

Statement on Competency-based Assessment of Student Learning

The Intersegmental Committee of Academic Senates (ICAS) recognizes the range and diversity of learning experiences beyond the traditional classroom setting that are available to today's undergraduates. ICAS acknowledges, moreover, that, in many cases, awarding credit for demonstrable achievement can ensure that individual students are placed in learning environments most appropriate to their skill levels and where they will flourish and make steady progress toward the attainment of a degree. As the undergraduate population becomes more diverse the so-called "nontraditional" student pursuing a college degree becomes as much the norm as the exception (for example, career professionals returning to college, military personnel, mature students seeking retraining). Therefore ICAS recognizes the place competency-based assessment can have in helping students realize their goals of degree attainment. For some time, opportunities such as credit for advanced placement (AP) courses have provided students entering college directly from high school the chance to demonstrate mastery of subject matter. Evolving undergraduate demographics raise the question of how to provide such opportunities to a heterogeneous student body, not just those beginning their college work immediately after high school.

ICAS also holds strong reservations regarding the epithet "seat time," a term increasingly used to justify the advantages of alternative competency-based assessment over classroom and laboratory experiences. "Seat time" is a misnomer, suggestive of a standard of mere attendance, while inferring that passivity, and even disengagement, in a college classroom are the trademarks of the undergraduate academic experience; in contrast, ICAS supports and encourages those best practices of active learning that lead to a quality education at our institutions. In this position ICAS is in concert with the conclusion of a recent article published in *Liberal Education*, the journal of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U):

Fostering students' curiosity about the world requires that they be immersed for a part of their lives in an environment that treats intellectual inquiry—not demonstrating competence—as the highest goal. Competency-based education can improve the quality of college education by helping colleges and disciplines identify some of the specific skills and knowledge that they want their graduates to exhibit, but it will always be just a part of the overall picture. A good collegiate education also offers intellectual experiences not available elsewhere that can change a life and last a lifetime. (<http://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/le-fa13/neem.cfm>)

As the AAC&U notes, common experience in the academic environment is an aspect of education that competency-based credit cannot replicate, and therefore the awarding of credit based on competency must take place only after careful consideration and analysis of its appropriateness in light of the specific circumstances of students' non-academic experience as well as the overall educational program.

Ultimately, it is the faculty who are most qualified to determine whether and how credit should be awarded for competency achieved outside of the traditional classroom or laboratory setting. The discipline expertise of the faculty must be the final arbiter in decisions regarding college credit for competency as well as how those units should be applied in the student's overall program—that is, as units toward general education requirements, major requirements, or electives, and what proportion of a given degree can be achieved through competency-based means. Faculty at an individual institution should have oversight and thus have the right to employ, or decide not to employ, competency-based assessments in awarding credit for students who demonstrate that they have acquired knowledge and skills outside the classroom setting, whether those assessments are designed and administered within their institutions or extramurally.