

# Competency-Based Education Programs

Including Credit-Based, Direct Assessment and Hybrid Programs

*Background Information*  
Institutions planning to offer competency-based education (CBE) programs are required to seek prior HLC approval by completing and submitting this application. Institutions should understand the [Common Framework for Defining and Approving Competency-Based Education Programs](https://download.hlcommission.org/C-RAC_CBE_Statement_6_2_2015.pdf) that was adopted by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) on June 2, 2015.  
  
Institutions planning to offer CBE programs that are considered for Title IV eligibility should also be aware that the U.S. Department of Education (the Department) requires that they obtain approval from their institutional accreditor prior to filing their applications with the Department.  
  
The Department’s longstanding guidelines published on [March 19, 2013](https://ifap.ed.gov/dear-colleague-letters/03-19-2013-gen-13-10-subject-applying-title-iv-eligibility-direct-assessment), and on [December 19, 2014](https://ifap.ed.gov/dear-colleague-letters/12-19-2014-gen-14-23-subject-competency-based-education-programs-questions), highlight that a course/credit-based competency-based program that requires approval by the accreditor is one where the program is organized or reorganized around competencies, not one where competencies have been added to existing courses.

## HLC’s Review Process

Competency-based education has two principal approaches: (1) a credit-based approach and (2) a direct assessment approach.

HLC’s policies and procedures for substantive change apply for these requests. Please refer to the [Substantive Change section of HLC’s website](https://www.hlcommission.org/change) (https://www.hlcommission.org/change). In addition, HLC’s Competency-Based Education Programs Substantive Change process follows various requirements:

Approval requirements are as follows:

**Credit-Based CBE Programs**. An institution must seek prior approval for its first two credit-based CBE programs. A credit-based CBE program requiring approval is one in which (1) the majority (51% or more) of the credits are offered through CBE or (2) the general education courses or the major courses are being converted to CBE and the program is organized around competencies.

Once HLC has approved the first two programs, an institution can add concentrations to the approved CBE programs, reformat other existing academic programs into CBE programs or add new academic programs in a credit-based CBE format provided that the institution does not add a program that would be a “significant departure” from its existing programs or would trigger the need for prior approval under HLC policies related to new academic programs.

Credit-based CBE programs that were offered prior to May 1, 2015, and reported to HLC through the survey sent in the spring of 2016 are included in the institution’s approvals. These programs are listed in an institution’s Institutional Status and Requirements (ISR) Report under Accreditation Stipulations.   
  
Note: Credit-based CBE programs that were offered prior to May 1, 2015, and are included in the institution’s approvals do **not** count toward the first two programs approvals.

**Direct Assessment Programs.** An institution must seek prior HLC approval for every direct assessment program and hybrid program, as well as every concentration (or any subset) of each direct assessment program that it intends to initiate (for example, within MBA, an MBA in Finance, MBA in Accounting, or MBA in International Business, or within engineering, in chemical engineering, electrical engineering, or c ivil engineering, etc.). An institution must file one application for each program. If an institution plans various concentrations of a program, it must separately address each concentration in the application. If an institution later seeks to add a new concentration for a direct assessment program or hybrid program previously approved by HLC, it will need to file a new application and seek approval for that new concentration.

### Other Related Considerations and Essential Program Components

Institutions should understand the difference between credit-based CBE and other initiatives, such as prior learning assessments, for example.

Proposed CBE programs are subject to federal definitions related to distance and correspondence education, and institutions should understand the significance of the interaction between students and faculty in these programs. If HLC finds that the proposed programs lack sufficient student-faculty engagement as outlined in the federal definitions of these concepts, HLC will require that the institution have appropriate HLC approvals for correspondence education prior to initiation of the proposed credit-based or direct assessment CBE programs in addition to the HLC approval required for credit-based or direct assessment CBE programs.

Institutions should also have carefully reviewed their credit hour policies and practices and made appropriate changes to encompass these new programs. Where the institution proposes reducing or eliminating “seat time” and credit-based units of measurement commonly used to enroll students and measure their progress, it must have determined “credit-hour equivalencies” for the program based upon its conventional assignment of credit hours across the institution.

Consequently, institutions should be prepared to demonstrate that their CBE programs (regardless of the chief mode of delivery, whether credit-based, direct assessment or a combination of the two) include the following essential components, as documented in the design of the program and its regular evaluation:

1. Faculty interaction with students is initiated on a regular basis by one or more faculty members who have subject matter expertise in the discipline of the course or program (and not performed by success coaches, academic mentors, graduate students or other individuals even if they have some subject-matter expertise).
2. Regular and substantive faculty interaction is explicitly designed in the curriculum and can be documented, and the quality of this interaction is evaluated in curriculum assessment and program review. (See [HLC’s Glossary](https://www.hlcommission.org/General/glossary.html) for a definition of regular and substantive interaction.)
3. Assessment of “credit hour equivalencies” for the competencies and student learning outcomes of the program in relation to the typical assignment of credit hours across the institution. (In order to corroborate this matter, all institutions that have not previously undergone a credit-hour evaluation in conjunction with a comprehensive evaluation will complete the Federal Credit Hour Worksheet and submit this form as part of the application. [If there are questions about whether an institution has previously completed a credit-hour review, contact the institution’s HLC staff liaison.])
4. The elements of good practice described below.

