The experience of the College of Public and Community Service indicates that two questions should be posed to eager higher education reformers: What factors should be considered by institutions in determining appropriate innovative approaches, and which guidelines should influence institutional planning?

assessing ourselves: the experience of the College of Public and Community Services

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The College of Public and Community Service (CPCS) was founded at the University of Massachusetts at Boston in 1972 under a broad and vague mandate to develop an innovative Bachelor of Arts program. We were explicitly charged with developing a B.A. program capable of preparing urban adult students for careers in public and community service. A competency-based format was adopted to carry out this mandate. Since its inception the College has progressed deliberately, but with undeniable results, toward a gradual clarification of issues embedded in its system of competency-based education. Our own "experiential learning" process has often been difficult: we were forced to continually educate students, faculty, and staff, as well as University administrators regarding the changing requirements of our evolving model.

It is precisely this perpetual struggle that accompanied the development of CPCS which makes us skeptical of the current wave of enthusiasm for innovative education as a general solution to the problem of higher education. As the demographics of traditional higher education become clear, we

We draw extensively on the writing and thinking of John H. Strange, the school's founding dean, throughout this chapter.

see educators increasingly looking to competency-based education and the assessment of experiential learning as the dual yellow brick highway destined to lead higher education out of its upcoming nightmare. The dream seems to be that colleges of the future will appeal to adults, not to the dwindling populations of eighteen-year-olds, with competency-based programs designed to be more accountable to work-related educational needs. Freestanding assessment centers are envisioned to help translate learning from prior experience into creditable competencies, so that adults will be able to return to college with a sense of accomplishment; perhaps, they will even feel gratitude toward academic institutions now willing to recognize the validity of learning which occurred outside the ivy-covered walls.

Simple planning seems to be all that remains to be done before the dream can come true. Appropriate assessment techniques (paired with equally "appropriate" billing mechanisms) need to be devised and objective criteria for the demonstration and evaluation of competence designed. Indeed, teams of educational experts are currently hard at work writing the manuals that will show eager administrators how to save their institutions through "innovative" education.

For those of us already engaged in the everyday tasks of implementing competency-based education programs, such grand expectations are worse than naive; they are dangerous. They promote exactly the kind of oversell that ultimately makes educational innovators look foolish to skeptical administrators, legislators, and the public. Far worse, fanciful expectations may lead to simplistic programs. These can undermine adults' ability to actively participate in the identification and evaluation of their own learning and can divert the faculty from the difficult task of redefining their own role in the teaching-learning process.

At the College of Public and Community Service we have learned, through six hard years of experience, that the creation of new models for educating adults is fraught with difficulties. We can name ex-students whose opinion of themselves has been lowered because of our failure to live up to the promise of recognizing their prior learning. We know faculty and staff who have retreated from personal and professional risk-taking because of our inability to support them in the draining work of innovative education. Such may be the costs of any change; certainly, we still feel that the overall benefits of our evolving system outweigh these costs. But the failures are not borne lightly; they leave us cautious about blithely promoting the immediate implementation of competency-based programs as an obvious solution to the fiscal and demographic crisis of higher education.

Instead, we must approach the future with care and with the recognition that the benefits to be gained from a well-designed and implemented competency-based program do not come easily. To ensure success we need to engage in wide-ranging appraisals of the work which has already been done in the development of competency-based programs and the assessment of experiential learning. Our investigations must go beyond the case study or "how to" examinations which have typified the research in the field thus far (for an example of such a study, see Grant, 1978). The current climate, which promises easy success, forces us to be more critical, more willing to admit to the difficulties in instituting new programs. To avoid doing so from fear of jeopardizing short run acceptance could ultimately undermine the important work, learning, and growth which have occurred across the country during the past ten years. What emerges here is that we need to do what we so often require of our students: prepare portfolios. We must present evidence which demonstrates how our experiences in different competency-based systems suggest directions for change in higher education as a whole.

guidelines for assessing our experience

At CPCS we have learned that students must be clear about what they are trying to prove in order to present acceptable evidence of prior learning. What we in the field should first attempt to demonstrate to those considering new programs, therefore, are the potentials and limitations of competency-based programs. Would-be planners need narratives and specifics, to be sure, but histories alone are not enough. Our programs must be set in context, so that the original goals, principles, and scope are not forgotten or exaggerated. CPCS, for example, began in the early 1970s as a result of a combination of reformist hopes. Some wanted new methods of teaching; others sought quality education for inner-city adults without traditional access to higher education; still others desired social change in communities and the human services. We can describe CPCS effectively only if we recognize this general context and address its influence on our evolution toward more formalized understandings of competency-based education. Similarly, other existing programs have their peculiar goals and principles; new programs cannot expect to choose among systems unless the differential histories are made clear.

