Competency-Based Learning in the United States: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract
The environment of online education has blossomed in the last decade in the United States, as well as in the rest of the world. Many different approaches have been used to provide students with a more convenient, still very high quality education that can help them to acquire the knowledge and to develop the necessary competencies to achieve success in their careers.

Competency-based education has emerged recently as an alternative targeting a specific audience of learners that have developed skills prior to getting a formal education in those areas. By being able to assessing those competencies, competency-based programs can recognize the “learning-by-doing” that students have formerly been exposed to, therefore accelerating the completion of degrees and guaranteeing that students can bridge the gap between the knowledge acquired and the actions employers expect to have when hiring the graduates.

Competency-based education, however, is not new to the United States or the educational system; it has been used for years in corporate training as well as trade schools. With that in mind, this review of literature will examine the history of competency education and the current trends in best practices.

Keywords
Online education, Competency Development, Higher Education,
Bios

Carlos Tasso Eira De Aquino, Ph.D. is the University Research Chair for the Center for Workplace Diversity Research, University of Phoenix. His educational background includes a B.Sc. in Civil Engineering (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), and a M.Sc. in Structural Engineering (The George Washington University), a Ph.D. in Sciences and Nuclear Technology (University of São Paulo, Brazil), and two post-doctoral degrees - Mechanical Engineering, and Business and Entrepreneurship (State University of Campinas, Brazil). Dr Aquino can be reached at Dr. Aquino at WorkplaceDiversity@phoenix.edu.

Jennifer Cunningham, Ph.D. is the Assistant Dean of Competency Based Education for the University of Phoenix. Her culmination of experience as an educational leader, instructional designer, faculty member and student has given Jennifer a well-rounded experience to innovate and take curriculum to the next level. Her main focus over the last two years has been the strategic planning and deployment of competency education for several online institutions. She understands the time and attention it takes to design and administer a quality competency program with superior assessments, valid competencies and adaptive curriculum selection. Jennifer hold a Doctorate from Capella University in Education with an emphasis on Instructional Design for Online Learning, Master of Leadership and Master of Information System Security.