## Elements of Good Practice in Competency-Based Education

When determining whether to approve a competency-based program, HLC will expect institutions to demonstrate the following elements of good practice. These elements are derived from HLC’s [Criteria for Accreditation](http://www.hlcommission.org/Policies/criteria-and-core-components.html) and [Assumed Practices](http://www.hlcommission.org/policies/assumed-practices.html) and align with elements that it typically reviews in substantive change.

**Philosophy and Framework for Competency-Based Education.**The institution has a clearly defined purpose and philosophy undergirding its reason for developing and promoting competency-based education. It has clearly defined goals and a framework for its competency-based programs that ensures quality and learning.

**Structure and Coherence of the Program***.* The institution has outlined the structure of the competency-based program and established clearly defined competencies related to the program and the learning outcomes that students must attain to be awarded the credential. The program has a clearly-defined beginning, middle and end, and the institution has a mechanism for monitoring student progress towards acquisition of competencies and attainment of the credential being awarded at the end of the program. Expectations for student work and the means for assessing the learning and competencies acquired through that work are clearly defined. The competencies required for the program build a unified body of knowledge that is consistent with a discipline or career path; that is, they are not taken as merely discrete units or for desultory purposes.

**Application of Academic Policies***.* The institution has determined how its already-established academic policies in such areas as Satisfactory Academic Progress, academic discipline, probation and suspension apply to students in the competency-based program, and it makes appropriate amendments to its academic policies where appropriate. The institution shows how it determines when a student in the program is not making sufficient academic progress and should be moved to a traditional course-based format to complete his or her academic program or when other disciplinary action should be taken, including academic probation, suspension, or dismissal.

**Student Eligibility***.* The institution has a mechanism for determining prior to matriculation in the competency-based program whether a student has the capacity to complete the program (as demonstrated by tests of computer skills and sufficient academic preparation, for example) and therefore is eligible to enroll in that program. Even an open-admissions institution should have such a mechanism for determining a student’s eligibility to enroll in a competency-based program.

**Information to Students***.* The institution provides clear information to students outlining the structure and expectations of the program, tuition and fees, and academic policies that apply to students in the program. This information is clearly communicated to students prior to their matriculation.

**Student Support Services and Access to Academic Resources***.* The institution offers student support services that appropriately guide students in these programs; they must have the same access to learning resources as traditional students. In addition, the institution is prepared to assist students who drop out of a competency-based program in making the transition back to a traditional course-based format so as to ensure that those students can continue to progress towards a degree or certificate.

**Eligibility, Development, and Engagement of Faculty Members and Instructional Staff***.* Faculty members with subject matter expertise in the student’s discipline and in general education play a formative role in developing the student’s academic program. While faculty with subject matter expertise may design the curriculum, these faculty members must also engage regularly with students during the competency-based program, provide expert assistance and academic support to students in the program, and have a meaningful role in directing and reviewing the assessment of competencies as well as the student learning outcomes. Program faculty should be “qualified faculty” (institutions should refer to the Commission’s document, “Determining Qualified Faculty”) and not simply “subject matter experts,” graduate students, or other personnel. In addition, faculty should be well suited for delivering competency-based education by interest and experience and receive appropriate professional development and support from the institution in executing this role. While mentors or counselors may be assigned an important role in supporting or assisting students in direct assessment competency-based programs, they must not replace the essential role of faculty or instructors. For those programs that do assign mentors or counselors, the number of those individuals assigned to the program should be sufficient to work with enrolled students and must be qualified to advise students at the college level.

**Assessment of Student Learning***.* The competency-based program relies upon a strong foundation for the assessment of student learning outcomes that has been established by the institution, with demonstrated capacity to assess student work at the course and program level in both general education and in the major. At all levels, assessment supports academic improvement. The comprehensive student learning outcomes and goals of the program are reviewed regularly and reflect concepts generally agreed on by the related discipline(s).

**Evaluation and Improvement Systems**. The institution ensures that it regularly reviews its competency-based programs, particularly in the initial years of those programs, to ensure that it identifies any areas of weakness in the programs and makes immediate improvements.

**Distinguishing Direct Assessment Competency-Based Programs From Prior Learning Assessment***.* For those programs providing direct assessment options, applicants must show that direct assessments provided by the institution are clearly distinguished from the assessment of prior learning that may take place at the outset of the program. When students demonstrate competencies at the beginning of a program on the basis of prior learning, transcripts and other documents should make clear that those competencies are awarded as prior-learning credit. Once the institution has identified prior-learning credit for each student, other competencies should be awarded only after the student has completed the tasks, units, or modules that comprise the program’s curriculum and that demonstrate mastery of the competencies defined by it.

**Institutional Contribution**. The institution offering the competency-based program is able to identify and articulate the educational contribution its curriculum provides to students in the program. This contribution may take the form of learning units or modules, substantive engagement with faculty, academic exercises or performances, tests and other demonstrations of student learning or other activities that either expand the student’s knowledge beyond any prior learning that the student may have demonstrated at matriculation or that assist the student in documenting how prior learning translates to the attainment of competencies required for receiving an academic credential.

**Billing and Title IV***.* While the institution may charge a fee for its assessment of a student’s prior learning as well as its transcription of competencies, the institution charges tuition only for those courses, modules, components, and services that the institution contributes to the development or formation of the competency-based student or for the term or enrollment period in which the student is matriculated in the competency-based program. Similarly, the institution assists students in seeking Title IV student aid funds for those courses, modules or components of the educational program that the institution contributes to the development or formation of the student.

