



Expanding Student Success: Creating a Competency-Based Credit Equivalency Model

Rationale for the Topic, Problem Statement, and Opportunity for Growth

According to a 2016 survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), the top five attributes employers seek on a candidate's resume are leadership, the ability to work in a team, communication skills, problem-solving skills, and a strong work ethic. Interestingly, attributes such as analytical/quantitative and technical skills ranked 8th and 10th, respectively. This change in focus from attributes typically associated with mastery-dominated learning—measured by colleges as seat time toward credit hours—suggests a paradigm shift from skills measured only by standards-based instruction. Standards-based instruction, therefore, is defined as “systems of instruction, assessment, grading and academic reporting based on students demonstrating understanding or mastery of the knowledge and skills they are *expected to learn* as they progress through their education” (Glossary of Education Reform, 2014). The significance of the phrase “expected to learn” is vital.

The notion of competency-based education (CBE), a response to a one-size-fits-all model, has received growing attention as a key goal for 21st century learning. In a 2013 plan to make college more affordable, White House administration, for example, announced a move to “...award credits based on learning, not seat time...,” in effect underlining the success of institutions such as Western Governors University, Southern New Hampshire University, and the University of Wisconsin—all of which have established fully CBE programs (The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2013).

Highlighting the strength of curricular flexibility, The U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) defined CBE, or personalized learning, as a “Transitioning away from seat time, in favor of a structure that creates flexibility, allows students to progress as they demonstrate mastery of academic content, regardless of time, place, or pace of learning.” Competency, then, is more than the mastery of a discrete academic standard. True competence is deeper and broader and includes academics as well as a wide range of other cognitive skills not typically included in academic subjects or college and career readiness learning standards. As Surr and Reading (2017) clarify, “Competency also requires the combination of knowledge and skills across multiple domains and implies the capacity to apply and transfer learning from one situation to the next, leading to the ability to adapt and innovate in the face of novel problems and contexts.” Notably, when defining college and career readiness standards, many states recently included the notion of mastering complex sets of skills in real-life settings, in addition to intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies.

Problem Statement: Standards-based education does not prepare MGCCC students for the global economy. In recent years, CBE has experienced a resurgence influenced by rising education costs and unemployment rates and has been linked to improved learning outcomes and job readiness (Book, 2014). There is growing consensus that to thrive in our rapidly changing world, students need an expanded set of competencies that include the mastery of core academic concepts, as well as analytical thinking and problem-solving skill, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, and the capacity to transfer learning to new problems and contexts.

Although there is not one common, agreed-on definition for CBE, a number of national organizations and researchers have identified CBE's most essential features. One often-cited definition of CBE, as noted by Patrick and Sturgis (2013), is offered by the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and includes the following features:

- Students advance on the basis of mastery.
- Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students.
- Assessment is meaningful and positive learning experience for students.
- Students receive timely, differentiated support according to their individual needs.
- Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include the application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions.

Because traditional seat time isn't a restriction with CBE, there are a multitude of strategies that are used successfully when determining competence. At MGCCC, a few examples of best practices for awarding students credit by non-traditional means include Credit for College Level Examination Program (CLEP), articulated credit, advanced placement (AP), and credit by departmental examination. In fiscal years 2011-2013, MGCCC awarded credit by nontraditional means to a total of 852 students (see table below).

Summary of Credit Awarded by Non-Traditional Means at MGCCC

Type of Credit Awarded	FY11			FY12			FY13		
	N	Total Hours	Avg.	N	Total Hours	Avg.	N	Total Hours	Avg.
Advanced Placement Credit*	39	200	5	33	186	6	42	225	5
Approved Apprenticeship	-	-	-	1	36	36	-	-	-
Army Registry Transcript	40	737	18	36	493	14	64	1068	17
Basic Law Enforcement	2	12	6	4	44	11	1	8	8
CLEP General Exam*	13	114	9	3	21	7	4	29	7
CLEP Subject Area Exam*	20	210	11	21	198	9	36	329	0
Coast Guard Institute	6	246	41	6	205	34	6	211	35
CTE Articulated Credit	2	10	5	6	27	5	3	14	5
Dantes Exam	3	12	4	7	24	3	3	15	5
Departmental Exam**	15	72	5	29	73	3	5	17	3
Military Service	23	99	4	20	105	5	43	315	7
Portfolio**	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	11	11
Sailor/Marine Registry Trscpt.	95	3646	38	91	3818	42	129	4568	35
Totals	258	5358	-	257	5230	-	337	6810	-

Source: Dept of Institutional Effectiveness and Research

* Fees associated with exam are collected by testing agency.

