



AT SOUTHERN NEW HAMPSHIRE UNIVERSITY

# Assessing Direct Assessment

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What is “Direct Assessment”?

What challenges does it present?

Why is important?

How does it work at College for America?

# What is “Direct Assessment”?

- **Term of art** in educational testing  
Distinguishes between **indirect** assessment of student learning (e.g., NSSE) and **direct** assessment of student learning (e.g., exam, project, portfolio)
- **Provision of Title IV**  
Allows **instructional programs** that use **direct assessment of student learning in lieu of credit hours or clock hours** to be eligible to offer federal financial aid
- **Synonym for Competency-Based Education (CBE)**



# Which is it?

- ☑ Term of art in educational policy
- ☑ Provision of Title IV
- ☑ Synonym for Competency-Based Education (CBE)

All of the Above



# What does the regulation say?

Instead of using credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, **instructional** programs may use **direct assessment** of student learning.... Examples of direct measures include projects, papers, examinations, presentations, performances, and portfolios.





## However...

The school's application must “specify the **equivalent number of credit or clock** hours for a direct assessment program” and “explain how it determined the equivalent number of credit or clock hours for the program, i.e., its **methodology** for determining these equivalencies.”



# What is the problem?

- The regulations constrain CBE because they
  - Focus on measuring seat time, not learning
  - Focus on “instruction” (inputs), not outcomes
- No aid for Prior Learning Assessment
- Hybrid programs not eligible

*Ex-sites designed to address these limitations*



# Why is Direct Assessment important?

- Many CBE models are possible, as WGU has shown
- CfA provides:
  - Competency-focus rather than course-focus
  - Authentic, project-based learning
  - Synthesis of assessment and curriculum
  - Close working relationship with employers
  - Integration of competencies
  - Evidence of what students can do with what they know



# First CfA Offering

## AA in General Studies



- Extremely **low cost** (\$2,500 per, year all-inclusive)
- **Online** and **Employer Supported**
- Flexible: **self-paced** and self-directed
- Organized around 120 **competencies**, not courses
- **Mastery** not grades (or seat time)

# What we mean by “competencies”

- Measurable, observable behavior
- Claims about what a student knows and can do
- Examples:
  - Can negotiate with others to resolve conflicts and settle disputes
  - Can speak effectively in order to persuade or motivate
  - Can define and use marketing terminology and concepts
  - Can generate a variety of approaches to addressing a problem
  - Can distinguish fact from opinion
  - Can convey information by creating charts and graphs



# AA in General Studies

## Liberal Arts **and** Workforce Relevance

### Foundational skills



Communication skills



Critical and creative thinking



Quantitative skills



Digital fluency and information literacy

### Personal and social skills



Personal effectiveness



Ethics and social responsibility



Teamwork and collaboration

### Content knowledge



Business Essentials



Science, society and culture



# How does direct assessment work at CfA?

## What Are They Really Selling?

Status: *Scheduled*



### COMPETENCIES TO MASTER

<input type="checkbox"/>	Can define, explain and use mass media terms and concepts
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can critique and evaluate mass mediated messages
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can identify and analyze ethical issues presented by social and mass media
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can create an extended presentation

### Overview

It's the day after the Super Bowl and everyone is talking about the commercials that aired at halftime, not about the game. What makes commercial or print advertising so compelling? And how can we be sure we're seeing the whole picture—not just what the advertisers are trying to sell us? In this Project, you will create a presentation that addresses these issues.

### Directions

You volunteer at a community youth center and believe it is important to encourage media awareness among young people. You want to arm them with the terms and concepts necessary to analyze and “deconstruct” the messages they see on television and in other mass media. You decide to create a presentation that will show them what's really going on in the commercials they admire. Use the Presentation Planner document in Project Resources to prepare your presentation.

Students demonstrate mastery of competencies by **completing Projects** – authentic, engaging activities that enable students to **learn by doing**

### Examples:

- Assessing the environmental impact of plastic bottles
- Curating a virtual art exhibit
- Creating a marketing plan
- Developing a budget for international travel



# Trained evaluators provide prompt, targeted and actionable feedback



- Trained educators (“Reviewers”) with advanced degrees and subject-matter expertise evaluate student work
- Reviewers provide detailed feedback with comments and rubrics within 48 hours of submission
- Every project is evaluated as “Mastered” or “Not yet”
- Students can revise and resubmit projects until they demonstrate mastery—there is no failure
- Every competency must be mastered to obtain degree

# Student Response

- 100% either plan to re-enroll, graduate, or go on to the BA
- 92% are employed full-time
- 85% said field of study is closely or very closely related to current job
- 77% have taken some college courses; 84% have no degree or certificate
- 94% rate Learning Coaches as good or very good
- 95% rate Reviewers as good or very good
- 93% agree or strongly agree that CfA projects will help with career goals
- 72% agree or strongly agree that CfA has helped increase their current job skills
- 92% would recommend or strongly recommend CfA to family, friends, co-workers
- 71% agree or strongly agree that completing CfA will allow them to change jobs
- 89% expect to have \$0 (57%) or <\$5,000 debt upon completing program
- 100% believe CfA is good value

*Nearly all say CfA has met or exceeded their expectations*



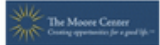
# Benefits to Employers

Anthem.



City of  
Memphis

ConAgra  
Foods  
Food you love



Students come into CfA through industry partners – over 65 and growing. Employers have told us they partner with CfA because:

**It's accountable.** Employers know that students only get credit for mastery, not seat time.

**It's achievable.** A strong support system of Learning Coaches and a robust learning community makes success more possible than ever before for many students.

**It's relevant.** While the program is a general studies, liberal arts degree, it enables students to develop – and demonstrate – critical skills that employers need.

