

## Policy on Competency Based Education

January 2025

### Background

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) is committed to advancing quality education, promoting equitable student outcomes, and supporting the institutional transformations required to serve the next century of learners. Recognizing new technologies and rapidly changing workforce demands, ACCJC supports institutional efforts to innovate and adapt to meet the educational needs of its students and to consider alternate approaches to educational design and delivery systems.

Competency based education is an outcomes approach to earning a college degree or credential that emphasizes what students can do as a result of learning, rather than the amount of time spent in class. Competencies are statements of the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that lay the foundation for success. The curriculum is structured around the specified competencies, and satisfactory academic progress is expressed as the attainment or mastery of the identified competencies.

### Federally Recognized Approaches to Competency Based Education

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

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

### Title IV Funding Requirements

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

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

<sup>1</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 668.10

## **Policy Requirements**

### **A. Institution Responsibility**

For the purposes of complying with applicable regulatory requirements, institutions seeking to offer a direct assessment approach must follow ACCJC's Substantive Change guidelines for approval and establish and document a methodology to reasonably equate the direct assessment program to credit or clock hours.

### **B. Commission Responsibility**

In order for a direct assessment program or a hybrid approach to be eligible for Title IV funds, ACCJC is required to:

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

Applicant institutions seeking ACCJC accreditation and offering only CBE- based programs will follow the eligibility and candidacy process, as well as have their application reviewed by the Commission using these principles.

*Adopted June 2020; Edited January 2025*

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