

Competency-Based Competency

Direct Assessment, Competency-Based Education (CBE)

LFCC now offers some of its programs in a new format with an initiative called “Knowledge to Work” (K2W). Funded in part by a U.S. Department of Labor TAACCCT grant, K2W offers competency-based education (CBE) programs for the Associate of Applied Science degrees in Health Information Management and in Information Systems Technology; the Certificate in Office Systems Assistant; and Career Studies Certificates in Hospital Facility Coding, Information Processing Technician, Cyber Security, and Networking Specialist. Program descriptions are provided separately in this catalog, along with a list of the competencies that are required for their completion.

With traditional programs, students earn a degree or certificate by meeting course requirements with a sequence of credit classes. With K2W’s CBE programs, the focus is on documenting competencies, instead of counting classes and credits. Competencies are performance-based statements about knowledge, skills, and abilities. The competencies used in LFCC’s CBE programs were developed by full-time faculty and incorporate national competency frameworks so that they are aligned with the latest curriculum and employer expectations for hiring.

LFCC’s CBE programs include a design feature called direct assessment of student learning. Direct assessment means that LFCC’s CBE programs look solely at the attainment of defined competencies in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning. However, while CBE is not measured in credits or time, some estimates are necessary for managing enrollment, registration, and tuition and fees. Therefore, students enroll in special credit courses based on the amount of educational activity they will be engaged in for the semester.

Personalized Learning for CBE

Students in CBE programs work with faculty to create a personalized learning plan each semester that lists the competencies to be acquired. Instruction is not delivered in a traditional class format with a sequence of weekly course material. Instead, the learning plan is implemented via the online, instructional management system BlackBoard and free and low-

cost learning resources are provided for each program competency or group of competencies, depending on the program. BlackBoard is also used for assignments and assessments to document when competencies are mastered. This allows students to work at a personalized and flexible pace.

Depending on the number of competencies students already have and how many hours of educational activity they devote each week, CBE programs have the potential to be completed more quickly and with significant cost savings over traditional, course-based programs. Students in the Administrative Support Technology (AST) and Health Information Management (HIM) programs are allowed to move individually through competencies, based on their needs and experience, with faculty permission. Students in the Information Systems Technology (IST) programs move sequentially through modules of competencies and new instructional material is made available as soon as the prerequisite competencies are mastered.

CBE Career Coaches

Knowledge to Work (K2W) career coaches are a unique feature of LFCC’s CBE initiative and are available to students interested in or enrolled in CBE programs. There are two types of coaches – K2W Outreach Coach and K2W Career Coach. A K2W Outreach Coach works with prospective students prior to enrolling at LFCC and can answer questions about the nature of the program, what to expect with BlackBoard and open educational resources, readiness for CBE, and how documenting competencies can help make them more employable.

The K2W Career Coach represents the college’s Counseling, Advising, and Career Services office and is available to help students from the time of application throughout their CBE-related education at LFCC. Career coaches provide a variety of wrap-around student support services. These include an introduction to LFCC student activities and services, registration, financial aid, career planning, drafting a personalized learning plan, introductions to CBE faculty, transcript review, helping students document previously attained competencies for faculty review, and career/employment planning. A career coach is also available to provide resources and support with a personal, financial, or health crisis that impacts student success.

Both the K2W Career and Outreach Coach are available by phone, email, text, and in-person during East Coast business hours. For contact info, visit the K2W website at:
<http://www.knowledgetowork.com/contact/>.

Is Competency-Based Education Right for You?

LFCC's CBE programs use online learning as a key component of instruction. The exception is Health Information Management (HIM), which requires at least one classroom experience to meet accreditation standards as a hybrid program. While traditional credit and noncredit courses, internships, and boot camps may be included in a learning plan if desired, the primary delivery mode is through the learning management system BlackBoard with instruction using free and low-cost digital learning resources.

In many cases, digital learning objects may be used instead of printed textbooks, helping to keep costs low. These digital resources are accessed via computer, tablet, and smartphone and require access to the Internet. Therefore, students are expected to have a foundation of technical and digital literacy in order to take advantage of distance learning. For prospective students who do not yet have these skills, a personalized learning program can begin with the goal of attaining this competency.

LFCC's Knowledge to Work (K2W) initiative addresses the whole continuum of learning, from adult basic education to the associate's degree. Students who do not have digital literacy skills or who need additional assistance with adult basic education or English as a second language should discuss these competencies with a K2W career coach. LFCC is the home of Northern Shenandoah Valley Adult Education and instructors are available to help students attain these competencies.

