Competencies for Competency Based Higher Education: A Delphi Study

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Competencies for Competency Based Higher Education: A Delphi Study

A Dissertation by
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Brandman University
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School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

January 2017

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ABSTRACT

Competencies for Competency Based Higher Education: A Delphi Study

by Cathryn Grammer Margolin

**Purpose:** It was the purpose of this study to identify the important competencies necessary in the workplace for graduates from a competency based education (CBE) program for the bachelor of business administration (BBA) degree, and the learning activities that best support the teaching of those competencies as perceived by human resource (HR) experts working in business.

**Methodology:** This study used a modified policy Delphi design to identify the competencies needed for a CBE BBA program. HR professionals completed three rounds of surveys to identify and prioritize competencies, and then offered suggestions for learning activities to contribute to CBE BBA students mastering those competencies.

**Findings:** Findings were derived from the data collected. Round 1 resulted in the identification of 10 competencies, primarily comprised of soft skills. In Round 2, the competencies were rated and narrowed to the top five, which focused on collaboration, interpersonal skills, written communication, decision-making, and problem-solving. Round 3 enumerated learning activities to support these competencies.

**Conclusions and Recommendations:** Graduates of a CBE BBA program need skills that will help them excel in business. Soft skills were identified as competencies needed in the workforce. A variety of learning activities were detailed by the HR professionals to assist in developing these competencies.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................ 1  
Background ......................................................................................................................... 2  
Higher Education from a Student Perspective .............................................................. 3  
Higher Education Alternatives ...................................................................................... 3  
Competency Based Education ...................................................................................... 4  
Bachelor of Business Administration ........................................................................... 4  
Competencies ................................................................................................................ 5  
Statement of the Research Problem .................................................................................... 6  
Purpose Statement ............................................................................................................... 7  
Research Questions ......................................................................................................... 8  
Significance of the Problem ............................................................................................ 8  
Definitions of Terms ....................................................................................................... 10  
Delimitations .................................................................................................................. 12  
Organization of the Study ............................................................................................... 12  

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .......................................................... 13  
Higher Education .............................................................................................................. 13  
The Supply: Sources of Revenue ................................................................................ 15  
The Demand: Higher Education from a Student Perspective ..................................... 16  
California Higher Education Issues ............................................................................ 17  
Higher Education Alternatives .......................................................................................... 18  
Online Learning .......................................................................................................... 18  
Hybrid/Blended Classes .............................................................................................. 20  
Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) ................................................................... 21  
Competency Based Education .................................................................................... 22  
Credit Hour ....................................................................................................................... 23  
History of Competency Based Education ....................................................................... 24  
Early Years of Competency Based Education ............................................................ 25  
Prior Learning Assessment ........................................................................................ 25  
Sputnik in the 1960s .................................................................................................... 25  
Bloom’s Taxonomy .................................................................................................... 26  
Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education in the 1970s ........................ 28  
Adult Performance Learning....................................................................................... 28  
Competency Based Education Public Opinion ................................................................. 30  
Bachelor of Business Administration Competency Based Education .............................. 34  
Competencies .................................................................................................................... 34  
Core Components of Competencies.................................................................................. 37  
Research Gap .................................................................................................................... 37  
Conclusions ....................................................................................................................... 38  

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY .................................................................................. 41  
Overview ........................................................................................................................... 41  
Research Design................................................................................................................ 42  
The Delphi Method ........................................................................................................ 42
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Total Students Enrolled in a Distance Education Course ......................... 20
Table 2. Industries of Study Respondents ............................................................. 58
Table 3. Competencies Perceived as Important for Graduates of a CBE BBA Program . 60
Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Round 2 ........................................................... 62
Table 5. Competency 1: Team Skills, Collaborating, Relationship Building ............ 65
Table 6. Competency 2: Interpersonal Skills/Social Perceptiveness ........................ 65
Table 7. Competency 3: Written Communication and Comprehension .................. 66
Table 8. Competency 4: Decision-Making ............................................................. 67
Table 9. Competency 5: Problem-Solving Learning .............................................. 67
Table 10. Summary of Learning Activities Cited by Multiple HR Professionals ....... 68
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Generic Building Blocks Competency Model................................................ 366
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The development of an educated, competent workforce in the business realm is important to the future economic strength and vitality of the United States. Competency based education (CBE) programs offered a straightforward and efficient method for delivering bachelor of business administration (BBA) degrees. Among the many changes in higher education underway, the delivery of CBE programs was one innovation that offered much promise (Schejbal, 2014).

Many changes in higher education occurred in the last five years. The recession affected both institutions of higher learning and students attending them. Many universities raised tuition (Lord, 2007). Higher tuition, a higher share of students borrowing, and a higher student enrollment (Garcia, 2014) led to a huge student loan debt, which was approaching “$1.2 trillion as of May 2013” (Chopra, 2013, para. 1). Federal and state government support of higher education was reduced due to the recession. With higher tuition and increased student loan debt, more students questioned the value of a higher education degree (The Economist, 2014).

Several disruptive innovations also started to occur in higher education (Roscorla, 2015). Massive open online courses (MOOCs) created a stir as they were free online courses. Some of the MOOCs were offered by Ivy League schools such as Stanford, Princeton, Harvard, and MIT. According to several reports, some universities would not offer MOOCs because of the perception that there was no return on investment (Clarke, 2013; LeBlanc, 2014). Others said that MOOCs helped with marketing, increased school rankings, and helped graduates with continuing education (ExtensionEngine, 2014).
Another disruption was the rise of CBE, where a student proved competency of a subject in higher education by passing a summative final test. Using CBE as a new modality of teaching was gaining ground in higher education as it “addresses the issues of cost, quality, scaling and individualized learning all at once” (Schejbal, 2014, para. 10).

CBE held much promise as a vehicle for helping students, particularly older, experienced students, make progress toward and achieve a degree. One of the most popular degrees offered by higher education institutions was in business (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012b). A CBE model in the field of business could address the issues of economy and quality faced by both students and institutions. However, research regarding the appropriate components for CBE in business was lacking. Present CBE program components in business were not based upon research. This study addressed the gap in the research on the subject of CBE business program components.

**Background**

Higher education is in a state of change. Due to the changing academic environment, Moody’s Investment Report (Moody’s, 2013) stated the outlook for higher education was negative from a financial perspective, reflecting mounting pressure on the key university revenue sources. Universities in America obtained their income from tuition received from students, direct government support, indirect government support such as grants and research contracts, and investment returns on endowments (Zare, 2013). The revenue from each of these sources varied depending on the institution and whether it was public or private.
University revenue streams were affected by federal budget reductions, state appropriation reductions, and a limited prospect for the growth of household income (Moody’s, 2013). The economic downturn of 2008-09 also affected endowments, reducing the financial revenue available to universities. “Moody’s analysis of median fiscal data from 2012 shows that enrollment at public colleges was essentially flat, revenues grew less than 2 percent, and expenses increased more than 3 percent—nearly twice as fast as inflation” (Kelderman, 2013, p. 1).

**Higher Education from a Student Perspective**

From a student perspective, tuition rose approximately 130% from 1988 to 2008 (Zare, 2013), and the amount of available federal aid did not keep up with the tuition increases. Student loan debt surpassed one trillion dollars and exceeded credit card debt (Denneen, 2014). “Rising student loan burden and defaults taint perception of the value of a college degree” (Moody’s, 2013, p. 2).

After taking out massive student loans, the unemployment rate for new undergraduates was at a high of 9.4% in 2011 (Shierholz, Sabadish, & Wething, 2012). With many graduates unemployed, paying back the student loan debt added to the instability of the higher education system and called into question the value of a degree.

**Higher Education Alternatives**

The reduced revenue growth in higher education, the economic downturn, the rising student loan debt, and the uncertainty of the value of a college degree forced some universities to look at alternatives to the traditional educational model. One such alternative was MOOCs, which could increase education at little or no cost to the student. Another alternative was CBE. According to Kamenetz (2013), 37 million Americans had
some college but no degree; and political leaders at all levels believed CBE could be the best method of advancing this demographic (Alssid, 2015).

**Competency Based Education**

CBE provided accessible degrees at an affordable cost for students. “CBE’s defining feature…is that it places a priority on the assessment of defined learning outcomes, regardless of where the learning occurs. That typically means breaking credit requirements into discrete ‘competencies’ that indicate a student has mastered concepts” (Fain, 2013b, Defining Competency, para. 1). This also meant students could use prior knowledge to go through the competencies faster, thereby reducing the cost of the degree program.

Some universities began to implement the CBE model. Seventeen universities involved with CBE replied to the U.S. Department of Education’s request for schools to serve as “experimental sites [to] test innovative ways to reduce college costs, with a focus on the CBE models” (DeSantis, 2014, para. 1). This included Southern New Hampshire University, University of Wisconsin-Extension, University of Maryland-University College, Northern Arizona University, and Brandman University. The experimental site pilot was developed for the purpose of testing federal definitions of attendance and satisfactory academic progress, allowing federal financial aid disbursement to be separated from traditional credit hour measures, and making financial aid available to CBE approaches.

**Bachelor of Business Administration**

The most enrolled undergraduate degree was a business degree (NCES, 2012b). The typically business degree was a BBA. Using this for the CBE modality, the BBA
degree used student prior knowledge acquired from the workplace applied to the competencies in the CBE program. The student could progress faster through the program by passing previously learned competencies, allowing him or her to spend more time mastering new competencies.

CBE was cited as “an outcomes-based approach to education where the emphasis is on what comes out of post-secondary education – what graduates know and can do – rather than what goes into the curriculum” (Soares, 2012, Competency Based Education, para. 1). CBE focused on what students learned, rather than where or how long the learning took place (Klein-Collins & Baylor, 2013). This mode of delivery worked best for students with prior knowledge either from working or from life experience and who were self-directed. CBE allowed students to work at their own pace, potentially enabling them to achieve their BBA in less than the four-year average of most BBA programs. The CBE model focused on competencies valued in the workplace and the CBE BBA degree could be obtained at a reduced cost over a traditional degree program requiring four years of in-class seat time.

**Competencies**

The CBE model was based on mastering competencies without sitting in a classroom. Competencies “are individual characteristics, including knowledge, skills, abilities, self-image, traits, mindsets, feelings, and ways of thinking, which, when used with the appropriate roles, achieve a desired result” (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2014, What is a Competency? para. 1). As employers looked to hire more highly skilled workers with less money to train employees due to a tight
economy, hiring the right individual with the proper skills, knowledge, and abilities out of a university was paramount.

To further define the CBE model and specifically the direct assessment model of CBE where competencies did not equate to credit hours, more research was needed into which competencies were needed for a BBA and which competencies were considered critical for students coming out of the CBE system to be viewed as valuable by the employers hiring those students. Using employers as an external audience aided in validating the competencies (Voorhees, 2001, p. 30). This also showed “currency in the marketplace and provide documentation of competencies beyond a degree or list of courses completed” (Voorhees, 2001, p. 30).

Using external employer research about competencies needed in the workplace would be useful in designing a CBE BBA degree program in the direct assessment model. The direct assessment model was an evaluation method that did not use credit hours or clock hours, but measured competencies or skills in subject matter through presentations, actual performance, or written examination (Higher Learning Commission, 2014). This would add value to the CBE program and enable a better match between higher education and competencies required in the workplace. Further, defining competencies employers valued in the workplace and competencies that were no longer useful would fill a research gap for new CBE programs for a BBA.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

CBE in higher education started to gain traction in the U.S., with the White House and both sides of Congress viewing CBE as a way to make college more affordable (Kamenetz, 2013; Office of the Press Secretary, 2013). According to the New York
Times (Kamenetz, 2013), 37 million Americans had some college education but no degree. With CBE, paying “for what students learn and can do, rather than how or where they spend their time” could save time and money (Laitinen, 2014, para. 14).

CBE relied on passing competencies that made up the BBA degree program. Most competencies were derived from the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for a specific position with an employer (SHRM, 2014). These were the Core Components of a Competency (CCC). At most universities adopting CBE, the BBA was used as students working in business could often apply what they learned in the business world toward their BBA.

The development of an educated, competent workforce in the business realm was important to the future economic strength and vitality of the United States. CBE programs offered a straightforward and efficient method for delivering BBA degrees. Among the many changes in higher education underway, the delivery of competency based programs offered much promise (Schejbal, 2014).

However, minimal research was available about which competencies to include in a CBE BBA program. In applying a CBE model to a bachelor’s degree, input from employers as to which competencies should be included in a BBA was needed for an external, independent validation of competencies in a CBE BBA degree. Additional research into the CCCs considered important by employers would help further define each of these competencies.

