The NC-CBE Project

Competency-Based Education Curriculum Improvement Project
Frequently Asked Questions

What is CBE and why are we exploring it in North Carolina?

Competency-based education (CBE) is an innovative education model that uses the application of learning, not time, as the sole means of determining progress to degree completion. Students can accelerate through their programs of study and into the workplace by demonstrating mastery of required knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes (i.e. competencies). This approach is effective in addressing the needs of low-income, adult learners, especially those with prior work or life experience such as veterans, incumbent workers, and the under-employed. Serving these underserved populations is critically important to developing and sustaining a healthy workforce and meeting statewide goals for postsecondary attainment.

How are CBE programs different from traditional education and training programs?

Competency-based education (CBE) emphasizes what students *know* and are *able to do*. This approach ensures that graduates have the specific knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes required to succeed in the workplace. CBE students cannot progress or complete their program of study until they have demonstrated mastery of every required competency.

CBE affords students an opportunity to progress at a pace that traditional course offerings often don't allow. Instead of requiring that students participate in a course for a specific amount of time, CBE students progress towards completion as soon as they demonstrate mastery of competencies. For learners with prior work and life experience, this flexibility can drastically change the time it takes to reach completion.

CBE is a technology-enabled teaching and learning model. While CBE can be offered in a face-to-face format, most best-practice models are hybrid or online. Technology plays a critical role in maximizing access and flexibility for adult learners.

What are the benefits of CBE for learners? Faculty? Employers?

Competency-based education (CBE) learners benefit from increased flexibility and accessibility. Self-pacing and less stringent time constraints help students navigating family, employment, and other obligations find a path to success.

Supported by robust technological tools, faculty are often able to dedicate more time to one-on-one interaction with learners. In CBE programs where traditional faculty roles are disaggregated, instructors may find opportunities to specialize in the areas of teaching they enjoy the most - such as curriculum development, assessment, or academic advisement.

CBE also benefits employers by improving alignment with industry needs. The rigor of the CBE program design process requires consensus between educators and employers on academic, industry, and workforce competencies and definitions of mastery. Building consensus ensures that curriculum emphasizes the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes graduates need to succeed in the workplace.

What is the NC-CBE Project?

The North Carolina Competency-Based Education Project (NC-CBE Project) is a collaborative statewide effort to design and build a sustainable, scalable competency-based Associate's degree pathway. Among other things, CBE affords students the opportunity to receive credit for what they already know and build on their own knowledge and skills in an environment that allows for a certain degree of self-pacing. The NC-CBE Project is directly informed by business and industry; the degrees and credentials students receive will help position them for competitive employment opportunities.

Who is involved in the NC-CBE Project?

The NC-CBE Project is led by Central Piedmont Community College, with full support from equal partners at the North Carolina Community College System, Forsyth Technical Community College, Stanly Community College, and Wake Technical Community College. These colleges realized early on that the complexity of building scalable and sustainable CBE models is best served by collaboration to co‑invent solutions to challenges that cannot be adequately resolved in isolation. These challenges include issues associated with quality of program design, rigor of learning assessments, innovative business processes and systems, sustainable financial models, as well as policy and accreditation.

Which programs and courses are impacted by the NC-CBE Project?

The NC-CBE Project will pilot two (2) Information Technology AAS degree programs - *Computer Programming* & *Development* and *Network Management*. Participating institutions will offer CBE programs **in addition to** existing IT programs. For example, an institution may offer a Network Management degree program in a CBE, fully online, and in a traditional face-to-face format. A small number of general education and technical course sections will be included in the pilot.

How does the NC-CBE Project impact me as a faculty member?

Most faculty will not be impacted by the NC-CBE Project. A team of faculty from CPCC and partner institutions will participate in CBE curriculum improvement activities and the pilot.

How is the NC-CBE Project related to other CPCC initiatives?

The NC-CBE Project leverages and complements other CPCC initiatives:

CRITICAL CORE is a faculty-led, college-engaged process with the goal of developing a model of teaching, learning, and assessment of four (4) critical core skills required for personal, academic, and professional success - *Critical Thinking, Communication, Personal Growth & Cultural Responsibility,* and *Information Technology & Quantitative Literacy*. CRITICAL CORE aligns general education courses and program of study courses, ensuring students achieve proficiency in all four of these critical core skills. For more information, visit: http://www.cpcc.edu/criticalcore?searchterm=critical+core.

- **DIFFERENT SCOPE** - CRITICAL CORE reflects an institutional effort to ensure students achieve proficiency in Critical Thinking, Communication, Personal Growth & Cultural Literacy, and Information Technology & Quantitative Literacy. CRITICAL CORE is designed to have broad impact, reaching *all curriculum students*. The NC-CBE Project will pilot a full AAS

program, but as an experiment only impacts a limited number of course sections and students/faculty directly involved in the pilot.

- **BOTH CBE** - Both CRITICAL CORE and the NC-CBE Project are competency-based and adhere to similar standards of academic performance and rigorous assessment. CRITICAL CORE embeds and assesses student proficiency in four critical skill areas. The NC-CBE Project requires faculty to define competencies at a more granular level - specifying all of the personal effectiveness, academic, workplace, and technical competencies learners are required to master. The CRITICAL CORE skill areas - *Critical Thinking, Communication, Personal Growth & Cultural Literacy, and Information Technology & Quantitative Literacy* - align with the NC-CBE Project's foundational academic and workplace competencies.