Since CBE programs provide increased flexibility and personalized learning, students need to be able to work independently in order to succeed. Unlike traditional courses that have a synchronous class schedule in which all students are learning the same material at the same time, CBE students are responsible for managing their time and workload. Faculty and K2W career coaches are available to help each step of the way. Weekly interaction between students and faculty about learning is a key feature of the K2W program, so students are not left to master competencies on their own. Rather, K2W provides a

case management approach and personalized learning with regular faculty engagement and interaction with students that help ensure success and employability.

Verifying Competencies and Transfer Credit Equivalencies for CBE Programs

As part of LFCC's CBE programs, students work with faculty to learn knowledge, skills, and abilities through new educational activity and to document competencies that have already been attained. A Knowledge to Work career coach is available to help students put together documentation that demonstrates their attainment of those competencies. This information is then reviewed and verified by the assigned program faculty member in order to be counted towards program requirements.

The verification of previously attained competencies can be done in three ways:

- (1) Students take competency assessments and pass with a grade of "B" or higher. These are the same assessments used for students who are learning a competency for the first time;
- (2) Students take the course where the same competencies are taught and pass with a grade of "C" or higher;
- (3) Students take a national certification or exam that faculty identify as documenting competency attainment and receive a successful score or higher.

After faculty review this documentation of student learning, competencies that are attained and verified are listed on the LFCC Extended Competency Transcript for that semester.

Transcripts and Credit Course Equivalents for Direct Assessment CBE Programs

Students enrolled in CBE programs have both a traditional college transcript as well as a competency based extended transcript. The traditional transcript reports on competency attainment through the use of credit course equivalencies. For competencies mastered with new educational activity, the transcript will display a credit course with a grade of "A" or "B", if the work is verified by faculty as an exceptional pass or pass. For any competencies related to a program-required course that have been verified by faculty as being previously attained, the traditional

transcript will show the course equivalent to these competencies as other credit and will display an “OT” grade.

The second transcript, the competency based extended transcript, documents the amount of credit-equivalent educational activity that attaining a competency represents. For each competency, a grade of exceptional pass (EP) or pass (P) is listed. These are equivalent to an “A” or “B” grade respectively. The competency based extended transcript separates out competencies and course equivalents attained through new educational activity at LFCC from those that were previously attained.

Satisfactory Academic Progress for CBE

Some policies for satisfactory academic progress (SAP) are implemented a little differently for students in LFCC’s CBE programs. One way of monitoring SAP is with information about goals created for the personalized study plan. Faculty work with students at the beginning of each semester to set weekly momentum points and semester milestones in the personalized learning plan. K2W faculty and career coaches monitor work on these goals to ensure that students are progressing. Weekly momentum points provide a plan of educational activity for each week. Semester milestones help ensure that: (1) a student has the materials needed in place to start the semester successfully (beginning); (2) the semester is progressing as expected (middle); and (3) competency attainment goals are met (end).

Attendance and SAP are reported to LFCC’s financial aid office for the CBE programs, like for non-CBE programs. SAP has two reporting deadlines – after the first three weeks of the semester and after the end of the semester. The first will vary for different semester session lengths. Students who do not actively work on their learning plan during the first three weeks may be flagged as non-attending and reported to the financial aid office for SAP evaluation. The faculty member and K2W career coach work together to monitor student progress and verify non-activity, if necessary.

Students who do not attain their planned competencies during a given semester must address these deficiencies in their next semester’s personalized learning plan in order to proceed in the program. Students may repeat the competency, with permission of the faculty, and supplemental learning resources

may be available. Otherwise, they will be in jeopardy of not meeting SAP for that competency and this information will be reported to financial aid for review. SAP is also calculated based on the number of credit equivalents completed each semester and within 150% of estimated time for program completion for the non-CBE version of the program.

Academic Load and Estimated Time to Completion for CBE Programs

As students think about enrolling in a CBE program, two things should be considered: (1) academic load or attendance status; and (2) estimated time to completion.

In terms of academic load or attendance, students may enroll full-time or part-time in LFCC’s CBE programs, just like in committing to a traditional class schedule. This depends on the number of hours they commit to be engaged in educational activity. For each credit hour of enrollment, a student is expected to devote 3 hours per week of educational activity, amounting to 45 hours per semester. A three credit enrollment requires at least 135 hours of educational activity per semester. A full-time student enrolled in 15 credits per semester commits to 45 hours per week of educational activity, or 675 total hours, over a 15 week period. Note that LFCC offers semester sessions of different lengths. If a student enrolls in a session that is shorter than 15 weeks, the amount of educational activity time is still the same, just accelerated.

For students who do not have any competencies in a program, the estimated time to complete is essentially the same as in a traditional program. However, some factors do allow CBE programs to be completed more quickly. These include such things as: (1) the number of competencies attained prior to enrollment; (2) the hours per week dedicated to educational activity; and (3) the ability to master and progress through the instructional material in less time than anticipated.