**Formal Processes for Evaluating Student Work***.* The institution has a mechanism for determining how courses, units, modules and competencies in the competency-based program are equivalent to traditional courses and credit hours in a conventional credit-hour-based program, and how they are related to accepted expectations of academic achievement and rigor, as based on the following principles:

1. Student work performed in competency-based programs (e.g., demonstrated mastery of tasks, assignments, or competencies) must be equivalent or superior to student work performed in traditional courses (e.g., successful completion of tests, assignments, or projects).
2. Student learning outcomes and goals in competency-based programs offered by the institution must be equivalent or superior to student learning outcomes and goals defined by the discipline in a traditional academic program.
3. The application of student learning assessments (e.g., examinations; portfolios; projects; capstone presentations; other recognized demonstrations of mastery; etc.) must be equivalent or superior to the outcome assessments that are used in traditional courses.

**Transcription of Student Work**. The institution is able to demonstrate that students in the competency-based program are achieving at least the same outcomes and goals, and at the same academic level of rigor, as in traditional programs and courses offered by the institution. For direct assessment programs, the institution prepares and maintains a transcript for each student documenting both the competencies earned and the equivalent courses or credit hours based on the expectations noted above. The transcript is prepared and updated during the course of the student’s academic program so that it is available in the event that a student transfers to another institution or drops out prior to completing the program. Such credit-hour equivalencies are also available at the program level for state and federal agencies and accrediting agencies that may need to review them. In addition, the transcript provides clear and sufficient information for other institutions and employers to understand the student’s accomplishments.

**External Contractors***.* If the institution has contracted with an external organization to provide some or the entire competency-based program, including course materials provided to students, the institution ensures that it retains sufficient control of the development and implementation of the program. The Commission’s policies for approval of contractual relationships requires the institution to seek approval of the contract at the same time it seeks approval to initiate a direct assessment competency-based program.

# Competency-Based Education Programs

Including Credit-Based, Direct Assessment and Hybrid Programs

Substantive Change Application

Institution:       City, State:

Name of person completing this application:

Title:       Phone:       Email:

Date Submitted:

This completed form will constitute your request for approval of a substantive change. This form will be the basis for review of this application. The questions are designed to elicit brief, succinct, detailed information, rather than a narrative or references to extensive supporting documents. Do not attach other documents unless they are specifically requested in the questions and are germane to the request. Excluding the appendix and attachments, the completed application form should be no more than 12–15 pages on a single classification of change. The total submission, including the appendix and attachments, should not exceed 200 pages.  
  
If the person completing this application is not the CEO, CAO or the Accreditation Liaison Officer of the institution, it is understood that the person completing and submitting this application has consulted with and informed those individuals and has been authorized to submit this form on the institution's behalf.  
  
Please note: HLC plans to update its application forms annually, on or about September 1 of each year. However, if an application form was accessed more than 90 days prior to filing, please visit [hlcommission.org/change](https://www.hlcommission.org/change) to ensure that there have been no changes to the form in the intervening time.  
  
Submit the completed application as a single PDF file at [hlcommission.org/upload](https://www.hlcommission.org/upload). Select “Change Requests” from the list of submission options to ensure the application is sent to the correct HLC staff member.

## Part 1: General Questions

1. **Requested Change(s).** Concisely describe the change for which the institution is seeking approval.
2. **Does another characteristic of the change requested in this application also require prior HLC approval?** (Example: contractual arrangement, new academic program, new additional location, etc.)

No

Yes

If yes, please briefly explain the second type of substantive change requiring prior HLC approval and submit the relevant application form separately (or indicate the date on which it was submitted):

1. **Classification of Change Request.***Note: not every substantive change requires prior review and approval. Visit* [*hlcommission.org/change*](https://www.hlcommission.org/change) *to make certain that current HLC policy requires the institution to seek approval.*

An institution submitting more than one change request should complete multiple applications, one for each type of change. Change requests may be related to the following topics:

• [New academic programs](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-academic-programs.html), including degree and certificate programs

• [New Pell-eligible prison education programs](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-pell-eligible-prison-education-programs.html) (also referred to as PEPs)

• [Changes to existing academic programs](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-clock-credit-hours-program-content-and-length-of-term.html) involving credit/clock hours, method of delivery

or length of term

• Opening or closing [additional locations or branch campuses](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-off-campus-activities.html)

• [Provisional Plans](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/provisional-plans-and-teach-outs.html) (with or without Teach-Out Agreements, as applicable)

• [Teach-Out Agreement](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/provisional-plans-and-teach-outs.html) if closing a campus or additional location that provides 100% of at least   
 one program

• Access to HLC’s [Notification Program for Additional Locations](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-off-campus-activities.html)

• Initiating or expanding [distance education offerings](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-distance-or-correspondence-education.html)

• Initiating or expanding [correspondence education offerings](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-distance-or-correspondence-education.html)

• Offering programs through [competency-based education](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-competency-based-education.html) (credit-based, direct assessment

or hybrid)

• Initiating or modifying [contractual arrangements](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-contractual-arrangements.html)

• Change in [mission](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-mission-or-student-body.html)

• Change in [student body](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/substantive-change-mission-or-student-body.html)

