion can be exciting and rewarding in that regard. Adhering to SCRP’s recommended emerging practices for designing and implementing CBE course credit programs in the context of regional accreditation should keep CBE Course Credit programs riding high on the crest of a great wave of educational innovation.
SCRIP Members & SACSCOC Collaborators

1. University System of Georgia
   a. Jon Sizemore, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Distance Education
   b. Rob Anderson, Vice Chancellor for Educational Access & Success
   c. Myk Garn, Assistant Vice Chancellor for New Learning Models
   d. Marci Middleton, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Programs
   e. Ed Rugg, Accreditation Consultant & Reports Editor

2. University of North Carolina - General Administration
   a. Michele Solar, Director of Competency-Based Education & Assessment
   b. Kimberly Van Noort, Vice President for Academic Programs
   c. Junius Gonzales, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

3. Tennessee Board of Regents
   a. Tristan Denley, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
   b. Randy Schulte, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
   c. Greg Sedrick, Associate Vice Chancellor--TN eCampus

4. Miami Dade College
   a. Jacqueline Hill, Associate Provost, Academic Affairs
   b. Lenore Rodicio, Executive Vice President & Provost
   c. Eduardo Padron, President

5. Wake Technical Community College
   a. Stephen Scott, President
   b. Sandy Dietrich, Vice President & Chief Academic Officer
   c. Amy Bruining

6. Texas-Sebesta Services (Recently University of Texas at Austin)
   a. Judith Sebesta, Consultant-CBE Specialist

7. SACSCOC
   a. Michael Johnson, Senior Vice President & Chief of Staff
   b. Larry Earvin, Vice President
   c. Kevin Sightler, Director of Substantive Change
References