It should be noted that many students choose to take a part-time load. For students with no previous courses in a non-CBE program who register for 3 credits each semester, it would take at least 20 semesters or six and a half years to complete an associate’s degree. CBE programs could take just as long or longer if students: (1) do not have any previously attained competencies; and/or (2) do not

accelerate their learning; and/or (3) do not devote sufficient effort and time to their studies.

Grading in CBE Programs

With CBE, what matters is verifying that students attain the required program competencies, not how they got them. As a result, the traditional approach to grading is modified. In order for LFCC to verify that a student has attained a competency, he/she must pass the assessment that measures it with a score of 80% or better. This is considered a “B” or higher, or a pass grade. Faculty assign grades to each competency and/or module of competencies, as well as to the course the student is enrolled in for purposes of registration and paying tuition and fees.

The CBE grading system is as follows:

- A grade of “Pass” is assigned for satisfactory completion of a competency with a score of 80% or better, and is deemed equivalent to a “B.”
- A grade of “Exceptional Pass” is assigned for completion of a competency at an excellent level, and is deemed equivalent to an “A.”
- A student making satisfactory progress, but not completing all of the competencies, is assigned an “R” grade (re-enroll) and the student must re-enroll in the next semester to complete the unfinished competencies.
- A student not making satisfactory progress is assigned a “Not Passed” grade, which is equivalent to an “F” or failing grade.

CBE Graduation Requirements

Students enrolled in LFCC’s CBE programs work with faculty on personalized learning plans to attain competencies. Once the assigned CBE faculty member has reviewed a student’s records and verified attainment of all required competencies, the student is ready to apply for graduation. To be eligible for graduation with an associate’s degree, certificate, or career studies certificate, the student must:

1. Attain all of the competencies required of the program as listed in the LFCC catalog at the time of program enrollment, including general education requirements where applicable;

2. Meet all assessments required for all competencies in the program with the equivalent of a “B” grade or higher where applicable;
3. Complete required exit testing established by the College for general education and the graduating student survey;
4. Be enrolled at LFCC for at least 25% of the equivalent course credits required for the program;
5. Be enrolled at LFCC for a minimum of 10 weeks of new educational activity for the program;
6. Be certified by an appropriate College official for graduation; and
7. Resolve all financial obligations to the College and return all library and College materials.

CBE Program Costs

Due to the unique nature of CBE, the total cost of completing a program will vary from student to student. Students enter CBE programs with different educational and professional backgrounds. Knowledge to Work (K2W) provides the following features that will impact the cost of CBE:

- *Flexible pace:* CBE programs offer students the flexibility of progressing through the program based on their individual needs and plans. Tuition and fees are charged based on the number of credit hours a student registers for. Credit hours are tied to the number of hours per week of educational activity a student commits to complete in a semester. The student works with a faculty member to create a personalized learning plan that includes a reasonable number of competencies to learn during the semester, based on the number of hours per week devoted to CBE.
- *Recognition for existing competencies:* If a student already has attained half of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that make up the competencies for a program, then the cost of attendance is potentially cut in half. Time and cost will vary depending upon how much effort the student devotes to new educational learning and if sufficient progress is made.

- *Open educational resources (OER)*: In many cases, free and low-cost digital learning resources, including OER, are used instead of traditional textbooks, lowering the cost of a CBE program. In addition, as part of LFCC's U.S. Department of Labor grant, extensive supplemental resources are available for students to learn competencies on their own. See LFCC's online portal at <http://highered.org>.
- *Educational activity*: As explained above, students register and pay tuition and fees for credit hours based on the number of hours of educational activity they will complete during a semester. These costs are for new educational activity.

Per the requirements of LFCC's regional accreditor, SACSCOC, students must complete 25% or more of the program credits at the institution awarding the degree/certificate. Regulations of the U.S. Department of Education also require that students be enrolled in a program for at least 10 weeks before receiving a degree/certificate.

The table on the following page illustrates the time to completion and costs for the AAS in Health Information Management for a student who already has attained 40 of the required 80 competencies. If this student takes a six hour academic load, this amounts to 18 hours of educational activity per week or 270 hours per semester. At this rate of attendance, it will take an average of 5.3 (or 6) semesters of enrollment to complete the program.

These examples are for purposes of illustration only. The tuition and fees charges listed are for the 2016-17 academic year and may increase over time. To determine your estimated program cost and time to completion based on attendance/academic load and previously attained competencies, schedule a meeting with a K2W outreach coach. See: <http://www.knowledgetowork.com/contact/>.