1. **Special conditions.** Indicate whether any of the conditions identified below fit the institution (Yes or No). If Yes, explain the situation in the space provided.
2. Is the institution, in its relations with other institutional or specialized accrediting agencies, currently under or recommended for a negative status or action (e.g., withdrawal, probation, sanction, warning, show-cause, etc.)?
3. Is the institution now undergoing or facing substantial monitoring, special review, or financial restrictions from the U.S. Dept. of Education or other federal or state government agencies?
4. Has the institution’s senior leadership or board membership experienced substantial resignations or removals in the past year?
5. Is the institution experiencing other pressures that might affect its ability to implement the proposal (e.g., a collective bargaining dispute or a significant lawsuit)?
6. **Internal Approvals.** Attach documentation of internal (faculty, board) approvals that the institution has obtained for the proposed change. **All required approvals must be obtained before submitting the application to HLC.** If no approval is required, attach evidence that approval is not needed (e.g. applicable regulation, statute or correspondence).
7. **State Approvals.** Attach documentation of state approvals that the institution has obtained for the proposed change. **All required approvals must be obtained before submitting the application to HLC.** If no approval is required, attach evidence that approval is not needed (e.g. applicable regulation, statute or correspondence).
8. **System Approvals.** If applicable, attach documentation of system approval that the institution has obtained for the proposed change. **All required approvals must be obtained before submitting the application to HLC.** If no approval is required, attach evidence that approval is not needed (e.g. applicable regulation, statute or correspondence). Check the box below if the institution is not part of a system.

Not Applicable

1. **Foreign Country Approval(s).** If applicable, attach documentation of foreign country approval(s) that the institution has obtained for the proposed change. Documentation must be written in or translated to English. **All required approvals must be obtained before submitting the application to HLC.** If no approval is required, attach evidence that approval is not needed. Check the box below if the proposed change is not related to offerings in a foreign country.

Not Applicable

1. **Specialized Accreditation.** Complete this section only if specialized accreditation is required for licensure or practice in program(s) covered by this change application.

The institution has already obtained the appropriate specialized accreditation. Attach a copy of the letter from the agency granting accreditation.

The institution has begun the process of seeking or plans to seek specialized accreditation. Specify the name of the agency and the timeline for completing the process in the space below. (If approval is a multi-stage process, the institution should contact the HLC staff liaison to discuss the timeline before submitting this change application form.)

The institution does not plan to seek specialized accreditation. Provide a rationale for not seeking this accreditation in the space below.

1. **Changes Requiring Visits.** This section is not for HLC-mandated visits such as additional location confirmation visits or campus evaluation visits.

Complete this section only if the institution is already aware that the proposed change will need to be reviewed through a visit. The institution may submit Part 1 of the change request application to begin the process of scheduling a Change Visit or adding the proposed change to an already scheduled visit. The full application must be submitted at a later date. (If the institution is unsure whether a visit is required, leave this section blank and submit the full change application. HLC will advise the institution based on the information provided.)

1. Select the type of visit the institution is requesting:

Request to schedule a Change Visit.

Change Visits typically are scheduled approximately four months from the date an institution submits its change request. The full change application and other required materials will be due to HLC and the peer review team eight weeks before the visit date. See [Change Visit: Required Materials and Submission Procedures](https://www.hlcommission.org/change-visit) for more information.or more information.

Request to embed a Change Visit into an already scheduled visit.

**Note:** Such requests must be submitted at least six months before the visit date. HLC staff will determine whether to embed a Change Visit based on peer reviewer availability and the complexity of the scheduled visit, among other factors. HLC may not be able to accommodate all requests.

Specify type of already scheduled visit and date scheduled:

The institution’s full change application should be submitted along with other materials required for the visit.

1. Provide URLs to the institution’s Faculty/Staff Handbook and Catalog below. If the URLs are not available, please provide PDF versions of these documents when submitting other required materials prior to the visit.

Faculty/Staff Handbook URL:

Catalog URL:

## Part 2: Topic-Specific Questions

An institution should submit a separate application for each requested program. Each proposed new program should be identified by using the [*Classification of Instructional Programs* terminology (CIP codes)](http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode/). CIP codes are established by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics as a taxonomic scheme that supports the accurate tracking and reporting of fields of study and program completions activity.

Application for (check one):

Credit-based CBE program(s)

Direct assessment program

Hybrid program

### Section A. Characteristics of the Change Requested

* 1. Identify the basic characteristics of the proposed educational program as indicated below:

1. The full name of the proposed program, the specific degree (if applicable) or the instructional level (if not a degree program), and the six-digit 2020 CIP code (XX.XXXX) of the program (CIP codes, program name, and additional description [optional])
2. The total credit hours (For a **credit-based** program, the total credit hours [indicate whether semester or quarter] for completion of the program; for a **direct assessment** program, the total credit hours upon which “credit-hour equivalencies” will be based; for a **hybrid program**, the percentage of the program that will be regular credit-based courses and the percentage of the program that will be either competency-based or direct assessment. *Note: See Section C, Question 8*)
3. Normal or typical length of time for students to complete the program (or equivalent measurement of expected duration)
4. Proposed initial date for implementation of the program
5. Primary target audience for the program (e.g., full-time, part-time, traditional college age, working adults, transfer students, military personnel, or particular ethnic group)
6. Whether the program will be part of contractual arrangement (see HLC’s website for a [definition of contractual arrangements](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/contractual-arrangements.html))

No

Yes

**Important:** If yes, complete the [Contractual Arrangement Screening Form](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/contractual-arrangements-screening-form.html) for each planned involvement to determine whether additional HLC approval is required.

