Strategic Development of Two Competency-Based Education Programs: University of Wisconsin’s Flexible Option Program and Capella University’s FlexPath

Judee Richardson
University of Wisconsin Extension

Kimberly Pearce
Capella University

The 2015 Summit for Online Leadership and Strategy
Agenda

- Competency Based Education & Direct Assessment
- UW Flexible Option and Capella’s FlexPath
- Institutional Mission Alignment
- Culture of Innovation and Risk
- Internal and External Pressures
- Academic Model
- Technology Infrastructure
Traditional Higher Education Model

Laurentius de Voltolina, 14th Century painting of Henry of Germany lecturing students in Bologna, Italy.
Competency-Based Education (CBE)
An educational approach focused on student learning rather than teaching. Outcome based, this approach focuses on how students can apply knowledge, skills and abilities rather than on rote learning. CBE is often designed to be self-paced and may be offered through credit hours or Direct Assessment.

Direct Assessment
A competency-based method by which a student’s skills, knowledge, and behavior are measured directly rather than student perception of these same attributes. Student progress is measured solely on their demonstrated competencies.
The Higher Education Mindshift

Credit-Hour
Focus on Teaching

Competency-Based
Focus on Learning

Time is Constant, but Learning is Variable

Time is Variable, but Learning is Constant
UW Flexible Option

- UW institutions offer the degrees and certificates, defined by discipline-specific competencies.
- UW faculty develop academic content, direct assessments, and mastery level required.
- Students progress by demonstrating mastery of discipline-specific knowledge and skills, measured by rigorous assessments.
- Self-paced, 3-month subscription periods, monthly enrollments.
- Non-term, direct assessment model based on outcomes.
- First public institution in U.S. to have CBE approved for Federal financial aid.
- Awarded Experimental Site status.

Capella FlexPath

- Self-paced option to pursue 6 existing degrees
  - Monthly program starts
  - Non-term model allows 12 weeks to complete regardless of start date
  - Daily course starts
  - BS and MS in Business, IT and Psychology
- Financial Aid eligible
- Quasi-mastery model
- Learning resource agnostic
- Authentic assessment evaluated by expert faculty
- Disaggregated faculty roles
Institutional Mission Alignment

UW Flexible Option

• The Wisconsin Idea.
• A public land-grant institution.
• Broad and balanced academic programs that are mutually reinforcing and emphasize high quality and creative instruction.
• To pioneer new fields of learning.
• To attract and serve students from diverse social, economic and ethnic backgrounds and to be sensitive and responsive to those groups which have been underserved by higher education.

Capella FlexPath

To extend access to high quality bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and certificate programs for adults who seek to maximize their personal and professional potential.

✓ FlexPath allows adult learners to optimize existing competencies as a platform for their emergent learning.
✓ Competency focus is aligned to industry and employer needs.
✓ Flexibility allows learners to control time, learning strategies, and opportunity costs.
Culture of Innovation and Risk

UW Flexible Option

• New higher education endeavor.
• Academics advanced beyond systems available to higher education.
• Real partnership with industry, foundation, federal and state leadership.
• Diverse partnerships working towards same goal, i.e., student learning, higher education access, relevance, quality.
• Permission to fail.

Capella FlexPath

• Quality and compliance emphasis slowed pace of institutional innovation
• FlexPath began as we initiated a culture shift to become more flexible, drive decision-making down in the organization, change with greater urgency and be more externally focused
• FlexPath built into existing infrastructure
Culture of Innovation and Risk

“The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.”

