EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Elsevier Education recognizes the potential of competency-based education to improve outcomes by allowing students to meet learning objectives and master key concepts at their own pace. This personalized approach emphasizes practical application and ensures that students are going beyond earning credit hours to gaining true proficiency in the essential skills needed for career success.
Elsevier Education’s Perspective on: Competency-Based Education

**Perspective**

Elsevier Education constructs its content using learning objectives and defined outcomes as a basis for ensuring students meet achievement and mastery benchmarks. Further, Elsevier products and services support competency-based education (CBE) initiatives within a variety of academic frameworks.

At the crux of competency-based learning and education is a focus on student mastery of performance and learning outcomes through a set of pre-defined learning objectives (EDUCAUSE, 2014). Traditionally, student achievement has been determined by using credit- or seat-hour parameters as a benchmark for post-secondary program completion, rather than proficiency within a set of learning objectives.

In order to define what competencies students must achieve, schools extrapolate the requirements and outcomes students would meet in a typical credit-hour program. Once students master the competency, they can progress to the next stage of learning (Fain, 2013). There is no one prototype that best constructs the framework for a competency-based educational setting. CBE programs can include ground or online courses, independent study, or blended models (Klein-Collins & Baylor, 2013).

With CBE, students are evaluated on what is learned in the time it takes to reach a learning goal, as opposed to learning being achieved through completion of work within a finite timeframe or the environment in which learning occurs (Klein-Collins & Baylor, 2013).

Due to many variables, competence is not always easy to measure (Pijl-Zieber, et al., 2014). Currently, assessment models for CBE typically fall into two categories and each has requirements to meet Department of Education financial aid reimbursement criteria for higher education institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

In recent years, CBE has experienced a resurgence influenced by rising education costs and unemployment rates.
The “course-based with credit equivalency” model is similar to the structure of traditional higher-education courses that have defined competencies within the program. Once students master competencies, they can take assessments at their own pace which can serve to speed the time it takes to complete a program. The “direct assessment” model assesses competency mastery through direct assessment by others in lieu of clock, seat or credit hours. Learning evaluation can be measured through written expression, exams, or presentations (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Background
CBE is not a novel educational model. It emerged towards the end of the 1960s, influenced by the educational objective taxonomy research of Benjamin S. Bloom, PhD, and the work by Robert F. Mager, PhD, on instructional objectives. Both sought to tie the skills students learn to application in real-life settings (Malan, 2000). In the 1970s, the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (www.cael.org) was established (Book, 2014). It has been influential in defining how learning is acknowledged outside of the traditional classroom setting (Council on Adult and Experiential Learning, 2014). Alverno College was considered a pioneer when it launched its “Competence-Based Learning” program in 1973 (Alverno College, 2005).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), competency-based learning, “leads to better student outcomes because the pace of learning is customized to each student.”

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). It realized success in online programs for workers needing to gain additional education requirements or certifications to meet employment criteria. Many CBE programs provide credit to students for the learning that has occurred as part of their work experience (Klein-Collins & Baylor, 2013).

There are many post-secondary institutions that have long-established CBE models such as Charter Oak State College, Empire State College, Excelsior College, and Thomas Edison State College (Book, 2014). In addition, Western Governors University (WGU) is considered a pioneer in CBE as it established its programs in the 1990s (Klein-Collins & Baylor, 2013). In 2013, WGU reported serving 44,000 students and noted better performance results than other online program structures (Book, 2014).
Accountability is also a driver for CBE programs, especially in nursing. Organizations like Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN) collaborative and Nurse of the Future Core Nursing Competencies (NOF) set forth to define competency standards for nurses. Having competencies defined by those organizations helped the Center to Champion Nursing in America (CCNA) outline four models for CBE. Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Rhode Island are listed by CCNA as successful BSN program examples at the state level (Sroczynski, 2013).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), competency-based learning, “leads to better student outcomes because the pace of learning is customized to each student.” The DOE recognizes these influential efforts in K-12 learning settings at the secondary state, district, and school levels (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

In 2013, President Obama released a plan to make college more affordable. In his plan, the President seeks to, “award credits based on learning, not seat time. Western Governors University is a competency-based online university serving more than 40,000 students with relatively low costs — about $6,000 per year for most degrees — with an average time to a bachelor’s degree of only 30 months. A number of other institutions have also established competency-based programs, including Southern New Hampshire University and the University of Wisconsin system” (The White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2013).