* **If contractual approval is required:** Complete the full contractual application and submit it in conjunction with this application.
* **If approval is not required:** Attach the confirmation email from HLC to this application.

1. Whether the program will be offered as distance education or correspondence education (see HLC’s website for [definitions of distance and correspondence education](https://www.hlcommission.org/General/glossary.html))

No

Yes

**Important:** If yes, check the institution’s distance delivery stipulation in its [Institutional Status and Requirements Report](https://www.hlcommission.org/Accreditation/institutional-status-and-requirements-report.html). If this program does not fit within the institution’s current stipulation, submit a [distance education](https://download.hlcommission.org/change/DistanceEducationApplication_FRM.docx) or [correspondence education](https://download.hlcommission.org/change/CorrespondenceEducationApplication_FRM.docx) application in conjunction with this application.

### Section B. Institution’s History With Alternative Delivery Programs

* 1. Briefly describe the institution’s experience in delivering competency-based education prior to the development of this program.
  2. Briefly describe the institution’s experience with alternative delivery (distance, correspondence, accelerated, compressed format) programs and with degree-completion programs. List all programs and delivery methods.
  3. Does the institution currently offer a program at the same instructional level and with the same 4-digit 2020 CIP code (XX.XX) as the proposed program? If so, identify the program currently offered and whether it is a degree program. Identify all delivery formats in which the program is currently offered (distance, correspondence, accelerated, compressed). Will the proposed program replace the program currently offered in any of its current formats?
  4. Does the institution currently offer two or more programs at the same instructional level with the same 2-digit 2020 CIP code (XX.) as the proposed program? If so, identify the two such programs with the highest numbers of graduates during the past year, along with their numbers of graduates. Identify all delivery formats in which these two programs are currently offered (distance, correspondence, accelerated, compressed).

### Section C. Institutional Planning for Program Change

* 1. Describe the number of semester or quarter credit hours, or clock hours, that are delivered in the credit-based competency-based program(s) or, if a direct assessment program, which are equivalent to the amount of student learning being directly assessed for this program. If you are proposing a hybrid program, explain how student progress is measured in relation to credit hours or credit-hour equivalencies.
  2. Describe the methodology the institution uses to determine the number of credit or clock hours to which the direct assessment or hybrid direct assessment program is equivalent; if applicable, please coordinate this section with the information supplied on the Credit Hour Worksheet (see Appendix A).
  3. Explain how the institution’s financial aid systems are configured to handle the management of credit-based competency-based programs, direct assessment programs, and hybrid programs (if applicable), and whether the institution anticipates any challenges related to these systems. If the institution is an applicant to the Experimental Sites (ESI) program, please attach a copy of the application provided to the U.S. Department of Education that includes a description of the program(s) the institution intends to include in the ESI program.

### Section D. Curriculum and Instructional Design

For the questions in the section, provide evidence of the institution’s planning by responding to the following scenarios:

* 1. For undergraduate programs, consider an exceptional student with 58 credits who has transferred to your program with an excellent record of academic success across the liberal arts and who brings work experience in accounting that has earned 15 additional credits by means of a CAEL prior learning portfolio. How would such a student ideally progress through your program’s curriculum, and what would be the financial expectations for such a student (including tuition, fees, and expenses)? Why would such a student choose this program over other online or face-to-face degree-completion programs?
  2. For undergraduate programs, consider a marginal student who has struggled to accumulate 48 credits from several institutions across vastly different practice areas (e.g., early childhood education, land surveying, and occupational therapy), suggesting a disjointed and uneven academic history, complicated by mild learning disabilities and avoidance of liberal arts courses. Needing a great deal of academic and social support, the student lacks direction, focus, and a record of success. Describe how this student will be evaluated and assessed for short-term placement and long-term success in your program: what services will be provided and how would they be made available; how regularly would standard academic progress be evaluated and by whom? Finally, describe the cost of all services and options provided by the program.
  3. For graduate programs, provide an overview of the admissions requirements. Explain how the institution established learning outcomes for the program and communicated the expected process for attaining competencies in the program. If a professional or licensed program, how do those learning outcomes correspond to professional standards in the state?
  4. Choose the typical full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and staff member in the proposed program and describe each one’s role in terms of the number of students enrolled in the program. What is the expected typical weekly interaction between faculty and students? What is the expected typical weekly time commitment for students, including coaching, mentoring, teaching, assessing, documenting, etc., for a planned academic year or its equivalent?
  5. If your institution will be offering credit-based competency-based instruction, direct assessment competency-based instruction, and instruction that offers a combination of these approaches, or hybrid formats, what factors do you use to determine the adequacy of your program to meet your students’ needs and the appropriateness of the delivery options to meet the goals and desired outcomes of your program’s academic discipline?
  6. For direct assessment or credit-based programs, provide an inventory of competencies that will be expected of all students. If these are to be sequentially attained, indicate the intended sequence. Connect each competency to the faculty member(s) responsible for assigning the work and evaluating the credit or successful mastery of the competencies.