**Purpose Statement**

It was the purpose of this study to identify the important competencies necessary in the workplace for graduates from a CBE program for the BBA, and the learning
activities that best support the teaching of those competencies as perceived by human 
resource (HR) experts working in business.

**Research Questions**

The following three research questions guided the study:

1. What competencies do HR experts from business identify as important and necessary for the workplace from graduates of a CBE BBA program?

2. How do HR experts from business rate the importance of the competencies identified in Research Question One?

3. For the competencies identified as most important in Research Question Two, what learning activities do HR experts from business recommend to best meet the requirements of each individual competency?

**Significance of the Problem**

As the boundaries for offering higher education expanded to include more and different methods of delivery, the need for research-based information upon which to identify the components to be delivered was important to the viability of the programs. CBE was one of the modalities of teaching in higher education that was a disruptive innovation (Laitinen, 2012). CBE programs used competencies as their measure of knowledge (Klein-Collins, 2012). Having prior business knowledge obtained in the workplace enabled students in a CBE BBA program to receive credit for prior knowledge and thus obtain their degree in less time (Weise, 2014).

The White House embraced awarding credits based on learning rather than seat time, catapulting CBE to the forefront of higher education (Office of the Press Secretary, 2013). But, CBE “has its critics, in part because it looks so different from the traditional
classroom” (Fain, 2013a, A New Dimension section, para. 1). Higher education had not substantially changed in many years and with the growth of technology and 37 million students with some college but no degree, the disruptor that some universities supported was CBE (Kamenetz, 2013).

According to Leblanc (2013), Competency-based education may also provide accrediting organizations with a framework for more fundamentally rethinking assessment. It would shift accreditation to looking much harder at learning outcomes and competencies, the claims an entity is making for the education it provides (is education actually happening?) and for the mechanisms it uses for knowing and demonstrating that the learning has occurred. (para. 7)

With a harder look at competencies by accrediting organizations, validation of competencies by external stakeholders in the workplace was significant in designing a CBE BBA degree. A recent Gallup study quoted by Alssid (2014) “revealed that 14 percent of Americans — and only 11 percent of business leaders — strongly agree that graduates have the necessary skills and competencies to succeed in the workplace” (para. 2). Information that would support the design of CBE BBA programs would include determining which competencies were valued and should be continued, which competencies were missing and should be included, and which competencies were no longer needed for a CBE BBA degree program from an external, unbiased source. An external source such as HR professionals in southern California with knowledge of how BBA students performed in the workplace and who understood the needs of the business world would add to the body of knowledge regarding competencies for a higher
education perspective. Information of this type was significant for the development of CBE programs that aligned to the needs of the workplace, allowing graduates to move directly into the workplace with as little initial training as possible.

**Definitions of Terms**

**Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA).** This is an undergraduate degree in business offered through many universities.

**Blended (or Hybrid) Class.** “This class has between 30% and 80% of the course content delivered online” (Allen & Seaman, 2014, p. 7).

**Competency.** As defined by Florida Colleges (2014), a learned skill performed in a knowledge and/or attitudinal area which can be accurately repeated or measured; an activity (cluster of skills and knowledge) that a person performs in an occupation that is both observable and measurable and that forms the basis for competency-based criteria. (p. 4)

**Competency-Based Education (CBE).** “An educational approach based on a predetermined set of knowledge, skills, and abilities that the student is expected to accomplish ” (Florida Colleges, 2014, p. 5).

**Competency by Credit Hour.** In a higher education system, each competency was linked to credit hours, with no classroom seat time required, and competency units equivalent to credit hours (Brigham, 2014).

**Core Components of a Competency (CCC).** The knowledge, skills, and abilities, which combined, aided in defining the competency (SHRM, 2014).
**Credit Hour.** A unit of time spent on a subject at a higher education institution, typically measured as seat time in a classroom (Laitinen, 2012).

**Department of Education (DOE).** In the United States government, this was the part of the executive branch that dealt with education and financial aid.

**Direct Assessment.** “An instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilizes direct assessment of student learning, or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others” (Higher Learning Commission, 2014).

**Disruptive Innovations.** “Technological innovations, products, services, processes, or concepts that disrupt the status quo” (Christensen, 2013).

**Experimental Site.** The DOE (2014), after application by a university, assigned this designation to a university to test a different model of awarding financial aid to alternative methods of teaching in higher education.

**Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC).** “A course of study made available over the Internet without charge to a very large number of people: anyone who decides to take a MOOC simply logs on to the website and signs up” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2014, para. 1)

**Online Learning.** According to Anderson (2008),

The learner is at a distance from the instructor, that the learner uses some form of technology (usually a computer) to access the learning materials, that the learner uses technology to interact with the tutor or instructor and with other learners, and that some form of support is provided to learners. (p. 16)
Online Courses. A class in which at least 80% of the instruction was delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2014, p. 7).

Professionals in Human Resources Association (PIHRA). PIHRA (2014) is the largest affiliate of SHRM membership organization located in the California counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura with over 4,000 members.

Seat Time. The time a student in higher education spends in the classroom.

Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM). SHRM is a large membership organization founded to support HR management. According to SHRM (2013), they had “more than 275,000 members in over 160 countries” (para. 1).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to HR professionals who obtained a SHRM certification, or have worked in HR for five years, were members of a SHRM chapter, worked for an organization with more than 50 employees, and who hired a BBA student within the last five years.

Organization of the Study

This research is presented in five chapters. Chapter I was an overview and introduction to the study of competencies for CBE. Chapter II is a review of the literature pertinent to higher education, disruptors of higher education, new modalities of teaching, MOOCs, CBE, and an in-depth look at competencies. Chapter III describes the methodology used for this study. Chapter IV presents the data analysis and key findings. Chapter V is a summary of the study, along with the conclusions, suggestions for future research, and recommendations for application to CBE.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The intent of this chapter was to provide a better understanding of the current state of higher education, identify disruptors, and focus on a disruptor, competency based education (CBE) in higher education, to determine which program components were needed for a bachelor’s in business administration (BBA) degree. This chapter focuses on the literature in the following areas: higher education’s current state, disruptive alternative modes of teaching, CBE and its related competencies, and the corresponding research gap. The first part of this chapter presents higher education issues such as disruptors, economic supply and demand considerations, and California higher education issues. The second part presents the disruptive alternative modes of higher education delivery such as online learning, blended or hybrid learning, massive open online courses (MOOCs), and CBE. The third part details the history of CBE, the current forms of CBE, and the public opinion about CBE. The final part discusses how employers used competencies to determine the knowledge, skills, and abilities for a specific position.

As students graduated from higher education, the concern was whether they had the required skills to master the new position. Concentrating on the largest degree program, business, and identifying which competencies were needed for a business CBE degree from external employers addressed a research gap for this new disruptive CBE degree.

Higher Education

There are many issues in higher education and some of the most important ones are discussed in this chapter, including the economic issues. Workforce development or a perceived gap in skills from university graduates was one of the top issues. Although
job openings exist, many graduates were still looking for work. One explanation was that the technology changed so fast that universities could not keep up with training students for these positions (Ebersole, 2015).

Another issue in higher education was accreditation. Accreditation was completed by many different regional bodies, such as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) for the southwest United States. Many disagreed whether the accrediting bodies were too lax or too strict, but there was growing concern on both sides (Ebersole, 2014). One proposal in Congress was to federalize the regional accrediting bodies to create more standardization across the regions.

Technology was another issue facing higher education, which included CBE as a modality of teaching, the growth of online classes, and the use of data mining and analytics for strategic planning (Grant Thorton, 2015). The U.S. President also proposed a new rating system for colleges to aid students in determining which college was best for them (Ebersole, 2015). Several authors mentioned new business models, such as year round school, consolidating services, and shifting enrollment attention abroad (Ebersole, 2015; Grant Thorton, 2015).

Higher education was affected by the recent recession in many areas (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010). According to Long (2013), the recession affected both the supply and demand side of higher education. The supply side included tuition and governmental support, whereas the demand side included the student perspective of higher education economics.
The Supply: Sources of Revenue

In terms of the supply side, revenue sources for higher education typically came from tuition received from students, direct government support, indirect government support such as grants and research contracts, and investment returns on endowments gifts (Zare, 2013). Tuition at public four-year colleges and universities increased at an average rate of 5.6% per year beyond the rate of general inflation from 2000-01 to 2010-11. This growth rate led the price to increase from 22% of the average tuition and fees at private nonprofit four-year institutions to 28% over the decade. (College Board, 2010, p. 3)

Direct government support, such as state appropriations per full-time equivalent student, averaged 19% lower than a decade earlier after adjusting for inflation (College Board, 2010). Due to the recession, the indirect government support, such as grants and research contracts, decreased. Also due to the recession, donations to universities and endowments were reduced and returns diminished (Kiley, 2012).

Even though tuition increase raised revenue for a university, other costs also increased while other revenues decreased, putting the squeeze on higher education. According to The Economist (2012), university spending was more driven by the need to obtain higher rankings than about the hard-to-measure quality of the graduates it produced. Overall, the supply of available sources of revenue for institutions of higher education dramatically decreased.
The Demand: Higher Education from a Student Perspective

From the demand side of higher education, tuition for the students grew beyond the rate of general inflation in the last decade. To cover the increased tuition, students took out student loans at a higher rate. According to NCES (2012a), from academic years 2006-07 to 2010-11,

The percentage of first-time, full-time undergraduate students at 4-year institutions receiving any financial aid increased from 75 to 85 percent. During this time, the largest percentage increase in first-time, full-time students receiving aid was at private for-profit institutions, from 55 to 90 percent. The percentage of students receiving aid at 4-year public institutions increased from 75 to 83 percent, while the percentage of students at private nonprofit institutions had the smallest increase, from 85 to 89 percent. (para. 3)

Student loan debt was over one trillion dollars according to Laititen (2013). The Economist (2012) mentioned that 17 million college graduates were overqualified for their jobs, and 37 million started college but left before receiving any degree, possibly due to economic reasons. According to Abel, Deitz, and Su (2014), the Federal Reserve Bank of New York talked about recent graduates working in low-wage jobs or working part-time due to the recession making it tougher to find positions.

With tuition rising, student loans at an all-time high, and the qualified job elusive after graduation, the public increasingly questioned the value of a college degree (Burd et al., 2013). With higher education’s value questioned, the demand for new ideas and technologies to disrupt the status quo were explored to make education more affordable.
California Higher Education Issues

California has four main types of university systems: (1) California community colleges (CCC), of which there are 112 colleges serving 2.1 million students; (2) the California State University (CSU) system with 23 campuses and 460,000 students; (3) the University of California (UC) system with 10 campuses, 5 medical centers, 3 national laboratories, and 238,000 students; and (4) private universities including for-profit and not-for-profit entities. The CCC system typically offered the first two years of university instruction plus workforce training. Recently, 15 CCCs were granted authority to offer four-year degrees in disciplines not served by the CSU or UC systems (Yarbrough, 2015). The CCC system now offers students the ability to take classes at any of the community colleges through the Online Education Initiative, offers open enrollment across campuses, and selected Canvas as its learning management system to replace Blackboard (CCC, 2015).

The CSU system started an online project several years ago with the intent to combine online courses from all the CSU schools. It did not reach the heights desired and became part of the CSU extended education division. The CCC, CSU, UC systems and, along with the California legislature, jointly sponsored the California Digital Open Source Library (CDOSL; CSU, 2015), which served a repository of open source textbooks for use by all public universities. The CDOSL initially began with a focus on free textbooks for 50 lower division courses.

Some of the private for-profits universities had accreditation and DOE issues concerning financial aid. Corinthian Colleges, a private for-profit college closed its doors in 2015 after being investigated by many federal and state agencies (DOE, 2015).
University of Phoenix, another for-profit university, saw its student body reduced by half, from 458,000 to 214,000, over the last five years after financial difficulties (Picchi, 2015).

**Higher Education Alternatives**

Selingo (2013) stated in *College (un)Bound* that a technology-fueled change was coming to higher-education and the driving force was new technology that allowed for personalization and the unbundling of education. Meyer (2010) talked about Clayton Christensen by saying “[Christensen] developed the concept of disruptive innovations, which are technological innovations, products, services, processes, or concepts that disrupt the status quo” (Pressures for Change section, para. 3). Applying this to higher education, several potential disruptive innovations came to the forefront, with modalities of teaching as the focus. Educating students in an online environment, blending the on-ground classes with partially online delivery (known as the hybrid or blended delivery model), offering MOOCs, and using competencies to develop a CBE model where learning was constant and timely, could all be considered disruptive innovations in higher education.