Albert Einstein
External and Internal Pressures

**UW Flexible Option**

- **External**
  - Access to information (technology)
  - Global competition
  - Aging student population
  - Systems do not support CBE
  - Financial Aid challenges
  - Lack of standard nomenclature

- **Internal**
  - Competing priorities
  - Limited resources
  - Campus and faculty onboarding

**Capella FlexPath**

- **External**
  - Increasing Higher Ed Costs
  - Degree Completion Challenges
  - Inflexible Learning Models
  - Workforce Skills Gap
  - National decrease in Competitiveness

- **Internal**
  - Serve learners better
  - Optimize our infrastructure investment
  - Return to growth
Academic Model - Curriculum

UW Flexible Option

• The curriculum viewed broadly and holistically rather than as a simple conversion of courses into competencies.
• Program-level competencies and curriculum sub-competencies that roll up into them.
• Backwards design based on best practice learning science (UW Instructional Design team).
• Learning resources selected by UW faculty. Open source/low cost.

Capella FlexPath

• Existing curriculum adapted for FlexPath
  – Backwards design principles
  – External alignments, faculty expertise, curriculum, instructional and assessment specialists
  – Curriculum completely aligned, mapped and documented
  – Competencies are clustered and offered through “courses”
• Outcomes>Competencies>Criteria>Assessments
UW Flexible Option

• Current Academic Programs Offered:
  – Associate of Arts & Science
  – Bachelor of Science in Nursing (RN to BSN)
  – Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Sciences Diagnostic Imaging
  – Bachelor of Science in Information Science Technology
  – Business & Technical Communication Certificate
  – Global Skills Certificate
  – Sales Certificate

Capella FlexPath

• Current Academic Programs Offered:
  – BS in Business
    • Business Administration
    • Health Care Management
    • Project Management
    • Management and Leadership
  – BS in IT
    • Minor in System Development: Mobile
    • Minor in System Development: Web Application
  – BS in Psychology
  – MBA
    • Business Intelligence
    • Health Care Management
    • Human Resource Management
    • Project Management
  – MS in ISTM
  – MS in Psychology
    • Industrial/Organizational
Academic Model - Assessment

**UW Flexible Option**
- Authentic assessments
- Grading rubrics
- Demonstration of knowledge, skills, integration and application versus rote learning or rote memorization.

**Capella FlexPath**
- Authentic Assessments
  - Real world contexts and deliverables
  - Independent from learning resources
- Criterion-referenced scoring guides enable flexible learning analytics
- Assessment of learning *for* learning
Academic Model - Faculty

**UW Flexible Option**
- University of Wisconsin faculty developed content and assessments.
- UW faculty are the authors of grading rubrics.
- UW faculty are the determiners of mastery level required.
- Professional development provided.

**Capella FlexPath**
- FlexPath Faculty
  - Curriculum
  - Assessment
    - 48 hour turn-around
    - Feedback that is personalized, mastery-based and competency focused to narrow performance gaps and encourage growth mindset
- Faculty Tutors
- Faculty Coaches
Academic Model – Student Progression

**UW Flexible Option**
- Individualized Learning Plan
- 3-month subscription periods
- All You Can Learn model
- Highly flexible and student-centric
- Proactive, wraparound student support from enrollment to graduation
- Academic Success Coaches

**Capella FlexPath**
- Personalized Course Completion Plan
- Successfully complete each competency in a course
- Three submissions per assessment
UW Flexible Option

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpM1HbEo-Jw
Technology Infrastructure

### UW Flexible Option
- Learning Platform is Desire2Learn
- Developing our own Student Engagement System (SIS, CRM, LMS combined)
- Developing our own transcript
  - to reflect competency-based learning/mastery
  - will allow students to track own progress

### Capella FlexPath
- PeopleSoft
- Blackboard
- Proprietary Tools
  - Curriculum Authoring Systems
  - Scoring Guide
  - Competency Map
- Regent
Q & A

Judee Richardson
Judee.Richardson@uwex.edu
Director of Academic & Curricular Development
University of Wisconsin-Extension
608-575-7149
UW Flexible Option Program
flex.wisconsin.edu

Kim Pearce
Kim.pearce@capella.edu
Director of Academic Quality Analytics & Accreditation and FlexPath Academic Lead
Capella University
capella.edu/flexpath-self-paced-learning/