### Section E. Institutional Staffing, Faculty and Student Support

* 1. If the way the faculty are utilized in the proposed program is different from the way the faculty are utilized in the traditional, credit-hour based program, please explain.
  2. How does the institution define a full-time student? Identify whether the students in the proposed program will be full-time or part-time, matriculated or non-matriculated, etc.
  3. Establishment of Faculty and Their Credentials and Role

1. Identify the instructional personnel in the program. Refer to HLC’s “[Determining Qualified Faculty](https://www.hlcommission.org/Publications/determining-qualified-faculty.html)” document and [Assumed Practices](https://www.hlcommission.org/Policies/assumed-practices.html) (B.2) to identify the instructional personnel’s credentials and indicate which instructional personnel are subject-matter experts in the discipline of the proposed program and demonstrate the basis for that determination.
2. Identify the role of each of the instructional personnel in the program and, referring to HLC’s documents regarding faculty qualifications referenced above, specify how each functions in the implementation of the program.
   1. Regular and Substantive Interaction Between Faculty and Students
3. Regular

Identify every faculty member connected to the program with his/her credentials, title and experience in the academic discipline or field.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Credential** | **Title** | **Experience in the**  **Academic Discipline or Field** |
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Does the faculty member initiate communication on some regular basis with the student in the course(s)? If yes, provide explicit examples of how and when this occurs.

Does the student have a responsibility to initiate communication with the faculty member on some regular basis that is at least equivalent to contact in a traditional classroom? If yes, provide explicit examples of how and when this occurs.

1. Substantive

Describe the manner in which faculty respond to questions from students about academic content of the program. Describe the interaction between faculty and students in demonstrating competencies of the program material.

Demonstrate that in the tasks mastered to assure competency, faculty and students interact about critical thinking, analytical skills, written and oral communication abilities, etc., in the context of the course(s) in question with appropriate guidance by faculty.

Demonstrate that in the tasks mastered to assure competency, faculty and students interact about core ideas, important theories, current knowledge, etc., in the context of the course(s) in question with appropriate guidance by faculty.

**Section F. Evaluation and Assessment**

* 1. How will the institution measure whether a student has demonstrated mastery of a competency area and is making satisfactory academic progress in the program, and how will the institution determine when a student has withdrawn or changed enrollment status?
  2. Please explain the institution’s process for assessing student learning outcomes. How will the institution conduct program review and to whom will the evaluation be delivered? What other measures for ensuring academic quality will be measured and assessed, and who will be involved in the process?

Appendix A: Worksheet on the Assignment of   
Credit Hours and Clock Hours

Instructions

This worksheet should be completed by the person(s) at the institution who knows the most about the institution’s calendar and credit hour assignments; at many institutions the registrar may be the appropriate person to complete this worksheet. The person(s) completing the worksheet should work closely with the institution’s financial aid officer to ensure consistency between what is reported to HLC on this form and what is reported to the U.S. Department of Education (hereafter referred to as “the Department”).  
  
Note that according to the 2022-2023 Federal Student Aid Handbook: “For *undergraduate* educational programs, the law and regulations set the following minimum standards for coursework earned by a full-time student in an academic year:   
  
• 24 semester or trimester credit hours or 36 quarter credit hours for a program measured in credit   
 hours; or  
  
• 900 clock hours for a program measured in clock hours.   
  
For *graduate and professional* programs, there is no minimum number of hours in an academic year.”

## Purpose

This form provides the peer review team with a single source of information about the institution’s calendar, credit hour policies and total credit hour generation related to the courses for which it provides instruction, and an overview of the institution’s pattern of distribution of credit hour assignments. **It is not an inventory of every course the institution offers.** The institution should:

* Report on academic terms and credit for courses that support the institution’s certificate and degree programs.
* When appropriate, include in the form brief explanations of the allocation of credit hours.
* Estimate or round off where appropriate.
* **Not** include prior learning, transfer, etc., wherein the institution awards credit but does not provide instruction associated with that credit

Peer reviewers will use this completed worksheet as part of their evaluation of the institution’s proposal to create a viable “credit hour equivalency" formula that is appropriate to the CBE program proposed in this application.

## Section 1: Institutional Calendar, Term Length and Type of Credit

Institutions using multiple calendars across the institution may need to complete more than one area of the chart below.For more information about the terminology and calendaring units referenced in this form, see the [2022-2023 “Federal Student Aid Handbook,” Volume 3, Chapter 1, “Academic Calendar, Payment Periods and Disbursements.”](https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/fsa-handbook/2022-2023/vol3/ch1-academic-years-academic-calendars-payment-periods-and-disbursements)

**Institution name:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Calendar** | **Term** | **Column 1**  **Term Length: Number of Weeks** | **Column 2**  **Number of Starts** |
| **Semester / Trimester Calendar** | Standard Format:  14 to 17 week term |  |  |
| Compressed Formats:  4, 8 or other week terms within the semester calendar1 |  |  |
| Summer Term |  |  |
| **Quarter Calendar** | Standard Format:  10 to 12 week term |  |  |
| Compressed Formats:  2, 5 or other week terms within the quarter calendar1 |  |  |
| Summer Term |  |  |

1If an institution offers a summer term that is different in length than the typical fall semester, it should report summer term information in this section.

**Non-standard Terms** (terms that are not semesters, trimesters or quarters. A non-standard term may have the following characteristics: courses do not begin and end within a set period of time; courses overlap terms, including self-paced and independent study courses or sequential courses that do not begin and end within a term; terms may be of equal or unequal length.)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Calendar** | **Term** | **Column 1**  **Term Length: Number of Weeks** | **Column 2**  **Number of Starts** | **Column 3**  **Type of Credit** |
| **Non-standard Term Calendar** | Term One |  |  |  |
| Term Two |  |  |  |
| Term Three |  |  |  |
| Summer Term |  |  |  |

**Degree Programs (Optional)**What is the length in semester or quarter hours or other applicable units of each of the institution’s degree programs? Institutions with programs at different degree levels may include a list here if an expanded answer is required.