The Competency-Based Education Network: A National Consortium for Designing, Developing, and Scaling New Models for Student Learning (www.cbenetwork.org) was formed in 2014. Its aim is to bring together a consortium of colleges and universities that will take part in funded, evidence-based research studies that will guide best practices.
for post-secondary education. Its website hosts public links to a resource library and open commentaries for CBE pioneers.

**Elsevier Products and Solutions that support Competency-Based Education**

Elsevier is well suited to provide the tools needed for educators and students participating in CBE programs. We develop competency-based content and course tools to align with national nursing and health professions standards recognized by professional organizations or established by accrediting and certification bodies, for instance:

- Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN)
- American Association of Colleges of Nursing, BSN Essentials
- Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES)
- Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP)
- American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA)
- And others

Elsevier engages subject matter experts in nursing and health professions to ensure our content meets curriculum requirements for accreditation. Our core textbooks, workbooks, and study guides are written to ensure the integration of the most up-to-date competencies and standards. In addition, we have learning tools that promote and reinforce student learning in a CBE environment, such as:

- **Elsevier Adaptive Learning and Quizzing** were created upon the premise that because individuals progress through the learning process at a different rate, traditional, one-size-fits-all learning approaches are largely ineffective. Adaptive Learning helps students not only learn but retain knowledge, and Adaptive Quizzing sets students on a self-directed, individualized learning path. Both are integrated with Elsevier’s core textbooks that are tagged to learning competencies and certification exams.

- **Virtual Clinical Excursions and Virtual Medical Office** guide students through virtual practice environments where the patients are “real.” Each lesson has a textbook reading assignment and activities based on what the student would experience in the workplace, providing a perfect environment for students to “practice” what they learn, at their own pace.

- **Simulated electronic health records (EHR)** with built-in assignments and guided texts allow students to practice EHR documentation at their own pace. The web-based platform makes it easy for instructors to provide real-time feedback to students prior to submitting assignments for grading.

- **HESI Review & Testing** combines expert exam development and trusted content from Elsevier texts to provide students with a preparation, testing, and remediation solution like no other. With HESI Custom Exams, you can construct an exam based on your individual curriculum and track students’ progress throughout your program. Robust reporting available with all HESI exams provides detailed, in-depth data into both individual student and program performance. All items are tagged to, and reported on, key nursing concepts, accreditation categories, and QSEN competencies. This data is useful in documenting the achievement of program outcomes and in preparing for program accreditation visits.
Elsevier provides **custom curriculum tools** that are personalized and mapped to the unique needs of your program. They give your school the power and flexibility to create print, digital, and curricular learning materials that are perfectly aligned with your program goals. Whether you need to tweak a textbook, organize an online course around assessment tools, or map your curriculum to certification standards, Elsevier has the expertise and resources to help you improve outcomes.

**Academic Consulting Group** gives you expert, unbiased, results-oriented recommendations for improving your program. We’ll work with you to identify your specific challenges, then match you with qualified consultants who are best suited to help. Our consultants are skilled at facilitating change and building internal consensus. They bring an invaluable, outside perspective to help your team identify and overcome your specific areas of concern such as developing new programs and evaluating or implementing changes to the curriculum, as well as in-service support and professional development.

**Conclusion**

With growing interest and emphasis on competency-based education, Elsevier Education is committed to empowering educators looking to approach learning in this way. Our existing products and solutions align with those objectives, and we continue to explore innovative solutions to meet the needs of students through a competency-based approach.
Works Cited


For more information on Competency-Based Education or Elsevier Education’s perspective on other trends in education, visit elsevieradvantage.com/perspectives