**Online Learning**

One growth area in higher education was online learning. According to two-thirds of the academic respondents to The Economist by Glen (2008) survey, their universities now offered online classes and anticipated growth in this area. Online learning tapped into a new market of students previously unable to enroll, as well as current students attracted to the flexibility of the delivery method (Meyer, 2010). Anderson (2008) described online learning as,
The learner is at a distance from the instructor, that the learner uses some form of technology (usually a computer) to access the learning materials, that the learner uses technology to interact with the tutor or instructor and with other learners, and that some form of support is provided to learners. (p. 16)

Online learning was an outgrowth of distance learning, where the instructor was at a distance. Communication in the first phase was by mail, starting in the 1880s, which was also called correspondence courses (Moore & Kearsley, 2011). Starting in 1925, radio, and then eventually television, were used as communication mediums for distance learning. The next phase included the establishment of open universities and teleconferencing for distance learning, then using satellites and interactive video conferencing. In the 1990s with the advent of the World Wide Web, a new form of distance learning using the Internet as a communication medium resulted in a new term, online learning (Moore & Kearsley, 2011). The current definition of online courses was when at least 80% of the class was delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2014, p. 7).

In a recent report by Allen and Seaman (2014), academic leaders at over 2,800 colleges and universities reported that “online learning is critical to their institution’s long term strategy [and grew] from 48.8% in 2002 to 70.8% this year” (p. 4). Over 95% of larger institutions (over 5,000 students) reported having distance classes, compared to 83.6% for medium universities (1,000 to 4,999 students; Allen & Seaman, 2014). Currently, online education enrollments, while growing, slowed slightly. Table 1 shows the number of students enrolled in a distance or online education course.
Table 1

*Total Students Enrolled in a Distance Education Course*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>3,584,745</td>
<td>3,750,745</td>
<td>166,000</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private not-for-profit</td>
<td>684,030</td>
<td>770,219</td>
<td>86,189</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private for-profit</td>
<td>799,417</td>
<td>736,415</td>
<td>-63,002</td>
<td>-7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,068,192</td>
<td>5,257,279</td>
<td>189,187</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Taken from Allen & Seaman (2011).

**Hybrid/Blended Classes**

Another disruptive innovation in higher education was hybrid/blended classes. According to Allen and Seaman (2014), “a blended [or hybrid] class, has between 30% and 80% of the course content delivered online” (p. 7). The rest of the course was typically delivered on ground. In the 1973, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (2016) was formed by the Carnegie Foundation to classify colleges and universities for researchers. Carnegie classes were developed to break out associate degrees from bachelor degrees, and from doctorate degrees (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2016). An advantage to the blended method was that students could interact in-person with the professor, yet still have the flexibility of an online class (Dahlstrom, Walker, & Dziuban, 2013). According to Dahlstrom et al., (2013), although not fully mainstream, blended learning persists as the preferred modality. Nearly four out of five U.S.-based students (79%) have taken a course with some online components and some face-to-face components. The majority of students across all regions and Carnegie classes report that they both prefer and learn most in blended learning environments.
One disadvantage to blended learning was the student must physically be present many times during the class time frame. With students, many of whom also worked, the flexibility desired was not available with a blended course and they considered other modalities of learning.

**Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)**

Oxford English Dictionary Online (2014) defined a MOOC as “a course of study made available over the Internet without charge to a very large number of people: anyone who decides to take a MOOC simply logs on to the website and signs up” (para. 1). Typically, these online courses were made available to non-students of the university, were designed for unlimited online participation, and offered for free, but no credit was given for this course (Allen & Seaman, 2014). This was changing as some universities began charging fees for MOOCs and offered students credits toward a college degree. Traditional online courses at a university differed from MOOCs in that tuition was charged for them. Traditional online courses were usually for a smaller number of students with more professor interaction and academic credit was given.

From an economic perspective, costs were associated with developing a free MOOC and to administer the MOOC course with large volumes of students. Some institutions such as Harvard and MIT considered that instead of an economic incentive, they were advancing education and technology by providing a high-profile, global service to all who sought to learn, and allowed new opportunities for teaching and learning research (Thompson, 2012).

Several articles mentioned that the excitement about MOOCs evened out while still in the development phase (Clarke, 2013), and that Chief Academic Officers (CAOs)
as polled by Inside Higher Ed (2014a) saw “increased attention on [MOOCs] as exaggerated. Just 2% strongly agree that recent excitement about MOOCs is justified. CAOs (26%) will strongly disagree with this statement” (p. 27). According to Shean (2015), “their course completion rates are low, limiting impact” (p. 2). The development of MOOCs continues, but the enthusiasm seems to be moderating.

**Competency Based Education**

Another alternative discussed widely within higher education was CBE. According to Fain (2013a),

Competency-based education’s defining feature, experts said, is that it places a priority on the assessment of defined learning outcomes, regardless of where the learning occurs. That typically means breaking credit requirements into discrete ‘competencies’ that indicate a student has mastered concepts. (para. 1)

According to Florida Colleges (2014), the definitions for competency and CBE were:

**Competency:** A learned skill performed in a knowledge and/or attitudinal area which can be accurately repeated or measured; an activity (cluster of skills and knowledge) that a person performs in an occupation that is both observable and measurable and that forms the basis for competency-based criteria.

**Competency-Based Education (CBE):** An educational approach based on a predetermined set of knowledge, skills, and abilities that the student is expected to accomplish. (p. 5)
The CBE Network (C-BEN, 2015), which was comprised of over 30 universities and colleges, defined CBE as:

Competency-based education is a flexible way for students to get credit for what they know, build on their knowledge and skills by learning more at their own pace, and earn high quality degrees, certificates, and other credentials that help them in their lives and careers. Students in these programs show what they know and how well they know it through multiple ways of evaluating learning. This is another choice for learning offered at many institutions, through a variety of programs, with full support to help students when needed. (para. 1)

**Credit Hour**

A traditional university used a credit hour as a base unit of learning. Credit hours started in high schools in the late 1800s when the National Education Association developed the concept of a standard unit of time that students spent on a subject as an easy comparison measure (Laitinen, 2012). The concept did not catch hold until Andrew Carnegie decided to fix something that had nothing to do with students at universities. Carnegie was a trustee of Cornell University and was troubled by the poor compensation of the faculty. Faculty tended to work longer than they were productive because there was no retirement system. Carnegie decided to form a non-profit, free pension system. To garner adoption of the free pension system, any college wanting to participate had to adopt the standard unit for determining high school graduation and for college admission purposes, which hereafter became known as the Carnegie Unit. Higher education was encouraged to adopt the standard unit to determine the credit hour workload for faculty to
qualify for the new pension system; a faculty member needed to teach 12 credit hours with each hour equal to one hour of faculty-student contact time per week for the 15-week semester. The standard unit then became known as the credit hour. Over time the credit hour was expanded to determine the unit of learning. An average bachelor’s degree would entail 120 credit hours. The problem with the credit hour concept, as stated by Laitinen (2012), was that time spent in the classroom did not always equate to learning.

As CBE tended to break the traditional credit hour rule of time spent in a classroom seat, the question of how to assess learning arose (Laitinen, 2012). Leblanc (2013) stated that,

Students demonstrate mastery of those competencies through completion of ‘tasks’ that are then assessed by faculty reviewers using the rubrics. Students can’t ‘slide by’ with a C or a B; they have either mastered the competencies or they are still working on them. (para. 5)

**History of Competency Based Education**

The origins of CBE were traced back to the middle ages with craft guilds and apprenticeship training in skilled trades (Spady, 1994). Later versions of CBE were found in “professional licensure, military training programs and flight schools” (Spady, 1994, p. 4). Each of these required “successful demonstrations of learning” (Malan, 2000, p. 23) or “what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences” (Spady, 1994, p. 12).
Early Years of Competency Based Education

The origins of competencies could be found as far back as 1860 when Spencer “was proposing educational objectives based on a classification of human activities” (Malan, 2000, p. 23). This idea was later expanded upon by stressing the importance of lessons with clearly stated aims and “five successive stages—preparation, presentation, comparison, association, and application” (McAvoy, 1985, p. 28).

Prior Learning Assessment

The two World Wars in the early to mid-1900s created a different need for education and proving competencies. After the two World Wars, many returning military personnel learned new skills. In the 1940s, Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) was developed where credit was given for previous knowledge, a related practice to CBE. Some of the providers were the “American Council on Education’s military credit and ACE CREDIT programs, the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning’s portfolio assessment, College Level Exam Program (CLEP), Excelsior Exams, and Defense Acquisition for Non-Traditional Education Services (DANTES)” (Book, 2014, p. 4). The DANTES exam was renamed DSST (DANTES Subject Standardized Tests), and were still used today as a way to give credit for previously learned competencies.

Sputnik in the 1960s

The success in World War II and American leadership in business were shattered by the 1957 Russian launch of Sputnik (Alderson & Martin, 2007; Eliopoulos et al., 2004; Hamilton, 1973; Harris, Guthrie, Hobart, & Lundberg, 1995; Norton, Harrington, & Gill, 1976). The success by the Russians called into question the United States’ system of training and education, which caused the American education system to
question its very roots. The education system was felt to be too progressive and focused on life skills and social responsibility (Harris et al., 1995). Leaders in industry started to claim that “vocational education graduates were inadequately trained for job responsibilities to an internationally competitive standard” (Harris et al., 1995, p. 37). There was growing concern that “students are not taught the skills they require in life after school” (Malan, 2000, p. 23) and extensive demands for curriculum reform resulted. Also, in the late 1960s business people were starting to question whether education was giving students actual lifelong skills that could be used in the workplace (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997). Curriculum development garnered large investments of federal funds and teacher education reached a high level of dissatisfaction with its outcomes, and as a result CBE was born (Smith, 2002; Tuxworth, 1989).

**Bloom’s Taxonomy**

Bloom (1956) became part of a movement in the 1950s and 1960s to classify educational objectives to aid college examiners to “promote the exchange of test materials and ideas about testing” (1956, p. 4). From the meetings of this movement, a taxonomy of “possible educational goals or objectives” in the cognitive domain were developed, which included such “activities as remembering and recalling knowledge, thinking, problem solving, and creating” (Bloom, 1956, p. 2). This taxonomy helped establish educational objectives that were later used to determine if “learners attained acceptable standards compared to the desired learning outcomes” (Malan, 2000, p. 23). Bloom’s work allowed further research into educational objectives and was later used by the outcomes-based education (OBE) movement (Malan, 2000; McAvoy, 1985; Norton et al., 1976)). At the same time, mastery learning (ML) also became popular, explained as
“defining what all students are expected to learn” (Block, 1971, p. 7) and that actual learning time was flexible. Using the background of Bloom’s findings, ML used this to focus on time as the variable (Spady, 1998), whereas CBE valued achievement as the variable (Guskey, Passaro, & Uheeler, 1990). Both CBE and ML used Bloom’s model as a structure for desired learning outcomes.

This led to the 1960s where the DOE funded elementary school teacher model training programs for 10 colleges and universities (Klein-Collins, 2012; Tuxworth, 1989). The design of these model programs included “precise definition of competencies or behaviors to be learned, the modularization of instruction, evaluation, personalization and feedback” (Klein-Collins, 2012, p. 10). Meanwhile, an accountability movement started that was inspired by politicians and critics inside and outside of the teaching profession who started asking about the value and effectiveness of schooling. Attention focused on student achievement, which then progressed to a relationship between teacher competence and student learning. The model training programs started the CBE movement according to Swanchak and Campbell (1981). Some programs were called competency based teacher education or performance-based teacher education, but both were considered synonymous (Swanchak & Campbell, 1981).

In the early 1970s, several reports again raised alarms about the need for reforms in education. The Newman Report released in 1971 from a task force of the Department of Health Education and Welfare (HEW) stated that the “needs of an increasingly diverse student population were not being met by higher education” (Grant, 1979, p. 228). A President’s Commission on Campus Unrest in 1970 also raised the same issues (Smith, 2002).
Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education in the 1970s

From these reports, the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) was formed by the Educational Amendments Act of 1972 (Grant, 1979; Klein-Collins, 2012; Maehl, 2000; Smith, 2002). FIPSE created a new program in CBE by awarding grants to implement innovative approaches (Smith, 2002). According Maehl (2000), “the competence approach offered adults in particular many benefits. Progress became linked to performance rather than to required time in attendance. Competence assessment could acknowledge the previous learning, whether from institutions or other sources, that many adults had acquired” (p. 115). Also affected were prior learning assessments (PLA) for college credit, which grew in use after this time period (Klein-Collins, 2012).