## Section 2. Format of Courses and Number of Credits Awarded

In this section, the institution provides an overview of the pattern of instructional hours required for the credit hours it awards. The sample form provides a suggested approach for conveying that information to the peer review team. The institution may make modifications to the chart’s format or add brief notes as appropriate to explain credit hour awards, particularly in non-standard or compressed-format classes.

If the institution offers multiple types of terms, such as a compressed-format term and a regular semester term, it should **complete a separate form for each type of term identified in Section 1**. Separate forms will help the peer review team understand how instructional time is related to credit hour awards in each term. The information in this section need not be extensive so long as it explains how credit hours are awarded across various formats at the institution.

This section should not be used to demonstrate that the institution assigns credit hours appropriately in regard to non-contact-hour requirements such as out-of-class group meetings or homework assignments. That issue may be addressed in the institution’s credit hour policy, and may be evaluated by the peer review team in the sample of institutional programs it examines during the visit.

Period Reported

An institution may use any recent term that appropriately depicts its credit hour allocations as the basis for completing the *Form for Reporting an Overview of Credit Hour Allocations and Instructional Time for Courses* below.

Key to Rows

* Number of Courses—Count each course offered by the institution in the row corresponding to the number of credits awarded and the column or columns representing the format of delivery through which the course or a section of the course is offered. Do not count sections of the same course if the sections are offered in the same delivery format.
* Number of Meetings—Enter the total number of class meetings (or equivalent) provided in each course with each credit award during the term reported; if the number of class meetings varies, enter a range. For distance, correspondence or other formats, report on instructional time. Do not include study or other time during which students work independently or with other students even though such time may be provided to replace time with a faculty member. Instructional time need not be limited to time spent with all students in the class in a single format.
* Include labs or discussions in the number of meetings if they are a required element of the course, if they do not have a separate course number or credit hour allocation, and if the presence of a lab or discussion is considered significant when the institution assigns credit hours to the course. If a lab or discussion does not meet these considerations, it need not be reflected in this chart.
* Meeting Length—Enter the range (shortest to longest) of meeting times in each category. (*Note:* One hour may be 50 minutes of actual instructional time.)

Key to Columns

* **FTF (face-to-face) and Mixed FTF Courses:** The following definitions arise from HLC’s definition of a distance education course. Institutions may use other thresholds for FTF courses and Mixed FTF courses provided that they define them clearly and include the definition on this worksheet.  
    
  ***FTF Courses:*** Courses in which instructors interact with students in the same physical space for 75% or more of the instructional time. ***Mixed FTF Courses:*** Courses in which instructors interact with students in the same physical space for less than 75% of the instructional time, with the remainder of the instructional time provided through distance or correspondence education.
* **Distance Education Course:** A course in which at least 75% of the instruction and interaction occurs using one or more of the technologies listed in the definition of distance education in [HLC’s Glossary](https://www.hlcommission.org/General/glossary.html), with the faculty and students physically separated from each other.
* **Correspondence Education Course:** A course provided by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructors. Interaction between instructors and students in a correspondence course is limited, not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the students. If a course is part correspondence and part residential training, it is considered a correspondence education course. A correspondence education course is not distance education.
* **Independent/Directed Study:** Courses in which instructors interact with students through a flexible format.
* **Weekend College:** Some institutions may have an evening or weekend college that, while on the same calendar, may structure its courses and credit assignments differently than the same courses offered during the regular day. If courses are offered in the evening or on the weekend as another scheduling option for students, but the courses provide similar class meetings or instructional time as those courses offered by the institution during the regular day, the institution need not report evening or weekend courses in this category.
* **Internships or Practica:** Some institutions may provide internship or practica experiences for which credits are awarded. Institutions that have professional schools in medicine, law, nursing, physical therapy, etc., which often require internships or practica with high credit allocations, should provide brief summative information about the internships but need not include them in the report form.

Examples

* If the institution offers Calculus 210, a three credit-hour course, in FTF and distance formats as well as through the Weekend College, the course should be reported in the row for 3 credits and once in each column corresponding to each course format offered.
* If the institution offers that course in a full 14–17-week standard format as well as in a compressed format, the course should be reported on one form for the standard format and on a separate form for the compressed format.
* If in the FTF format instructors meet with students two times per week for 1.5 hours per meeting for the 14 weeks of the term, the number of meetings should be reported as 28 meetings, and the length of each meeting as 1.5 hours.

Direct Assessment or Other Competency-Based Education Program Credit Hour Equivalencies

Complete the questions following the chart with regard to direct assessment or other competency-based education programs.

### Form for Reporting an Overview of Credit Hour Allocations and Instructional Time for Courses

Using the above instructions, complete the following table to provide an overview of the pattern of instructional hours required for the credit hours the institution awards.

Please note:

1. **Courses with six or more credits awarded:** You may add rows to the table if the institution offers courses with six or more credits awarded. In addition, identify the course(s) and explain the reasoning behind the credit allocated to those courses in a narrative.
2. **Multiple term lengths:** If the institution reported multiple term lengths in Section 1, Columns 1 and 2, duplicate the table below and complete a separate table for each term length specified.

If applicable, the narrative regarding courses with six or more credits and/or the additional tables for other term lengths may be entered in this section or attached as **Supplement A1**.