Intentional Course Design (ICD) is a best practice model for redesigning whole courses (rather than individual classes or sections). The ICD initiative has two primary goals: increase student access (at no additional expense) and increase student success. For additional information about ICD at CPCC, please visit: http://www.cpcc.edu/learning/initiatives/intentional-course-design.

- **DIFFERENT SCOPE** - The ICD initiative at CPCC will bring to scale the College's ability to use tested course design models to increase student success and access. The initiative is designed in "rounds," with the first round focused on high-enrollment courses impacting all students that take these courses and all faculty that teach these courses. The second and third rounds will continue to focus on high-demand courses across AA, AS, and AAS programs. The NC-CBE Project will pilot a full AAS program, but as an experiment only impacts a limited number of course sections and students/faculty directly involved in the pilot.
- **SIMILAR PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH** - ICD begins with the end in mind. For example, what are the student learning outcomes; what evidence will faculty collect to determine if students have achieved the outcomes and at what performance standard; what strategies/learning activities will be delivered to give students the opportunities to learn and practice? The outcomes and standards of performance *may* incorporate competency-based pedagogy, and will not significantly modify student supports, but may impact the definition of faculty work, workload, and flexibility.
- **BOTH LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY** - Both ICD and the NC-CBE Project leverage technology to support student success and access.

Completion by Design (CbD) is a student success initiative designed to help community colleges implement and scale institutional change in order to increase completion and graduation rates. Guilford Technical Community College leads the North Carolina cadre, which includes CPCC, Davidson County, Martin, and Wake Technical community colleges. The institutions participating in the North Carolina cadre initiated four primary interventions as part of CbD — 1) Structured Programs of Study, 2) Intrusive (or proactive) Advising, 3) Continuous Bridge, and 4) a technology-supported, Integrated Planning and Advising System (IPAS). At CPCC, the initial CbD pilot targeted first-time in college (FTIC) and transfer students. For additional information, visit: http://www.cpcc.edu/learningcollege/college-initiatives/completion-by-design?searchterm=completion+by+design.

- **DIFFERENT SCOPE** - CbD is now an institutional effort benefiting *all CPCC students*. The NC-CBE Project pilot will have limited impact on programs, courses, faculty, and students.
- **DIFFERENT FOCUS** - CbD focuses exclusively on development, implementation, and assessment of interrelated interventions designed to boost completion and graduation. The NC-CBE Project is focused on curriculum improvement activities led by faculty.
- **ALIGNED PRACTICES** - The NC-CBE Project will incorporate the primary interventions

established by CbD into a robust support system specifically for CBE students.
- **SAME GOAL** - Both CbD and the NC-CBE Project have increased student completion and success as an overall objective.

Developmental Math and Development Reading and English Redesign (DMA/DRE) focused on improving developmental education curricula so that students could complete developmental course sequences in one year or less. DMA/DRE courses have been successfully piloted and are currently open to CPCC students who place at the developmental level. These courses are modularized - making them shorter than traditional offerings. Courses are also mastery-based, requiring students to demonstrate mastery of content before progressing to college-level coursework. For additional information regarding DMA, please visit:
http://www.cpcc.edu/math/math-emporium/the-concept?searchterm=dma. For additional information regarding DRE, please visit:
http://www.cpcc.edu/english-humanities/reading-program?searchterm=dre.

- **DIFFERENT SCOPE** - DMA/DRE courses are open to *all developmental students* at CPCC. The NC-CBE Project pilot will have limited impact on programs, courses, faculty, and students.
- **BOTH FLEXIBLE** - The DMA/DRE structure allows students to move through developmental coursework quickly at a flexible pace. (DMA courses are 4 weeks long, and DRE courses are 8 weeks in length.) The NC-CBE Project will also offer some degree of self-pacing for students.
- **BOTH CBE -** DMA/DRE and the NC-CBE Project promote a competency-based, mastery-based pedagogical model and adhere to similar standards of academic performance and rigorous assessment.
- **BOTH LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY** - DMA/DRE courses are technology-enabled, ensuring students complete coursework and move to college-level classes in a timely manner. (DMA/DRE courses are supported by Pearson's *MySkillsLab* and *MyMathLab* software.) CBE courses will also leverage technology to support flexibility and promote academic success.
- **SAME GOAL** - Both the NC-CBE Project and DMA/DRE redesign are intended to help increase student success and completion.

The CPCC Online Strategic Plan articulates a comprehensive, college-wide approach for increasing the quality of online learning and access for learners. The plan addresses the quality of courses and programs, student support services, marketing, and assessment/evaluation. The Plan includes best practices and standards for the following:
- design and development of online courses;
- professional development (intentional and required preparation for faculty to teach online);
- selection and integration of appropriate digital resources and technology that facilitate teaching, learning, and assessment; and
- student support (preparation and support of students engaging in online courses/programs).

Many CPCC initiatives will be impacted by implementation of the Online Strategic Plan, including CRITICAL CORE, Intentional Course Design, and the NC-CBE Project.

- **DIFFERENT SCOPE** – The Plan impacts *all online courses* - all faculty teaching online courses and all students enrolled in online courses are affected by the Plan. Implementing the Plan requires the collaborative efforts of a cross-functional, college-wide team, including Enrollment and Student Services, Instructional Technology Services, Marketing and Communication, Professional Development, and eLearning. The NC-CBE Project pilot will have limited impact on programs, courses, faculty, and students.
- **BOTH LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY** - Both the CPCC Online Strategic Plan and the NC-CBE Project will leverage technology to support student success and access.