CBE Program Estimates of Costs and Time to Completion			
Program	AAS Health Information Management	Total Program Competencies	
	Previous Attained Comp % (1-75)	# Prev. Attained	# Remaining
Percent	50	40	40

Load	Semesters needed to complete	Cost Per Semester In-State	Cost Per Semester Out-of-State	Semester Weeks	Hours of ed. activity per week	Hours of ed. activity per semester
3 Credit	10.5	\$472.20	\$1,062.00	15	9	135
6 Credit	5.3	\$917.40	\$2,097.00		18	270
9 Credit	3.5	\$1,362.60	\$3,132.00		27	405
12 Credit	2.7	\$1,807.80	\$4,167.00		36	540
15 Credit	2.1	\$2,253.00	\$5,202.00		45	675
		Total Cost In-State	Total Cost Out-of-State			
		\$4,775.80	\$11,067.00			

CBE and Financial Aid

LFCC has applied to the U.S. Department of Education for approval to offer Title IV financial aid for its direct assessment CBE programs.

LFCC has also applied to the state of Virginia authorizing agency for veterans' educational benefits. Until these approvals are in place, students seeking financial aid should work with the K2W outreach or career coach to determine their eligibility and other sources of support.

Many employers provide educational benefits for incumbent workers and prospective students who work full-time are encouraged to ask about this assistance. TAA-eligible workers whose companies are closing are entitled to additional sources of financial support and should ask the K2W outreach coach about this benefit.

Information about Title IV and veterans' educational benefits will be made available as soon as it is received. For more information, check with K@W outreach or career coach and the K@W website at <http://knowledgetowork.com>.

Terms and Definitions in CBE

Terms used to describe LFCC's CBE programs and policies are defined below:

Competency-based education - A design feature for educational programs that uses the language of competencies to teach the curriculum.

Competencies - Performance-based statements about knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Competency attainment – Documentation verified by faculty in the program discipline that a student has mastered a competency at the expected level of performance.

Competency Based Extended Transcript - In addition to the standard traditional transcript of courses and grades, a second transcript is provided to CBE students that documents competency attainment for each semester a student is enrolled in a CBE program.

Competency framework - A list of competencies provided by an external organization such as an accrediting agency or national association that provides an approved curriculum model. The competency-based curriculum of programs at LFCC incorporates these national competency frameworks in different ways.

Course credit equivalency – Each competency taught in the CBE curriculum is linked back to the course where it is taught and mastered by students. Once a competency is verified as attained, information about the equivalent course is documented in terms of the amount of credits the competency equals.

Direct assessment - A type of competency-based education that, instead of counting clock hours or credit hours, relies solely on the attainment of defined competencies as a measure of student learning.

Instructional management system – Online software used to deliver instruction. At LFCC, BlackBoard is used for all courses, as well as the CBE programs. For CBE, free and low-cost learning resources are provided for each program competency. BlackBoard is also used for assignments and assessments to document when competencies are mastered.

Knowledge to Work (K2W) - An LFCC initiative to promote competency-based education and personalized learning in high wage, high growth industries. This is funded in part by a TAACCCT grant from the U.S. Department of Labor.

K2W Career Coach/Outreach Coach - A unique feature of LFCC's CBE initiative, there are two types of coaches that work together to help students. The K2W Outreach Coach works with prospective students and promotes and markets the programs. The K2W Career Coach provides a variety of wrap-around student support services once students are ready to enroll in CBE, from registration to career planning.

Weekly momentum points – In creating a personalized learning plan, faculty work with students to plan out their weekly work to learn competencies. Weekly goals are set called “momentum points” to help make sure that students make progress on a timely basis.

New educational activity – Students work to learn new competencies during a semester using CBE and register for the purpose of paying tuition and fees. Educational activity is estimated using credit hours for the academic load. Credit hours for new educational activity are based on the estimated number of weeks and hours per week students will be engaged in new learning.

Personalized learning plan (PLP) - An electronic document prepared by program faculty that lists the competencies that a student plans to learn

and master during a semester. The PLP sets weekly goals or momentum points and three semester milestones to plan out how the semester's educational activity will progress. Faculty and K2W career coaches use the PLP to document their engagement and interaction with students. Faculty record a mark of pass (B) or exceptional pass (A) for each competency that is verified.

Previously attained competencies - Students work with faculty and the K2W career coaches to document competencies they think they may already have. Faculty then verify any previously attained competencies for documentation on their transcript.

Semester milestones - In creating a personalized learning plan, faculty work with students to set general goals for how the semester will progress. These are called "semester milestones" because they ensure that: (1) a student has the materials needed in place to start the semester successfully (beginning); (2) the semester is progressing as expected (middle); and (3) competency attainment goals are met (end).

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