

New Study: Less Expensive Competency-Based Education Programs Just As Good As Traditional Programs



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I cover higher education, culture, and the intersection of the two [FULL BIO](#) 

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With regard to the CBE program in teaching, WGU graduates scored significantly higher on work readiness overall as well as grit, organizational acumen, and personal management. Twenty-five percent more WGU graduates took loans to pay for their degrees. However, of participants who took out loans while pursuing their teaching degree, non-WGU students graduated with 49 percent (\$10,000) more student debt. The annual income of surveyed WGU graduates is 21 percent higher than that of non-WGU graduates, and WGU graduates reported higher average salaries across all workplaces.

With regard to the CBE degree in Organizational Leadership, the majority of participants in the South Texas College (STC) program said they would not have received a recent promotion without their STC degree. At the same time, a common concern among respondents was high instructor turnover and a high dropout rate among students. Given the relative youth of the program, many participants noted progress in these areas and expected continued improvement over time.

The Learning Policy Institute projects that the demand for well-trained teachers will rise to an additional 300,000 per year by 2020, and teacher shortages could reach 112,000 by 2018. By offering a flexible and accessible teacher preparation program, WGU may help increase the supply of educated teachers and provide some relief from forecasted teacher shortages.

In critical industries with chronic labor shortages like education and health care, bolstering the labor supply is necessary to ensuring that essential services are accessible and affordable. The large shortfall of qualified nurses and teachers in the U.S. is a symptom of an education system and labor market that have failed to work in tandem to meet the growing needs of American society.

As more Americans gain access to reliable internet connections and labor demand continues to shift away from manufacturing into service industries, flexible, online learning opportunities can help increase access for a growing segment of people looking for a career change. Enrollment in online, competency-based programs has grown rapidly in the last decade, producing a large increase in CBE graduates in the workforce. While numerous research organizations, educational institutions, and state legislatures have speculated about the competence of CBE program alumni, relatively little research has been done to explore the outcomes of CBE graduates.

Our survey-based, quantitative study of CBE graduates finds no evidence that CBE graduates in the programs studied had less favorable outcomes than the non-CBE graduates. In fact, incomes of both WGU and Institution X graduates were significantly higher than those of graduates of traditional programs.

The qualitative portion of the study focusing on the CBE Organizational Leadership degree program at South Texas College found that many respondents noted that this program was one of few education alternatives to the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley—and was much more affordable. The ability to reach

communities of low socioeconomic status is extremely important in order to alleviate shortages in well-paying, critical fields and in improving social mobility.

Clearly, three programs cannot provide a fully representative sample of all CBE higher education, so additional research is necessary to confirm the outcomes of CBE program alumni in nursing, teaching, and other fields.

Nevertheless, we are confident that the claim that CBE program graduates are not prepared for the workforce or do not have at least comparable outcomes to traditional programs cannot be supported.