

Competency-Based Education Network

Response to Inspector General’s Report on Western Governors University

September 21, 2017 – The Office of Inspector General within the U.S. Department of Education today issued an audit critical of Western Governors University’s (WGU) competency-based education programs, suggesting they are not providing the “regular and substantive” faculty interaction with students as is required for federal financial aid.

WGU is a member of the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN), which is a diverse group of public and private organizations such as colleges, universities, state systems and service providers collaborating to address the shared challenges of designing, developing and scaling high-quality competency-based education programs. WGU represents one of many models of competency-based education nationwide.

Federal financial aid must be spent in ways that support student learning and provide safeguards against fraud and abuse of these funds. It is important to note that the requirement for regular and substantive interaction applies to distance education programs, not CBE programs specifically. CBE programs are sometimes offered via distance education, but other delivery modalities are also used.

C-BEN believes that while the Inspector General is following the letter of the law, the federal laws governing financial aid need to be updated. The 1992 law reinforces the status quo in higher education by relying on an outdated view of how learning takes place. This leaves little room for proven innovations informed by research in learning sciences, academic program design, learning assessment and education technology to be put in service of students. These innovations in CBE have led members of both parties in Congress to laud competency-based education.

Competency-based education offers high-quality education that is both affordable and convenient for millions of Americans, many of whom may not otherwise be able to gain the competencies and earn the credentials they need. In order to help a growing field ensure that emerging programs and credentials are well designed, C-BEN has released the [Quality](#)

[Framework for Competency-Based Education Programs](#) that are used in the development of high-quality programs. This framework can provide guideposts and assurances to policymakers and accreditors tasked with regulating this vibrant, and still emerging, field of practice, while also ensuring that learners' needs are met and tuition dollars are well spent. In addition, these principles can help students understand what they should expect from a CBE program.

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