Adult Performance Learning

In 1970, the DOE put out a request for “research projects that would establish a systematic definition of adult functional literacy” (Kasworm, 1980, p. 2). The Adult Performance Learning (APL) project, sponsored by the University of Texas and the Texas Education Authority, was designed to develop a definition for adult functional literacy and to study adult literacy over the next four years (Kasworm, 1980; Maehl, 2000; Parker & Taylor, 1980). APL redefined adult literacy “in terms of competencies required to perform life tasks” (Parker & Taylor, 1980, p. 9). A national assessment of adult literacy was also performed and the results were surprising with “20% of the total adult population with less than minimal survival skills” (Parker & Taylor, 1980, p. 10). This called national attention to the definition developed by APL as “the ability to function effectively in today’s society” (Kasworm, 1980, p. 2). Based upon this
definition, 64 million Americans were functionally illiterate adults at the time (Kasworm, 1980). This was an eye-opener to many and served as the impetus to ask how to improve adult literacy as it was defined in terms of competencies.

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) formed the Committee on Performance-Based Teacher Education in the early 1970s to study efforts in performance-based teacher education (PBTE; Elam, 1972; Harris et al., 1995). A seminal work by Elam (1972) on PBTE stated that students were “held accountable, not for passing grades but for attaining a given level of competence in performing the essential task of teaching” (p. 14). According to Hodge (2007), in referencing Elam’s work,

The essential characteristics of a PBTE program are:

- Competencies to be demonstrated by the student
- Criteria to be employed in assessing competencies
- Assessment of a student’s competency
- The student’s rate of progress is determined by demonstrated competency rather than time or course completion. (p. 188-187)

Another theory developed in 1973 for education was that “tests should be for competency not intelligence” (Le Deist & Winterton, 2005, p. 9). Intelligence tests were being questioned as predictors of job success because several studies showed scores on intelligence tests were not correlated with job success (McClelland, 1973). Testing competencies as students progressed through school would show “growth in the desired characteristics is actually occurring” (McClelland, 1973, p. 13).
Many innovative degree programs for adults initiated in the 1970s used CBE, including “Empire State College, Regents College (now Excelsior College), Thomas Edison State College, Alverno College, DePaul University’s School for New Learning, and many others” (Klein-Collins, 2012, p. 10). The use of PLA was also expanded at this time to give students credit for learning outside the traditional academic environment as a way of proving that each student achieved that competency (Cini, 2015; Klein-Collins, 2012).

Through the next 30 years, CBE ebbed and flowed with the economy. Medical schools adopted CBE as they focused on competencies including residencies and practical applications such as a practicing a correct diagnosis (Cini, 2015). In 1997, Western Governors University (WGU) was formed by 19 state governors using online CBE to help educate their respective states’ population and now serves 50,000 students in CBE (WGU, 2012).

In the 1980s and 1990s, education focused on moving online. In the past three years, CBE became a hot topic again. It was theorized that its re-emergence was due to declining completion rates in college (Cini, 2015). As mentioned earlier, student loan debt also increased exponentially. Politicians and educators looked for ways to increase degree completion and reduce student loan debt. CBE was one way universities started to address some of these issues. As of early 2015, it was suggested that “over 350 colleges and universities are working on some form of CBE” (Cini, 2015, p. 1).

**Competency Based Education Public Opinion**

An ongoing debate was whether the public thought CBE was worthwhile. A Gallup Poll (2013), published in conjunction with the Lumina Foundation, found a
random sample of U.S. adults stated that “as many [as] 70% favor awarding college credit based on mastery of course content, rather than on time spent in the classroom” (p. 8). The Gallup Poll (2013) also reported that “Americans express strong support for redesigning pathways to higher education attainment. When asked whether they think students should be able to receive college credit for knowledge and skills acquired outside the classroom, nearly 9 in 10 (87%) [said] yes” (p. 8).

Two-thirds of CAOs thought that “there will be substantial use of student-directed, self-paced components in future online courses” (Allen & Seaman, 2014, p. 5), which aligned with self-paced, online CBE. They also reported that online enrollments continued to grow and that online delivery reduced costs (Allen & Seaman, 2014). With student loan debt so high, any reduction in costs was welcomed by the students. Weise and Christensen (2014) stated that “competency-based education stands out as the innovation most likely to disrupt higher education” (p. 4).

Brigham (2014) suggested two types of CBE degree programs. One was linked to credit hours, with no classroom seat time required, where competency units equated to credit hours. The other, called direct assessment, had no seat time or credit hour requirements, just competencies. The direct assessment of CBE was the newest methodology to emerge. The Higher Learning Commission (2014), an accreditation body, stated,

A direct assessment program is an instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilizes direct assessment of student learning, or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others. The assessment must be consistent with the
Direct assessment of student learning means a measure by the institution of what a student knows and can do in terms of the body of knowledge making up the educational program. These measures provide evidence that a student has command of a specific subject, content area, or skill or that the student demonstrates a specific quality such as creativity, analysis, or synthesis associated with the subject matter of the program. Examples of direct measures include projects, papers, examinations, presentations, performances, and portfolios. (Federal Definitions and Expectations section, para. 2)

The DOE was yet to determine how to deal with direct assessment of CBE, although it opened up applications for experimental sites to be able to test this new method of CBE. According to Inside Higher Education (2014b), the DOE said it was, …particularly interested in experiments that are designed to improve student persistence and academic success, result in shorter time to degree, including by allowing students to advance through educational courses and programs at their own pace by demonstrating academic achievement, and reduce reliance on student loans.

The department gave three examples of the types of innovations it may approve: competency-based education, dual enrollment of high school students in higher education, and prior learning assessment. (para. 3)
Despite the upsurge of interest in CBE, there was equal concern due to its disruptive elements. One such case is that of Zach Sherman (Saffron, 2013). Sherman was the first graduate of College for America, a completely competency-based college founded by Southern New Hampshire University. “Sherman’s studies were divided into ‘clusters’ that focused on areas such as information technology and writing. He raced through the program, completing an associate degree in general studies in just over three months” (Saffron, 2013, para. 10). Finishing his program in three months showed how CBE could be a disruptive innovation, since normally this would take Sherman two years to complete. According to Saffron (2013), some University of North Carolina’s Board of Governors were shocked by the speed of the degree, questioning the amount of learning, as well as concerned for their own community college systems.

To counter some of these concerns, a new national organization, the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) was formed:

C-BEN is the brainchild of the Lumina Foundation and Public Agenda, a non-profit organization based in New York. Its aim is to educate skeptical community college presidents, faculty members, and policymakers at all levels about how competency-based models can work. Backing them up at the federal level is the Department of Education, which has expressed openness to the model. (Saffron, 2013, para. 12)

The focus of C-BEN was on the direct assessment model of CBE since there could be many variables in designing a direct assessment system. It was the direct assessment model of CBE where gaps in the practice and literature existed because it was the newest model to emerge in the last few years.
Bachelor of Business Administration Competency Based Education

CBE could be applied to a multitude of higher education degree programs. In terms of having the largest population for a bachelor’s degree that would be most commonly awarded to the 37 million adults with some college but no degree, that would be the business degree. According to NCES (2012b), “of the 1,650,000 bachelor’s degrees conferred in 2009–10, the greatest numbers of degrees were conferred in the fields of business (358,000); social sciences and history (173,000); health professions and related programs (130,000); and education (101,000)” (para. 2).

Most schools referred to the business degree as a BBA. Traditional colleges offering business undergraduate degrees included general education classes, such as English and science, and then a core of business courses such as general business, marketing, accounting, finance, and operations. Usually, an emphasis area of courses was added after completing the core business classes so students learned more about one of the business disciplines such as international business, marketing, or accounting. Blended and/or online business classes followed the same pattern of classes as the traditional on-ground classes, but offered flexibility in delivery. Neither the traditional or blended/online business programs allowed credit for knowledge previously learned in the workplace. Students were required to complete each class, even if they had previously mastered the topics covered in the class. CBE allowed students to earn credits for workplace knowledge without having to sit through a class.

Competencies

A CBE degree was broken down into smaller units of measurement called competencies. Merisotis of the Lumina Foundation (as cited by Kamenetz, 2013) said,
deconstructing curriculum into abstract, interrelated competencies like these is the way of the future for all programs, whether based on assessment or credit hour. What you’re seeing is a growing recognition that all postsecondary credentials should have competencies that students can demonstrate as a result of their education. (p. 4)

Competencies were made up of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that aided in achieving a desired result, such as performing a specific occupation (SHRM, 2014). One large database used by many HR professionals was the O*net database of knowledge, skills, and abilities for a specific occupation (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013). Another governmental database called CareerOneStop (2014) used competencies to build an industry competency model. It was a pyramid of building blocks arranged in nine tiers so that each tier was a set of related competencies. The foundation started with personal effectiveness competencies, academic competencies, and workplace competencies. The next layer, called industry-related competencies, included industry-wide and industry sector competencies. The top layer of occupation-related competencies listed occupation-specific knowledge, occupation-specific technical skills, occupation-specific requirements, and management competencies (See Figure 1).
Figure 1. Generic Building Blocks Competency Model (CareerOneStop, 2015). This figure explains the industry competency model using a pyramid of building blocks.
Core Components of Competencies

CCCs were comprised of the knowledge, skills, and abilities for that competency.

An example of some of the core components for an oral communication competency from the O*Net database (U.S. Department of Labor, 2013) were:

**Abilities:**
1. Oral Comprehension — the ability to listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
2. Oral Expression — the ability to communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.
3. Speech Clarity — the ability to speak clearly so others can understand you.

**Skills:**
1. Speaking — talking to others to convey information effectively.

The concept of CCC was used to further define the competencies necessary for the CBE BBA degree program.

Research Gap

In a CBE degree, defining which competencies were valued in the workplace would add to the body of knowledge for a BBA. According to LeBlanc (2014), if competencies are a new ‘currency’ replacing credit hours, we will need to work out the ‘exchange rates’ system that does not replicate the waste and inefficiencies of the current credit hour and transfer system. In other words, if CBE is finally a movement, it is like many new movements still in search of the basic taxonomy, an agreed-upon nomenclature, and the aforementioned exchange rate. (p. 2)

However, a gap existed in research that identified and clarified the competencies that should be a part of a CBE program. Defining those exchange rates called
competencies aided in future research to establish clear competencies for the BBA degree and added external knowledge that could be used for further research to define CBE.

**Conclusions**

Higher education is currently in a state of flux. Revenues peaked and expenses steadily increased. Students felt the pressure of rising tuition costs, a weak economy, and the rising student loan debt of over one trillion dollars. Thirty-seven million Americans started college but never finished. Students and parents questioned the value of a college degree as many college graduates were not obtaining jobs after graduation.

Higher education explored several new technologies to educate more people, such as MOOCs and CBE. According to Inside Higher Ed (2014a), the enthusiasm for MOOCs waned. CBE seemed to be gathering momentum as a disruptive technology with over 350 institutions of higher learning adopting it in the past several years (Cini, 2015).

Typically, a university used credit hours as its base unit of learning, aligned to time spent in a classroom. CBE tended to break the traditional credit hour rule by using the achievement of competencies as a measure of learning and making time flexible (Laitinen, 2012).

The history of CBE started with craft guilds in the middle ages with apprenticeships where the apprentice proved that he or she knew the trade/craft and later with professional licensure and military training schools (Spady, 1994). After the two World Wars, the educational system developed PLAs to give soldiers returning from the wars credit for previous knowledge. This continued to this day as a way for students to prove they were competent.
In the 1960s, questions were raised about the U.S. educational system not adequately training students (Malan, 2000, p. 23). Federal funds became available and as a result CBE was born as an answer to changes requested in education (Smith, 2002; Tuxworth, 1989). In the 1970s, several reports pointed out the need for further reforms in education. From these reports, FIPSE was born, which had specific funding for CBE (Grant, 1979). In Texas, the APL program was formed to research and address adult learning. Adult illiteracy was at a high of 64 million people according to the definition developed, which encouraged programs addressing adult literacy in terms of competencies (Kasworm, 1980). Also at this time, the committee on PBTE was formed, which mirrored the CBE movement. It was later decided that CBE and performance-based education both focused on competencies and a handful of universities adopted CBE at that time (Klein-Collins, 2012). Over the next 30 years, CBE ebbed and flowed, but a boost occurred when WGU was formed. Recently, CBE became a favored mode of teaching due to the declining completion rates in college and the government’s move to educate more students.

