

Competency Based Education

Four key readings that were helpful for members of the California Community College Curriculum Committee (5C) as they worked to develop a common understanding of the need for CBE, briefly what it is and how it's different than traditional credit instruction, and how it can advance learning for people of color and adults who may traditionally struggle with time-based structures of traditional credit instruction. Titles link to articles.

- [“Cracking the Credit Hour” by Amy Laitinen](#)
A review of policies needing update, with a focus on the origins of the credit hour (hint: it had nothing to do with student learning) and the faulty assumption that seat time equals learning. Includes suggestions for policy revisions and lists some innovative programs as examples, including Western Governors University and its use of competency-based education.
- [“Competency-Based Education: A Strategy for Skills Upgrading in California” by California Edge Coalition](#)
An overview of competency based education and how it can be utilized as a one means of delivering instruction and facilitating learning and meeting California workforce needs.
- [“How Competency-Based Education May Help Reduce Our Nation’s Toughest inequities” by Stephanie Malia Krauss](#)
Reviews how CBE can be used to reach and empower learners who struggle in postsecondary learning programs. Includes recommendations for where to start and how to prioritize equity. Also includes the recommendation that three learner populations be prioritized, including learners of color.
- [“Understanding by Design Framework” by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins](#)
Effective CBE utilizes Understanding by Design (UbD), also called backwards design, for curriculum planning and design. This article highlights seven tenets of backward design, with four having direct application to CBE:
 1. *“The UbD framework helps to focus curriculum and teaching on the development and deepening of student understanding and transfer of learning.”*
 2. *“Understanding is revealed when students autonomously make sense of and transfer their learning through authentic performance. Six facets of understanding – the capacity to explain, interpret, apply, shift perspective, empathize, and self-assess – can serve as indicators of understanding.*
 3. *“Effective curriculum is planned backwards from long-term, desired results through a three-stage design process (Desired Results, Evidence, and Learning Plan). This process helps avoid the common problems of treating the textbook as the curriculum rather than a resource and activity-oriented teaching in which no clear priorities and purposes are apparent.”*
 4. *“Teachers are coaches of understanding, not mere purveyors of content knowledge, skill, or activity. They focus on ensuring that learning happens, not just teaching (and assuming that what was taught was learned); they always aim and check for successful meaning making and transfer by the learner.”*

These additional documents were released or updated following 5C's Spring 2020 work but have been helpful in further understanding elements of CBE as it applies to implementation.

- [“Side by Side: Comparing Credit for Prior Learning and Competency Based Education”](#) by California Competes
This recent document from California Competes graphically highlights the differences between competency based education (CBE) and credit for prior learning (CPL).
- [“Research Explainers: What Are We Learning about Post-Secondary Competency-Based Education?”](#) by American Institutes for Research (AIR)
This recent document explores research about CBE implementation and results as CBE increases as a means of program design and instruction.