**Specify the Term and Length:**(e.g., “Spring 2023, 16 weeks” OR “Spring 2023, 5 weeks”)

| **Number of Credits Awarded** | **Instructional Time** | **Course Formats** | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| FTF | Mixed FTF | | Distance | Corresp. | Independent/ Directed Study | WeekendCollege | Internship or Practica |
| 1 Credit | Number of courses |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Number of meetings |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Meeting length |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2 Credits | Number of courses |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Number of meetings |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Meeting length |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3 Credits | Number of courses |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Number of meetings |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Meeting length |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4 Credits | Number of courses |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Number of meetings |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Meeting length |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 5 Credits | Number of courses |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Number of meetings |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Meeting length |  | |  |  |  |  |  |  |

### Other Courses Not Reported

List below any other courses that were not included in the *Form for Reporting an Overview of Credit Hour Allocations and Instructional Time for Courses*. Identify the course names, the number of credits allocated, a brief description of how instruction takes place in these courses and how many hours of instruction are provided. (Such courses might include travel, summer term or other courses that do not fit in the columns above because they have a different delivery format.)

### Direct Assessment or Other Competency-Based Education Programs

An institution must demonstrate that any direct assessment or other competency-based education programs that it offers have appropriate credit hour equivalencies.

1. Provide a list of the academic programs available in direct assessment or competency-based format and the required credit hours for each program. Identify the learning objectives for each such program.
2. Explain how the institution sets credit hour equivalencies for these courses and programs and otherwise ensures that students have sufficient instructional time and out-of-class work to justify the credit allocations for the courses and programs.
3. How does the institution’s credit hour policy explain credit hour allocations or equivalencies established by the institution for these types of offerings?
4. Identify aggregate learning outcomes information the institution has collected for direct assessment and competency-based programs and explain how the institution reviewed this information and considered it in academic program review and its improvement processes.

## Section 3: Policy on Credit Hours

Does the institution have a policy specific to the assignment of credit?

Yes

No

The institution has policies specific to the assignment of credit at the following levels (check all that apply):

Institution-wide

Delivery-format-specific

Department-specific

Program-specific

Attach copies of all applicable policies related to the assignment of credit as **Supplement A2**.

## Section 4: Total Credit Hour Generation

How many credits does a typical full-time or part-time **undergraduate** student take during a regular term? Enter “Not Applicable” if the institution does not have undergraduate students.

How many credits does a typical full-time or part-time **graduate** student take during a regular term? Enter “Not Applicable” if the institution does not have graduate students.

If applicable, provide the head count of **undergraduate** students earning more than the typical credits taken during a regular term in the most recent fall and spring semesters/trimesters (or the equivalent, for institutions with quarters or non-standard terms).

Most Recent Fall Term:

Head Count:

Most Recent Spring Term:

Head Count:

If applicable, provide the head count of **graduate** students earning more than the typical credits taken during a regular term in the most recent fall and spring semesters/trimesters (or the equivalent, for institutions with quarters or non-standard terms).

Most Recent Fall Term:

Head Count:

Most Recent Spring Term:

Head Count:

## Section 5: Clock Hours

Only complete this section if the institution (1) offers any programs in clock hours or (2) offers programs that must be reported to the U.S. Department of Education in clock hours for Title IV purposes, even though students may earn credit hours for graduation from these programs.   
  
Check with the institution’s financial aid officer to determine if the institution has programs of this nature. Such programs typically include those that must be identified in clock hours for state licensure of the program or where completing clock hours is a requirement for graduates to apply for licensure or authorization to practice the occupation. Such programs might include teacher education, nursing or other programs in licensed fields.  
  
**Federal Formula for Minimum Number of Clock Hours of Instruction (34 CFR §668.8(l)):**  
 1 semester hour or trimester hour must include at least 30 clock hours of instruction  
 1 quarter hour must include at least 20 clock hours of instruction

Does the institution (1) offer any programs in clock hours or (2) offer any programs that must be reported to the U.S. Department of Education in clock hours for Title IV purposes?

No

Yes

**If the answer is Yes, provide the following information:**

Attach as **Supplement A3** a list of the academic programs that are reportable in clock hours based on the information above.

Does the list in Supplement A3 match the list submitted to the U.S. Department of Education?

Yes

No

What is the institution’s credit-to-clock-hour conversion policy?

If the credit-to-clock-hour conversion numbers are less than the federal formula, what are the specific requirements, if any, for student work outside of class?

Attach the institution’s last E-App as **Supplement A4.**

Attach the institution’s ECAR as **Supplement A5.**

Attach the institution’s most recent program review as **Supplement A6.**

## Part B: Supplemental Materials

The institution must include with this document the following supplements as PDF documents.

* Attach a copy of the catalog or other document that contains course descriptions and applicable credit hour assignments as **Supplement B1**.
* Attach the catalog or other document in which the institution has marked or highlighted any course provided by the institution in non-standard terms or compressed format for the term reported. This information can also be provided on a separate list that identifies those courses and how to find them in the course catalog. Attach this document as **Supplement B2**.
* Attach as **Supplement B3** the course schedule for the most recently completed fall and spring terms, including times and meeting dates for all classes at all locations and in all delivery formats. If the course schedule is not available as a separate document, include a URL to access this information online. If a password is required to access this information, include that password.

*Note:* The peer review team may ask for additional data to examine credit hour production by educational program and by course. These data may include separate breakdowns for general education as well as by delivery format, by course academic unit (semester, quarter, etc.)