According to public opinion and academic officers, CBE was seen as a viable option for students. Two types of CBE programs were developed. One was linked to credit hours and the other to direct assessment of competencies. To help universities understand CBE, an organization called C-BEN was developed to design standards for CBE implementation.

A CBE degree program was comprised of competencies and those competencies formed the basis of the final assessment. Competencies consisted of the knowledge, skills, and abilities for a specific position and were used for many years by the
government and HR professionals. “If competencies are the new currency” as suggest by LeBlanc (2014, p. 2), defining them would aid future research in CBE. At the present time, the competencies for the BBA degree were not yet defined using the external stakeholders who hired BBA graduates. This gap in the existing literature on CBE required further study.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter contains a description of the methodology used in the study, the Delphi method, and the procedures used to conduct this study. It includes the purpose statement, research questions, and research design. A description of the population and the sample of human resource (HR) professionals who participated in the study is also presented. The instrumentation, validity and reliability, data collection, data analysis, and limitations are presented. The chapter ends with a summary.

Purpose

It was the purpose of this study to identify the most important competencies necessary in the workplace for graduates from a competency based education (CBE) program for the Bachelor in Business Administration (BBA), and the learning activities that best support the teaching of those competencies as perceived by HR experts working in business.

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided the study:

1. What competencies do HR experts from business identify as important and necessary for the workplace from graduates of a CBE BBA program?

2. How do HR experts from business rate the importance of the competencies identified in Research Question One?

3. For the competencies identified as most important in Research Question Two, what learning activities do HR experts from business recommend to best meet the requirements of each individual competency?
Research Design

This study used a descriptive, mixed-methods policy Delphi design to answer the research questions. According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2011), “Qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting in order to obtain understandings about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participants in the context perceive them” (p. 12). Rounds 1 and 3 used qualitative data from the participants collected through open narrative responses. Quantitative data were also collected for Round 2 as participants rated the level of importance of each competency identified from Round 1.

Descriptive research was designed to “describe a phenomenon without attempting to determine what causes the phenomenon” (Salkind, 2012, p. 392). When conducting descriptive studies, data were largely collected through the use of interviews, surveys, observations, or other relatively personal techniques (Salkind, 2012). This descriptive study utilized an online survey to gain knowledge of employer’s perceptions of competencies necessary to achieve a BBA through a CBE program.

The Delphi Method

The Delphi method, originally established by the RAND Corporation in the 1950s and further refined in the 1960s and 1970s, was developed to improve the use of expert opinion in policymaking (Gupta & Clarke, 1996). Subject matter experts were solicited for their opinions or expectations about the likelihood of future events or scenarios of interest (Loo, 2002). The Delphi method structured and facilitated group communication over a series of iterations upon a complex problem so that a group consensus was achieved about some future direction. A variation of this was the policy Delphi, where opposing views were debated on a complex policy issue and consensus was not
necessarily the desired goal. The policy Delphi sought to generate the strongest possible opposing views on the potential resolutions of the major policy issue, which could include topics for which there were no experts, but only informed advocates and referees (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). The result of a policy Delphi was the formation of an effective policy given the complexity of the issue and inability to satisfy the conflicting demands of different stakeholders (Loo, 2002). This descriptive study used a modified policy Delphi method.

**Advantages and Disadvantages of the Delphi Method**

The Delphi method generated some discussion regarding its advantages and disadvantages, similar to most research methods. Advocates for the Delphi method claimed it was an efficient, structured way to gather expert opinion at a minimal cost while avoiding the pitfalls of face-to-face interaction (Gupta & Clarke, 1996). Detractors of the Delphi method held a critical view of the relatively small, non-random samples typically used in a Delphi study (Loo, 2002). It should be emphasized that a careful selection of a relatively small panel according to a set of relevant criteria for that particular study (i.e., purposive selection) could yield valuable data for informing policy decision-making (Loo, 2002).

Reliability and validity issues were present in all types of research. Some writers challenged the Delphi method, noting that,

> The reliability of measures received from the judgments is questionable, given that responses from different panels to the same question can differ substantially, that the consensus achieved in later rounds might be due more to pressure to conform into a genuine converging consensus of
opinions, [and] that the use of open-ended questions can make it difficult
to assess measurement reliability and validity. (Loo, 2002, p. 767)

However, small non-random samples typical of Delphi studies could be useful if
the researcher carefully determined the selection criteria based on the nature and purpose
of the study and set the sample size based upon expected variation in responses. In a
policy Delphi, the goal was not to achieve consensus or make a final decision. Two or
more potentially conflicting policy directions could appear, and that did not mean the
study lacked reliability or validity. In fact, this would give the policymakers options and
stimulate critical evaluation of opposing views in the decision-making process.

The Delphi method tries “to obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a
group through a series of intensive questionnaires interspersed with controlled feedback.
The technique involves repeated questioning of the individuals and avoids direct
confrontation of group members with each other” (Clayton, 1997, p. 376). By not having
face-to-face discussions, this enabled individual objectivity and the integrity of an
individual’s response.

**Selection of Research Design**

A modified policy Delphi was selected as the method for this study. The goal of
the study was to determine the knowledge and perception of employers in southern
California about competencies needed for a BBA degree through a CBE model, and
further define the specific components of the competencies deemed important and
relevant to the workplace. A modified policy Delphi was selected over other Delphi
models because the aim of this study was to identify different viewpoints rather than
generate consensus about the competencies.
Modifications to the Policy Delphi

In its original form, the policy Delphi consisted of six rounds; however, for this study, three rounds were used. The first round of the original policy Delphi was the formulation of the issues and how they should be stated (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). It was during this stage the researcher and pilot test team determined which issues should be under consideration and how they should be stated during the first round of data collection. For the current study, the issue of competencies for the BBA program was pre-determined.

Round two of the original policy Delphi consisted of identifying the various policy options available (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). This round was maintained in the current research study as participants were asked to identify the competencies to include in the BBA program. The next round of the original policy Delphi study, and also utilized in this research study, was to “determine initial positions on the issues, which ones does everyone agree on, and which ones are the unimportant ones to be discarded” (Linstone & Turoff, 2002, p. 84). The next two rounds, four and five, were not included in this study. These rounds, as presented by Linstone and Turnoff (2002), were for the purpose of further exploring disagreements, identifying assumptions underlying the different perceptions, and assessing the merits of the different positions. As the primary purpose of this study was to research the perceptions of employers about competencies needed in higher education, these two steps were not viewed as applicable to achieving the objectives of the study. The sixth and final round of a policy Delphi was to reevaluate the options based upon the views of the underlying evidence (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). This round was included in the research study.
Population

In research, a population was defined as a “group of persons that one wants to describe or about which one wants to generalize” (Vogt, 2005, para. 1). The target population was the group that the “researcher wants to draw conclusions about” (Vogt, 2005, para. 1). The population for this study was HR professionals in California who possessed Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) certification and/or had five years’ experience in HR, and worked at medium to large companies (over 50 employees). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015), approximately 5,000 HR professionals worked in medium to large businesses in California.

Target Population

The target population for this study consisted of HR professionals in the southern California chapters of SHRM or Professionals in Human Resources Association (PIHRA) who possessed SHRM certification and/or had five years’ experience in HR and worked at medium to large companies (over 50 employees). Additionally, these HR professionals needed to hire applicants who held a BBA degree.

More specifically, the target population for the study included members of SHRM and PIHRA in the chapters representing Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Ventura counties. Approximately 800 HR professionals were members of these organizations when delimited to the selected counties. This target population was selected because it hired managers from all types of industries and services. An expert panel from the target population was used as the sample for this study.
Sample

A sample was defined as “actual data sources pulled from a larger population of potential data sources” (Morgan, 2008, para. 1). The Delphi method required subject matter experts to serve as the participants. “The process of selecting experts is critical to the Delphi and serves to authorize the Delphi’s superiority and validity over other less painstaking and rigorous survey procedures” (Clayton, 1997, p. 377). The selection process needed to be coordinated to select experts consistent with the desired general characteristics of the panelists. The following selection criteria were established through consultation with three selected employers:

- **Membership**: Must be a member of SHRM or PIHRA in the southern California area.

- **Certification**: Must hold a certificate of Professional in Human Resources (PHR), Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR), or Global Professional in Human Resources (GPHR).

- **Position**: Must currently serve as an HR director, manager, or higher, or served in this capacity within the last five years.

- **Company**: Must be at a medium- to large-sized company (over 50 employees located within southern California).

- **Hiring**: Must have hired a BBA student within the last five years.

Size of the Panel

The sample size of the Delphi study depended on the homogeneity of the population. Clayton (1997) suggested,
With experts coming from the same discipline…general rules-of-thumb indicate 15-30 people for a homogeneous population and 5-10 people for a heterogeneous population, people with expertise on a particular topic but coming from different social/professional stratifications such as teachers, university academics and school principal. (p. 389)

Generally, the more homogeneous the group, the smaller the sample size required.

Accounting for potential attrition during the study, 30 HR professionals were selected to serve as panelists.

Selection of the Panel

Panel selection was initiated by chairs of the SHRM and PIHRA chapters in southern California who nominated HR professionals who met the selection criteria. An email was sent to the potential respondents that explained the purpose, nature, and composition of the study, including the required time commitment. Possible respondents were informed of the data collection process, which comprised three rounds of electronic questionnaires. The email contained a link for interested participants that took them to an informed consent form. The informed consent form asked the interested participants if they agreed to participate in this study, and then asked them to confirm they had read the consent form, were 18 years of age or older, and understood the terms of the study. Contact information was also collected for future survey administrations.

Once potential participants who met the selection criteria were identified, their names were place on numbered lists by county. Forty-two HR professionals responded from the six counties. Following the selection process, participants were contacted, informed they were randomly selected for the study, and asked to participate.
Upon receiving signed informed consent documents, the researcher immediately sent a confirmation email to the participants that contained their unique identification number, a link to the online survey website hosted by SurveyMonkey, and a password to the initial survey.

**Instrumentation**

**Validity**

Validity was defined as how well an instrument measured what it set out to measure (Roberts, Priest, & Traynor, 2006). It was important to measure content validity if the study was designed to elicit attitudes and knowledge of respondents’ in a particular field (Roberts et al., 2006). To assure validity of this study, care was taken in choosing the expert panel utilizing explicit criteria. The participants chosen were deemed experts in the field for hiring staff with the competencies expected from a business degree. The experts’ responses to the various rounds of surveys built validity throughout the survey process.

Several educational research experts were asked to review the survey questions prior to administration of each round as well as the results following the survey process to add another level of content validity to the results as part of the pilot test team.

The questions posed in each round, except the first, were designed to use the data from the prior round as a base to gain further information about the topic. The actual competencies identified in Round 1 came from the expert participants and therefore could not be identified prior to administration of the survey instrument.
Reliability of the Instruments – Pilot Test

Reliability was defined as “how well an instrument produced similar results in different circumstances, assuming nothing else has changed” (Roberts et al., 2006, p. 41). The instruments used in this modified policy Delphi study were pilot tested in preparation for the data collection. Pilot studies offered a means to ensure greater rigor, particularly in light of criticisms about the design of the first-round questions (Clibbens, Walters, & Baird, 2012). According to Clibbens et al. (2012), two methods were suggested for pilot studies within the Delphi model. The first was to perform a pilot test before each round. The second was to pilot all rounds in advance of recruiting for the full Delphi study (Clibbens et al., 2012). For this study, a pilot test was conducted before each round. Educational research experts were used for the pilot tests.

All three instruments were pilot tested before administration in the field to ensure the instruments were clearly stated, easy to comprehend, easy to use, and solicited appropriate responses. Several educational research experts participated in the pilot tests to ensure consistency with the general Delphi model and overall reliability of the instruments. The pilot test was conducted online to ensure consistency with the overall research design and to reduce in-person bias. Feedback provided by the pilot test team resulted in minor revisions to the instrument and more consistency between rounds. All of the recommended changes were accommodated in the final instruments to ensure reliability of the results.

Data Collection

Following approval by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB), the data collection process identified in this section was enacted. This study
consisted of three surveys distributed to an expert panel of HR professionals. The questionnaires were designed to identify their perceptions and knowledge regarding competencies important in the workplace that should be included in a BBA program. Participants were also asked to rank the competencies in terms of importance and identify learning activities appropriate for teaching the competencies.