**Fees associated are collected by MGCCC at rate of \$25/credit hour.

Furthermore, MGCCC has introduced a stackable credential initiative whereby CTE students earn additional credentials as they progress through credit hour intervals. For example, most CTE students are able to earn a certificate (30 credit hours), a diploma (45 credit hours), and an Applied Associates of Science (A.A.S.) (60 credit hours) as well as other industry recognized credentials (e.g, NCCER, OSHA, AWS, C+). In addition, notable success utilizing competency-based education has been achieved in two separate programs: the Harrison County Law Enforcement Training Academy (HCLETA) and Maritime Apprenticeship programs.

MGCCC serves as the Related Technical Instruction (RTI) for the Maritime Training Academy's Apprenticeship program. In FY 2017, 1,601 apprentices participated in 165 courses in 12 Maritime Technology Programs leading to college credit awarded by MGCCC. During the same period, 213 students participated in the nine HCLETA Basic Law Enforcement classes. Successful completers are given the opportunity to have 12 semester credit hours transcribed.

Opportunity for growth will occur by expanding on recent successes of CBE in the aforementioned CTE programs. As such, MGCCC proposes to increase 21st century skill preparedness and degree attainment by offering the opportunity for students to earn up to 30 hours of credit toward their program of study through CBE, thus increasing flexibility while minimizing costs and seat time.

Expected Outcomes/Impact on Student Learning or Student Success

Goal: Create a competency-based education (CBE) model to be used College-wide as a means to increase student success and completion in academic and CTE programs for nontraditional student populations.

Outcome 1: Identify members of a team consisting of faculty, staff, subject matter experts, and industry partners who will determine the institution's readiness to institute a cross-disciplinary competency-based education model [**Institutional Commitment 1, 2, 3, 4**].

Outcome 2: Develop a CBE tool, and identify a framework to assess a wide range of student competencies in knowledge, specialized skills, personal and social skills [**Institutional Commitment 1, 2, 3, 4**].

Outcome 3: Increased professional development and application of a cross-disciplinary competency-based education model through tools and framework [**Institutional Commitment 1, 2, 4**].

Outcome 4: Increased completion and/or graduation rates of non-traditional student populations in CTE programs and academic programs, including those who may have stopped out or dropped out [**Institutional Commitment 1, 2, 3, 4**]

Outcome 5: Decrease overall cost for student completion through shortened seat time and through employer-paid apprenticeships [**Institutional Commitment 1, 2, 3, 4**].

Strategies/Actions to Be Implemented

The following strategies/actions will be implemented for the purpose of this proposed QEP plan.

- 1) Professional development – training for all advisors, counselors, and enrollment specialists to crosswalk prior learning experiences into transferable college credit to be applied to a MGCCC academic or career/technical pathway.
- 2) Develop a CBE tool, and identify a framework to assess a wide range of student competencies in knowledge, specialized skills, personal and social skills.
- 3) Implement the CBE tool with the targeted population.

Student Cohort

Non-traditional student populations in CTE, apprenticeship, and academic programs, including students who may have stopped out or dropped out.

Measurement/Assessment

- 1) 100% of advisors, counselors, and enrollment specialists will receive professional development training to crosswalk prior learning experiences into transferable college credit to be applied to a MGCCC academic or career/technical pathway (quantitative).
- 2) 20% increase in program completion for non-traditional student populations in CTE, apprenticeship, and academic programs, including students who may have stopped out or dropped out (quantitative).
- 3) Overall increase in number of credits awarded through non-traditional means (quantitative).
- 4) Comments from open-ended survey questions and student exit interviews (qualitative).

Resources

Resources will be utilized from the following MGCCC areas.

Division of Student Services and Enrollment Management

Division of Teaching and Learning

Collaboration between leadership of all MGCCC campuses and centers

For any questions or clarification of this proposed plan can be directed to: