

Common Framework for Competency-Based Education Programs Announced

By Don Sutherland

On June 2, 2015, the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) released a joint statement setting forth criteria that accrediting agencies will use to define and approve competency-based education programs. The Council is comprised of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE); the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (CIHE, NEASC); the Higher Learning Commission (HLC); the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU); the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC); the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACCJC/WASC); and, the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC).

According to C-RAC's press release, interest in competency-based education programs has been increasing. Competencies are things students can do with the knowledge they attain, not the knowledge itself.

The following are among the considerations accrediting agencies within C-RAC will use to evaluate competency-based education:

- Whether the institution “demonstrates the capacity to offer competency-based or direct assessment programs, including administrative capacity and significant expertise in assessment to ensure the reliability and validity of assessments.”
- Whether “most learning outcomes emphasize performance, not simply knowledge.”
- Whether “competencies are externally referenced (e.g., by convened groups of employers, professional advisory committees, or licensure requirements).”
- Whether the college or university “follows good practices in assessment and measurement (e.g., determines reliability and validity, has multiple forms or prompts for each competency).”
- Whether “the institution validates the quality of its program through feedback from students and graduates...”