Three rounds were used for data collection, which extended five months from March 2016 to August 2016. Data for all rounds were collected online via SurveyMonkey. The details of each data collection round are presented in the following sections.

Round One

Each panel member received an online survey with an overview of the research study, instructions, and a deadline for returning the survey. The survey provided explicit instructions and contained one open ended question, “What competencies are important in the workplace and should be included in a Bachelor’s of Business Administration program?” All questionnaires were distributed via SurveyMonkey with reminders sent after one week. Seventeen participants returned data for Round One.

Round Two

Once the panel members returned the original questionnaire, the results were analyzed and duplicated competencies were combined. For example, written communication and writing were combined. Several educational research experts assisted with the compilation of data in an effort to control for researcher bias. Once the data were compiled, 10 competencies emerged to be included in a BBA program. These competencies were used as the basis for all questions in Round Two.
The Round Two online questionnaire instrument was distributed to the 42 HR professionals in the sample. The survey contained instructions, a summary of the results from Round One, and a deadline for submission. The Round Two instrument asked participants to rank the importance of the competencies identified in Round one on a Likert Scale of 1 to 6 where 1 = *Totally Unimportant*, 2 = *Not Important*, 3 = *Somewhat Unimportant*, 4 = *Somewhat Important*, 5 = *Important*, and 6 = *Very Important*. The Round Two instrument was administered via SurveyMonkey. Altogether, 15 panelists responded to the survey in Round Two.

**Round Three**

After the Round Two responses were received, the results were analyzed and compiled into a comprehensive summary. The summary included a list of competencies deemed important. Once again, several of the pilot test team members assisted with the compilation of data in an effort to control for researcher bias. The five competencies ranked most important were identified for use in the Round Three instrument.

The Round Three instrument consisted of a question about their role in the organization to further define their knowledge about learning activities, and one open-ended question with five parts, one for each of the competencies identified as most important. The following question was asked, “Please identify and describe the learning activities that are most appropriate for the teaching of each of the following competencies.”
Data Analysis

Round One

The first round of data analysis consisted of compiling a list of competencies identified by the expert panelists as necessary in the workplace and important to include in a CBE BBA program. The competencies were aggregated and coded by category using Excel then presented in Round Two in random order for ranking via the Likert scale.

Round Two

The data analysis for the second round included compiling the ratings of the competencies deemed important. These were recommendations for which competencies should be included in a CBE BBA degree. The Round Two instrument asked participants to rank the importance of the competencies identified in Round One on a Likert scale of 1 to 6. Total ratings were determined using mean scores for each competency. A final rating was determined for each competency, with the competency having the highest rating score being ranked first and the competency with the lowest mean score ranked last. The five highest rated competencies were used to develop the instrument for Round Three.

Round Three

The Round 3 instrument used an open ended question to ask each respondent to identify and describe the most appropriate learning activities for each competency. After receiving the responses for the Round Three survey, they were placed into data matrices, coded, and analyzed to identify themes and trends. The third round of data analysis further defined the core components comprising each competency deemed important.
Data were compiled in Excel with totals compiled for each competency. Data were placed into matrices to identify frequency of responses and major themes identified for each category.

**Limitations**

Five potential limitations were identified for this research study that should be acknowledged. These limitations were:

1. An expert panel was relied upon for data collection. This panel could possibly be disconnected from the larger population and therefore the results may not be generalizable. The panel may also have been poorly chosen.
2. Three rounds could have resulted in expert panel fatigue and may have affected the quality of the answers provided.
3. The perceptions of a small expert panel limited this study and potentially raised questions about the validity of the data.
4. Data were synthesized and compiled between rounds, which led to the increased possibility of researcher bias.
5. Potential sample members were selected by chapter presidents, which could result in selection bias.

**Summary**

Chapter III presented a summary of the modified policy Delphi study and why it was selected. The purpose of the study and the research questions relating to competencies for a CBE BBA program were stated. The population of HR professionals and sample for this Delphi study was detailed, which included HR professionals who were experts verified by certifications and who worked in medium to large businesses.
The data collection rounds and limitations for the modified policy Delphi study were also
described. The next chapter lists the HR professionals’ responses to three rounds of
surveys and includes an analysis of data collected about competencies.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter I of the study introduced the background on issues and current innovations in higher education and defined competency based education (CBE) as an innovation. Chapter II was a review of the literature relating to issues in higher education, current innovations, online learning, CBE in higher education, and competencies. Chapter III detailed the methodology, purpose, research questions, population, sample, and data collection and analysis procedures. Included in this chapter are a restatement of the purpose statement and research questions, as well as a summary of the methodology. This is followed by the data analysis for each of the research questions for this modified policy Delphi study. A summary of the findings is found at the end of chapter IV.

Purpose Statement

It was the purpose of this study to identify the most important competencies necessary in the workplace for graduates from a CBE program for the Bachelor in Business Administration (BBA), and the learning activities that best support the teaching of those competencies as perceived by human resource (HR) experts working in business.

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided the study:

1. What competencies do HR experts from business identify as important and necessary in the workplace for graduates of a CBE BBA program?

2. How do HR experts from business rate the importance of the competencies identified in Research Question One?
3. For the competencies identified as most important in Research Question Two, what learning activities do HR experts from business recommend to best meet the requirements of each individual competency?

**Methodology**

A modified policy Delphi was selected for this study to “reveal positions on an issue within a panel of people with relevant knowledge” (de Loë, Melnychuk, Murray, & Plummer, 2016, p. 78). Delphi studies were an iterative process of data collection, which was used to query HR experts in southern California about the competencies needed in the workplace for graduates from a CBE BBA program as well as the teaching activities that would assist in learning these competencies. Three rounds of electronic surveys deployed via email were completed. Results from the Round One survey were summarized and used as input for Round Two, and Round Two results were summarized and became the basis for the Round Three survey.

**Population and Sample**

The population was HR professionals in California who passed the SHRM certification and worked at medium to large companies (over 50 employees). The target population was members of SHRM or the Professionals in Human Resources Association (PIHRA) who had at least five years of experience in HR and worked in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, or Ventura counties. HR professionals who were deemed experts were recruited via SHRM and PIHRA meetings and through social media and networking. Forty-two individuals were identified as HR experts and were sent an invitation to participate, a participants’ bill of rights, and an informed consent form. Of the 42 HR professionals contacted, 22 agreed to participate and
responded to one or more rounds of the study. Of the 22 HR professionals, 17 (77%) responded to the electronic survey for Round One, 15 (68%) responded for Round Two, and 14 (63%) responded for Round Three.

**Demographic Data**

Five of the six counties were represented by the HR professionals who participated: Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego. No one from Ventura County participated. Of the 22 participants, 20 were female and 2 were male. They came from a cross-section of industries as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

**Industries of Study Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Frequency of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foodservice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freight</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical tech</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Presentation and Analysis of the Data**

Data are presented for each research question in consecutive order beginning with Research Question One and Round One. The results of Round One were used to create
the survey for Research Question Two, and the results from Round Two were used to address Research Question Three.

**Research Question One**

The research question guiding Round One was: *What competencies do HR experts from business identify as important and necessary in the workplace for graduates of a CBE BBA program?*

A total of 228 competencies were listed by the 17 HR professionals who responded to the survey. Each expert was given the opportunity to offer up to 20 competencies. The responses were coded, analyzed, and compiled into common themes of competencies. Similar responses were combined as were specific competencies with larger themes. For example, if an expert responded that competencies such as Microsoft Word and Microsoft PowerPoint were needed, both responses were combined into the larger theme of Microsoft Office/Information Technology.

The researcher generated a list of 68 unique competencies based upon the initial review of responses. The list was presented to several people who participated in the pilot test for additional input and analysis of key themes. The pilot test team suggested the combination of several responses, and based on their guidance, 68 competencies were reduced to 44 unique competencies.

The competency of Written Communication and Comprehension was cited by 13 of the 17 respondents. Twelve participants noted Oral Communication, Problem-Solving, and Team Skills, Collaborating, Relationship Building. Nine of the respondents noted Interpersonal Skills/Social Perceptiveness, Microsoft Office/Information Technology, and Time Management and Priority Setting. Critical/Strategic Thinking,
Decision-Making, and Listening/Oral Comprehension were noted by eight respondents.

Table 3 presents the frequency of responses for each of the identified competencies.

Table 3  
*Competencies Perceived as Important for Graduates of a CBE BBA Program*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written Communication &amp; Comprehension</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Organizing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Communication</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Strategic Planning</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-Solving</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Action Orientation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Skills, Collaborating, Relationship Building</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Skills/Social Perceptiveness</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Business Acumen</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft Office/Information Technology</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management &amp; Priority Setting</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Deductive Reasoning</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical/Strategic Thinking</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Leading Change</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening/Oral Comprehension</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mission Driven</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration and Management</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Group Writing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Peer Relationships</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Management</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Presentation Skills</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Learning</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Talent Management</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Focused</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Acumen</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Intellectual Horsepower</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Managing Vendors, Partners, Others</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sense of Humor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Law</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sense of Humor</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Management</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Work/Life Balance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 17*
The top 10 competencies chosen by the respondents from Round One became the basis for Round Two of the modified policy Delphi study. The HR professionals were asked to rate these top 10 competencies in Round Two.

**Research Question Two**

The research question for Round 2 was: *How do HR experts from business rate the importance of the competencies identified in Research Question One?*

In Round Two, HR professionals were asked to determine the degree of importance of the top 10 competencies identified from Round One. The HR professionals received an email with a link to the electronic survey, in which they were asked to rate the top 10 competencies using a 6-point Likert scale with 6 = *Very Important*, 3 = *Somewhat Important*, and 1 = *Very Unimportant*.

There were 15 respondents in Round Two, 13 of whom participated in Round One. Mean ratings were calculated based on the responses. Mean ratings ranged from 4.93 to 5.73, indicating the HR professional believed that each of these 10 competencies were rather important. Table 4 presents the descriptive data for the 10 competencies.
Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Round 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competencies</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode Frequency</th>
<th>Frequency of Very Important</th>
<th>Frequency of Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team Skills, Collaborating, Relationship Building</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Skills/Social Perceptiveness</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Communication &amp; Comprehension</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-Solving</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening/Oral Comprehension</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical/, Strategic Thinking</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Management &amp; Priority Setting</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft Office/Information Technology</td>
<td>4.93</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purposes of Round Three, the top 10 needed to be reduced to the top 5 competencies, which were determined using the mean, mode, and mode frequency.

Reviewing the mean, there were seven competencies with a mean of 5.60 or better:

1. Team Skills, Collaborating, Relationship Building
2. Interpersonal Skills/Social Perceptiveness
3. Written Communication & Comprehension
4. Decision-Making
5. Problem-Solving
6. Listening/Oral Comprehension
7. Oral Communication

However, the bottom four competencies were tied with a mean rating of 5.60. As such, the mode frequency was used to break the tie. The two competencies with the highest mode frequencies were included in the top five for the purposes of Round Three. With this determination, the top five rated competencies were:

1. Team Skills, Collaborating, Relationship Building
2. Interpersonal Skills/Social Perceptiveness
3. Written Communication & Comprehension
4. Decision-Making
5. Problem-Solving

These were then used as the input for Round Three to identify learning activities that would best meet the requirements of these important competencies.

Research Question Three

Research Question Three was: For the competencies identified as most important in Research Question Two, what learning activities do HR experts from business recommend to best meet the requirements of each individual competency?

For Round Three, HR professionals were asked to identify learning activities to best meet the requirements of the top five competencies identified in Round Two. An electronic questionnaire was sent out to HR professionals with the five competencies listed, each with open-ended text-boxes for the participants to write-in their responses related to training activities for each competency. There were 14 respondents in Round
Three, 12 of whom participated in Rounds One and Two. Their responses were then coded, analyzed, and compiled into similar ideas representing common themes of learning activities to best meet the needs of the individual competency. Similar responses were combined as were specific learning activities with larger themes. The list of themes aligned to each learning activity was presented to a member of the pilot test team to seek input and additional analysis of key themes, and this person suggested the combination of several responses. In total, 105 learning activity responses for the 5 competencies were listed. For the Team Skills, Collaborating, Relationship Building competency, the 20 responses were grouped into 7 common themes. For Interpersonal Skills/Social Perceptiveness, 22 responses were grouped into 7 themes. Similarly, 23 responses were grouped into 8 themes for Written Communication and Comprehension, 19 responses were grouped into 6 themes for Decision-Making, and 19 responses were grouped into 8 themes for Problem-Solving.

Table 5 presents the frequency of responses for the competency Team Skills, Collaborating, Relationship Building. The most common response, cited by 9 out of 20 participants, highlighted interactive group project-based training such as team presentations, leaderless group discussions, and interactive group training. Four of the 20 participants mentioned learning activities such as real observation and immediate evaluation, feedback in general, general theory instruction, a review of post-project lessons learned, and immediate, one-on-one feedback when positive or negative behaviors were observed. Three participants mentioned simulations and role-playing to develop the necessary skills. Other responses were unique to one individual.
Table 5

*Competency 1: Team Skills, Collaborating, Relationship Building*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Activities</th>
<th>Frequency of Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactive group project-based training</td>
<td>9 of 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real observation and immediate evaluation, feedback, general theory instruction,</td>
<td>4 of 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post-project lessons learned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business simulations, tactical decision games, role playing</td>
<td>3 of 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly networking with a new person from a different dept./class</td>
<td>1 of 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know the difference between healthy and unhealthy competition.</td>
<td>1 of 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside team time, unrelated to work</td>
<td>1 of 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-study via books.</td>
<td>1 of 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the competency on Interpersonal Skills/Social Perceptiveness, the top two learning activities were both mentioned by six respondents (Table 6). The first related to formal and informal mentoring and coaching, and the second related to emotional intelligence assessment and training. Other responses were mentioned by between one and four participants.

Table 6

*Competency 2: Interpersonal Skills/Social Perceptiveness*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Activities</th>
<th>Frequency of Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring program, job shadowing</td>
<td>6 of 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional intelligence assessment / training</td>
<td>6 of 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business simulation, role playing</td>
<td>4 of 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside tasks-volunteer work, professional associations, community involvement</td>
<td>2 of 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing non-verbals</td>
<td>1 of 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group training</td>
<td>1 of 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn around tense transactions</td>
<td>1 of 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the Written Communication and Comprehension competency, one learning activity was mentioned 10 times out of the 23 responses, which was training on business writing or mock written business communications (Table 7). This was followed by training for technical and strategic writing, mentioned by four participants, which included specific hands-on training for professional emails with no icons, emoji’s, or text shorthand. Preparing a presentation for an executive leader or writing a speech for an executive was another learning activity with three responses; other learning activities were mentioned by two or fewer respondents.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Activities</th>
<th>Frequency of response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business writing course, mock written business communications</td>
<td>10 of 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for technical and strategic writing</td>
<td>4 of 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare presentations for management</td>
<td>3 of 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies with business writing as part of the training</td>
<td>2 of 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness training between social media and professional writing, assign mentor to review prior to formal written submittals</td>
<td>1 of 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer reviews</td>
<td>1 of 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business plan development</td>
<td>1 of 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Business reports and business periodicals</td>
<td>1 of 23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the competency of Decision-Making, one response was mentioned 10 times out of the 19 responses, which related to business simulations and role playing. This was followed by training on specific strategies and tactics, which was mentioned by five participants. Other learning activities were mentioned by a single participant (Table 8).
Table 8

*Competency 4: Decision-Making*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Activities</th>
<th>Frequency of response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business simulations, real scenarios, role playing, or case studies</td>
<td>10 of 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train on specific decision-making strategies and tactics</td>
<td>5 of 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real-time brainstorming meetings</td>
<td>1 of 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-box exercises</td>
<td>1 of 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical learning/discernment in decision-making</td>
<td>1 of 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation on hot topic, analyzing both sides</td>
<td>1 of 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the Problem-Solving competency, one learning activity was mentioned six times, which was training on problem-solving techniques such as brainstorming, affinity grouping, fishbone diagraming, and force field diagraming. This included active problem-solving activities, creating story boards to show the problem, and outlining consequences and potential solutions. Five respondents mentioned business simulations, role playing, or review of real case studies. Other responses were given by two or fewer participants (Table 9).

Table 9

*Competency 5: Problem-Solving Learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Solving Learning Activities</th>
<th>Frequency of response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Train on problem-solving techniques/strategies such as brainstorming, affinity grouping, fishbone diagrams, force field diagrams.</td>
<td>6 of 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulations, role playing, real-life case studies</td>
<td>5 of 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving process similar to Lean</td>
<td>2 of 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group projects, activities</td>
<td>2 of 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project-based internships</td>
<td>1 of 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-the-job learning</td>
<td>1 of 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>1 of 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask others for input</td>
<td>1 of 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10 presents a summary of the learning activities that were cited by multiple HR professionals for each of the five competencies.

Summary of Learning Activities Cited by Multiple HR Professionals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Primary Learning Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team Skills, Collaborating,</td>
<td>• Interactive group project-based training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Building</td>
<td>• Real observation and immediate evaluation, feedback, general theory instruction, post-project lessons learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Business simulations, tactical decision games, role playing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Skills, Interpersonal Savvy, Social Perceptiveness</td>
<td>• Mentoring program, job shadowing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Emotional intelligence assessment / training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Business simulation, role playing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Outside tasks-volunteer work, professional associations, community involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Communication &amp; Comprehension</td>
<td>• Business writing course, mock written business communications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Training for technical and strategic writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Prepare presentations for management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Case studies with business writing as part of the training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td>• Provide real scenarios, role playing, simulations, or case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Train specific decision-making strategies and tactics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-Solving</td>
<td>• Train on problem-solving techniques/strategies such as brainstorming, affinity grouping, fishbone diagrams, force field diagrams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Simulations, role playing, real-life case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Problem-solving process similar to Lean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Group projects, activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter IV reviewed the purpose of the study, the three research questions investigated in the study, the methodology, the population and sample, demographic data, and the presentation of data aligned to each of the three research questions. The data were presented through the three rounds of the modified policy Delphi study.
In Round One, HR professionals were asked to identify competencies that were important and necessary for graduates of a CBE BBA program. Seventeen of the 22 HR professionals responded with 228 competencies that were coded into 44 themes.

The top 10 responses from Round One were used as the basis for Round Two, which was to rate the competencies on their level of importance in the workplace. Fifteen of the HR professionals responded. Their ratings were analyzed using the mean, mode, mode frequency, and median to determine the top five most important competencies, which became the basis for Round Three.

Round Three used the top five competencies from Round Two to further define learning activities to best meet the requirements of each individual competency. Fourteen HR professionals responded with 105 learning activities, which were then coded into themes and presented in tables aligned to each of the five competencies.

Chapter V presents conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study examined human resource (HR) professionals’ perceptions of what workplace competencies should be included in a competency based education (CBE) degree for the bachelors of business administration (BBA) program. This study also sought to determine the importance of these competencies. Finally, this study included defining what learning activities would be recommended to best meet the requirements of each individual competency.

Chapter I of this study provided background about higher education and current innovations, such as CBE, and an introduction to the research study. Chapter II presented a review of literature about higher education, higher education alternatives such as online learning and CBE, the history of CBE, and an overview of competencies. Chapter III covered the research design and methodology of the study, including the population and sample, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter IV provided a brief description of the research design, population and sample, and data collection procedures, and presented findings aligned to each research question through the three rounds of the modified policy Delphi study. Chapter V presents a summary of the study, including the purpose, research questions, and methodology. A summary of major findings and unexpected findings are described. Conclusions are presented, followed by a discussion of implications for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections.
Purpose Statement

It was the purpose of this study to identify the most important competencies necessary in the workplace for graduates from a CBE program for the BBA degree, and the learning activities that best supported the teaching of those competencies as perceived by HR experts working in business.

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided the study:

1. What competencies do HR experts from business identify as important and necessary for the workplace from graduates of a CBE BBA program?

2. How do HR experts from business rate the importance of the competencies identified in Research Question One?

3. For the competencies identified as most important in Research Question Two, what learning activities do HR experts from business recommend to best meet the requirements of each individual competency?

Methodology

A modified policy Delphi method was utilized to gather perceptual data from a panel of 22 HR professionals who had at least five years’ experience and/or had a SHRM certification, and worked in one of five counties in southern California. An electronic questionnaire was used to identify competencies needed for the workplace from graduates of a CBE BBA program, to rate the importance of the competencies, and to identify learning activities to meet the requirements of each identified competency. Three rounds of surveys were used.
Seventeen of the 22 (77%) HR professionals who participated responded to the electronic survey for Round One. Results from Round One were analyzed and became the basis for Round Two questions. Fifteen of the 22 (68%) HR professionals who participated responded to the electronic survey for Round Two. Round Two responses became the basis for the third and final round of questions, in which 14 of the 22 (63%) HR professionals identified learning activities to help CBE BBA students master each competency.

**Major Findings**

**Research Question One**

Research Question One was: *What competencies do HR experts from business identify as important and necessary for the workplace from graduates of a CBE BBA program?* To address this question, the study participants were asked via electronic survey to report out the competencies they thought were important for graduates of a CBE BBA program. The researcher grouped and consolidated their responses. The top 10 competencies identified by the HR experts were:

1. Written Communication and Comprehension
2. Oral Communication
3. Problem-Solving
4. Team Skills, Collaborating, Relationship Building
5. Interpersonal Skills/Social Perceptiveness
6. Microsoft Office/Information Technology
7. Time Management and Priority Setting
8. Critical/Strategic Thinking
9. Decision-Making

10. Listening, Oral Comprehension

Most of the competencies identified focused on soft skills that concentrated more on social interactions than technical skills. Soft skills referred to people skills or interpersonal qualities such as critical thinking, common sense, and professionalism (Robles, 2012). Labi (2015) mentioned soft skills as “critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration and teamwork, and effective and timely communication” (p. 6). Of the top 10 competencies found in Round One of this study, only Microsoft Office/Information Technology would be considered a hard skill (a more technical, non-interpersonal skill).

The top 10 competencies of this study were reinforced by research from the Committee on Economic Development of the Conference Board. A study by the Committee on Economic Development of the Conference Board (2015) had 52 of its members respond to the question what are the essential competencies on the job? In listing the essential competencies for being hired, “problem-solving, the ability to work with others of diverse backgrounds, critical thinking, teamwork/collaboration, oral communication, organization as well as written communication and proficiency with new technologies” (Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board, 2015, p. 1) were listed as essential and most important to being hired. Davidson (2016) mentioned that due to automation in the workplace reducing routine positions, employees needed to take on broader roles that included soft skills such as critical thinking. She also referenced a LinkedIn survey of employees who changed jobs and noted that communication trumped all other competencies (Davidson, 2016).
Research Question Two

Research Question Two was: *How do HR experts from business rate the importance of the competencies identified in Research Questions One?* To address this research question, the study participants were asked to rank the competencies that emerged from Round One. Based on their responses as determined by mean ratings and mode frequency, the top five ranked competencies were:

1. Team Skills, Collaborating, Relationship Building
2. Interpersonal Skills/Social Perceptiveness
3. Written Communication and Comprehension
4. Decision-Making
5. Problem-Solving

The top five competencies in Round Two were included in Round Three. The top five competencies were also considered soft-skills. In this study, the top competency was Team Skills, Collaborating, Relationship Building, and the last of the five top competencies was Problem-Solving. This was similar to a study by the Committee on Economic Development of the Conference Board (2015), in which team work/collaboration was deemed the most essential skills, followed by problem-solving. Even Heckman and Kautz (2012) found that “soft skills predict success in life” (p. 1).

Research Question Three

Research Question Three was: *For the competencies identified as most important in Research Question Two, what learning activities do HR experts from business recommend to best meet the requirements of each individual competency?* To address
this research question, the HR experts were asked to identify strategies to help the CBE
BBA students meet each competency.

Many different recommendations were given, including interactive, group project-
based training for team skills; mentoring for interpersonal competencies; writing courses
or mock business communications for written communication; scenarios for decision-
making; and training for problem-solving such as brainstorming. The HR experts were
creative in addressing this survey question and showed much thoroughness in the details
provided. Many of these learning activities could be used in higher education as well as
in the workplace to aid students in honing these skills and competencies.

Recognizing that soft skills were necessary to get hired, Evenson (1999) provided
examples of how a soft skill such as customer service could be woven throughout a
course with tasks such as discussing how to get along with people, imagining one’s self
as a customer, practicing customer service, and launching a business.

**Unexpected Findings**

The need for soft skills was abundantly clear. However, only one hard
skill/competency, related to the use of technology, was identified. The researcher
expected a few more hard skills to be in the results of the surveys, but the focus ended up
more on soft skills. From the research for this paper, the workplace was found to be
rewarding and demanding more focus on soft skills, in addition to the hard skills
required.

**Conclusions**

Based on the findings from the three rounds of the study, the following
conclusions were drawn:
1. With the exception of the Microsoft Office/Information Technology competency, the competencies identified fell into the soft skill category, which focused more on interpersonal skills than knowledge-based competencies. Soft skill examples included team skills, oral and written communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Other studies collaborated the findings of this study, which showed a growing need and current lack of these skills by university students entering the workforce. This study’s HR experts also rated soft skills as important for CBE business students.

2. Communication competencies were most frequently cited and in various forms, as evidenced by the following competencies that were identified in Round One: written communication, written comprehension, oral communication, listening, oral and written communication together, and presentation skills.

3. Team skills, collaborating, and interpersonal skills in Round Two focused on working with others as an important set of competencies. The HR experts in this study valued the team concept as the most important competency for students entering the workplace.

4. Learning activities described by the HR experts in this study showed they were aware of the competency gaps of graduates entering the workplace, but many of them had developed training programs to address these gaps. The robust nature of the learning activities described by these HR experts showed
an in-depth knowledge of how to train employees to bridge these perceived gaps.

Implications for Action

Adding to University Learnings

The findings of this study could be used by CBE university programs to address needs in the workplace not currently met by the universities. Other university programs, including non-CBE programs, could also utilize this study to add to their curriculum to ensure their graduates were prepared for the workplace with the appropriate soft skills. Even continuing education programs at universities could use the results of this study to focus on competencies to augment the workforce training to remediate the need for these competencies.

Experiential Learning

One method of addressing this competency gap would be to embed experiential learning (working with other employers on a project) in the core of a CBE business program. This transformational change in education would take theory to practice in a safe learning environment by actually practicing the theory. This was accomplished in the Brandman University doctor of education program by teaching and practicing transformational change on an actual organization as part of the course work embedded throughout the program. Universities should work with companies to present projects for students across a broad range of disciplines. Companies such as RIIPEN and MindSumo/Pearson offer problems from existing companies for students to solve as part of their university coursework to bring the theory into practice that could be used to strengthen the soft skills gap. Years ago, co-op universities were popular with students
working every other semester at an ongoing internship at a company to gain experience. A newer version of this co-op experience could be to complete an internship that would enable a student to practice his or her soft skills as part of a requirement for graduation.

**Badging Soft Skills**

Soft skills are needed in the workplace, as evidenced by this study. One way to promote soft skills would be to reward their achievement. Many CBE programs used badging as a visual recognition of the mastery of a competency (Educause, 2012), with the badge shared across social media such as LinkedIn and Facebook. Employers could see the student mastered soft skills by reviewing their badges on the social media sites to further qualify the student for the workplace position. Davidson (2016) mentioned that people with soft skills specifically listed in their LinkedIn profile tended to be more successful in their job search. With soft skills in such demand, employers wanted to verify their mastery before hiring.

**Testing and Certification of Soft Skills**

Other than in a CBE program that could encompass and reward soft skills via badging, there could be other ways to recognize the achievement and mastery of soft skills. A global organization, even possibly SHRM, could develop testing for these competencies and then award certifications for the corresponding soft skills.

**K-12 Teaching Opportunities**

A number of studies mentioned that only about one-quarter of the 8th through 12th graders were writing at a proficient level (Fleming, 2012; Junior Achievement, 2013). The Junior Achievement (2013) report mentioned that American businesses felt that only half of the high school students were proficient at many soft skills such as critical
thinking, problem-solving, and oral and written communication. Learning soft skills could also be more of a generational issue with digital natives (younger students who grew up with digital technology) who did not grasp written communication as they went through grade school and high school. Younger digital natives focused more on shorter writings such as texting or Twitter, which was capped at 140 characters. Generational banding of teaching soft skills would be a transformational change for whole generations of students as they progressed throughout school. Establishing a coaching and mentoring system with their peers would establish better team skills and eventually more virtual teaming skills, even as early as first grade.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The current study had several limitations that could be addressed by future studies. For example, this study was limited to only five counties of southern California, so this study should be expanded to other areas to get a more representative understanding of the entire state or the United States. Additionally, a new survey sample should include more male HR professionals to round out the gender issue. Another possibility would be to see if there were differences in competencies needed from different age groups graduating college, such as Millennials (born from 1977 to 1994) who were digital natives versus Generation Z (born from 1995 to 2012) students as they entered the workforce.

Another opportunity for additional study would be to survey students who graduated from a CBE program after a year in the workplace. With the emergence of CBE, it would take several years to obtain this population.
A study could utilize the learning activities found for these competencies to determine if these specific learning activities were appropriate and increased the competencies of a BBA student in a CBE program, as they entered the workplace. Additionally, the study should identify potential gaps in skills and areas in which CBE programs should be improved.

Another opportunity for additional research would be a Delphi study to have experts identify the model(s) of delivery that would work best for a CBE system. Another possibility could be a study to identify the characteristics of students who would be most likely to succeed in a CBE system. A study to examine how business departments could collaborate with other college departments to deliver the soft skills component would be another possibility for additional research.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

This study examined HR professionals’ perceptions of workplace competencies that should be included in a CBE BBA degree program and to determine what learning activities could meet the requirements of each individual competency. The HR professionals who participated in this study offered their knowledge and experience to further research competencies. They had an extensive grounding in what was needed in the workplace and shared information to identify these competencies. This could be used by universities to develop CBE programs better aligned to workplace needs and enable their graduates to excel at their new jobs.

Soft skills such as team skills, collaboration, and relationship building were considered the top competency. Globalization and a more virtual workforce where employees could work anywhere might be one of the drivers of this focus on teamwork.
Interconnectivity where many were needed to complete a project could also be one of the drivers of this change.

The results of this study could be used by CBE programs and other university programs to identify workplace competencies that need to be included in these programs. Publishing these results as articles for others to grasp the implications for future university programs will be a goal of this researcher. Adding an experiential learning component to a university degree program to practice these competencies, instead of just learning theory, could enhance the university program that included this type of practical learning.

Employers would like to confirm mastery of the soft skill competencies before hiring graduates of a business program. One way to promote this knowledge could be by developing a badging program (as many CBE programs already started). Additionally, this could open an opportunity for a global organization such as SHRM to develop training and certification of these soft skills.

Certain soft skills such as written communication were shown to be a perceived skill in early education that was not developed as fully as necessary. Generational banding of teaching soft skills would be a transformational change for whole generations of students as they progressed throughout school. Mentoring and coaching by their peers could be a potential learning experience to develop these soft skills. As concluded by this study, improvements in the educational system to address the competency gaps requested by the workplace, such as the development of soft skills, are needed.
REFERENCES


The Economist. (2012). Not what it used to be—American universities represent declining value for money to their students. *The Economist*.


Office of the Press Secretary. (2013). *Fact sheet on the president’s plan to make college more affordable: A better bargain for the middle class.* Retrieved from


APPENDICES
## Appendix A – Synthesis Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Implications</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. College</td>
<td>Strategic Plan: Concept Paper</td>
<td>Developing an Intervention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. College</td>
<td>Strategic Plan: Concept Paper</td>
<td>Developing an Intervention</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voltage</td>
<td>Depth 3: A technique to improve system for individual decision-making tools and outcomes</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>The Depth method ties to select the most reliable combination of variables in a group through a series of interactive questionnaires with controlled methods. The technique removes repeated questioning of the individual and avoids down weighting of group members with each other.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Board</td>
<td>Economics on a college campus</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Published tuition and fees for all schools in 1986-87, published tuition and fees for all schools in 1987-88, and published tuition and fees for all schools in 1988-89. These figures do not reflect the impact of inflation on the average student over the past four years.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Board</td>
<td>Trends in college prices</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>College prices are rising at a remarkable pace, on average, at about 4% per year. The trend continues to be a significant increase in college costs, and this has had a significant impact on the average student over the past four years.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Teacher Quarter</td>
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Note: The table entries are placeholders for the purpose of this example. The actual content would depend on the specific documents referenced.
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**Note:**

- Higher Education Grant and Scholarship
- Higher Education Supply Trust
- Sympathetic
- Direct
- MOOS
- Study away (Grant Education - General)
- Study away (Grant Education - Direct Assistance)
- Special Education Trust - CBE
- CBE (Scholarship)
- REA
- Conquendes
- DEP
- NDC
- DEP - Other
- DEP - Incidence
- DEP - Host Sex
- History of CBE
- Credit Hour
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Notes:
- bachelor: 3 years
- master: 2 years
- doctoral: 4 years

**Degree Types:**
- Bachelor
- Master
- Ph.D.
- Doctorate

**Degree Focus:**
- Economic
- Finance
- International Business
- Development Economics

**Degree Levels:**
- General
- Specific (e.g., Economics)

**Degree Durations:**
- Bachelor: 3 years
- Master: 2 years
- Doctoral: 4 years
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Source: [American Institute for Research](http://www.air undermines.org)
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Competencies for Competency Based Higher Education: A Delphi Study

BRANDMAN
UNIVERSITY 16355
LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Cathryn G. Margolin

TITLE OF CONSENT FORM: Consent to Participate in Research

PURPOSE OF STUDY: It was the purpose of this study to identify the most important competencies that are necessary for the workplace in a Competency Based Education program for the Bachelor Degree in Business Administration and the learning activities that best support the teaching of those competencies as perceived by Human Resource experts working in business.

In participating in this study I agree to participate in three rounds of electronic survey questionnaires administered in one week intervals over a period of three weeks.

Each survey will take no longer than 10 – 15 minutes to complete. You will be sent an invitation before each round with explicit instructions for completion of the subsequent questionnaire.

a) Round one of the electronic questionnaire will require participants to type responses to one open ended question.

b) Round two of the electronic questionnaire will require participants to rate the degree of importance of items related to responses to round one question using a predetermined Likert scale.

c) Round three of the electronic questionnaire will require participants to provide responses to open ended questions based on rankings generated from round 2.
I understand that:
a) The potential risks for participation in this study are minimal. Identification of all participants will be anonymous throughout the study although email addresses of participants will be necessary for participation in the electronic survey questionnaires.
b) The benefits of this study to me include receiving a summary of the findings following the final survey in round three. Potential benefits to the field of education include adding to the body of knowledge of competency based education and the competencies needed for that degree program.

c) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Cathryn (Cathy) Margolin, M.B.A., at (949) 375-2627 or at Margolin@mail.brandman.edu.
d) I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.
e) I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, and 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.”
I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.
Clicking on the “agree” button indicates that you have read the informed consent form and the information in this document and that you voluntarily agree to participate, and you are at least 18 years of age.

If you do not wish to participate in this electronic survey, you may decline participation by clicking on the “disagree” button.

The survey will not open for responses unless you agree to participate.

☐ AGREE: I acknowledge receipt of the complete Informed Consent packet and “Bill of Rights.” I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in the study.

☐ DISAGREE: I do not wish to participate in this electronic survey
Appendix C

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman
University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.
Appendix D

Competency for Competency Based Education Surveys

Brandman University

Ed.D. program in Organizational Leadership
Dissertation Research

Researcher: Cathryn Margolin
Research Title: Competencies for Competency Based Higher Education: A Delphi Study

Survey Instrument #1

In the space below, please identify and describe all competencies you believe are necessary in the workplace that should be included in a Competency Based Bachelor of Business Administration program.
### Brandman University

**Ed.D. program in Organizational Leadership**  
**Dissertation Research**

Researcher: Cathryn Margolin  
Research Title: Competencies for Competency Based Higher Education: A Delphi Study

---

**Survey Instrument #2**

Please rate the importance of each of the listed competencies on the scale provided below using the following scale:

- 6 – Very Important
- 5 – Important
- 4 – Somewhat Important
- 3 – Somewhat Unimportant
- 2 – Not Important
- 1 – Totally Unimportant

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Brandman University

Ed.D. program in Organizational Leadership
Dissertation Research

Researcher: Catherine Margolin
Research Title: Competencies for Competency Based Higher Education: A Delphi Study

Survey Instrument #3

What role and/or job title do you perform in the organization?

For each of the competencies listed below, please identify and describe all learning activities you believe are most important for teaching the competency in a Competency Based Bachelor of Business Administration program

Competency 1

Competency 2

Competency 3

Competency 4

Competency 5

Competency 6

Competency 7

Competency 8