Existing programs must be specific about the student population they are designed to serve. At CPCS we designed our program to work best for the students it was planned to serve: working class adults in their early thirties, who have direct experiences in a variety of community programs. Further, we recognize that "street savvy"—an ability to improvise and take advantage of possibilities—is critical to success at the College. We can deal with many basic skill problems, but we cannot serve as well the younger or more sheltered, inexperienced student who wants ongoing guidance. Any plan to emulate our particular competency-based system with a different population may be problematic. Indeed, the logic of this argument may be that the first task in selling competency-based education is to disclaim *any* current ability to provide it well, everywhere, for everyone.

We should recount the practical pressures which affected our progress, not only the theoretical issues we encountered. Problems with funding, physical facilities, university or state politics, and centralized services are likely to occur everywhere and their impact should be acknowledged. It is crucial here that we honestly appraise our level of consciousness at the time when planning decisions were made.

The ability of faculty and staff to be flexible in responding to pressures must be analyzed. The faculty at CPCS have a wide range of nonacademic experiences. Most were hired especially to work at the College, not recruited from the rest of the University. While these characteristics caused other problems, they did allow the school perhaps a more widespread commitment to experimentation than might be obtained from faculty drawn into competency-based education only as a means of ensuring academic survival. We must consider more fully the faculty characteristics that promote flexibility, so that new programs do not make false assumptions about faculty ability to embrace new roles.

Finally, we need to be more open about the values embedded in existing programs, both the original values and those which have evolved. Many programs, not only CPCS, developed because of common, but unstated assumptions regarding social change, adult equality, and the nature of good teaching. New programs established for market reasons, without such shared and strong values, may have the form but not the spirit of existing programs and will therefore encounter very different problems. We cannot avoid such considerations in our efforts to advance experiential learning or competency-based education; to do so may be to forfeit the very driving force behind our success.

the College of Public and Community Service model

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze one aspect of the CPCS program using the above guidelines. Our hope is that by expanding on the strengths and weaknesses of CPCS we will offer more realistic direction to those considering new programs. Space, however, does not allow us to fully elaborate on the entire experience of the College.

Here we concentrate on the relationship between the development of the competency-based curriculum at CPCS and the corresponding growth of an Assessment program* which is fully integrated into the College. We find this perspective useful because it highlights one of the central commitments of competency-based education—that learning occurs beyond the classroom. It also allows us to focus on the central problem of creating a viable assessment process to help students identify and demonstrate competence acquired through experiential learning, as well as to plan for the achievement of further competence. In the summer of 1978, the College entered a new stage in its development of an Assessment program. The administration and development of the program was transferred from an administrative function to a faculty role. This natural juncture, therefore, allows us an obvious mechanism for examining our own experiences and for comprehending the lessons our experience may have for others.

*Assessment program is CPCS's name for the course and procedures used to teach students how to identify their competencies, as defined by the college, and how to gather and submit evidence to demonstrate those competencies. It is *not* a traditional testing program.

the historical context

In order to understand the origins of the Assessment program, we must review the early development of CPCS. The College of Public and Community Service is one of three colleges at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. After one year of operation, the College was physically separated from the rest of the University when the other colleges moved to a newly constructed facility near the Boston harbor. Over the years this separation has produced problems both for CPCS as a developing college and for CPCS students as recipients of centralized University services.

The truth is, however, that the College was conceived in a hotel; here a small core planning staff began planning the College in July 1972. If there is a symbolic meaning to the hotel birthing, it is that CPCS rapidly became the bastard child of the University—not only because it was physically separated, but also because it chose to define its goals and practice in ways which were often viewed as different from, if not hostile to, its parent institution.

Four main features of the College contributed to its uniqueness and the development of its program:

1. *Curriculum.* The curriculum of the College is competency-based, that is, an outcome-oriented curriculum defined in competency terms. Competency statements include criteria and standards which define the breadth and level of competence that students are required to achieve. As the name of the College implies, the curriculum concerns itself with the development of skills and knowledge necessary for careers in public and community service, broadly defined. The College also sought, from the beginning, to integrate career education with the liberal arts. Early in the history of the school, however, administrative pressures pushed us to separate the curriculum into career and general education areas. Curriculum problems continue to result from this administrative division of a single College goal.

2. *Student Body.* CPCS attempts to serve a population of inner-city adults over twenty-five years of age. To a great extent, CPCS has achieved this objective. While its enrollment has doubled (from 300 to 650 in six years), its student profile has continued to be 25–30 percent minority, 50 percent inner-city, and an average thirty-two years of age.

3. *Faculty.* CPCS faculty include both traditional academicians and practicing professionals. Most faculty attempt to remain engaged in professional, community, or service activities as ways of broadening their perspective in the teaching and evaluation of students. The College is continually negotiating with the University regarding the extent to which traditional criteria are to be used for tenure and promotion at CPCS.

4. *Admissions Criteria.* Neither Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores nor high school records are appropriate admissions criteria for CPCS. The

College has attempted to develop criteria which reflect the characteristics needed for survival in experimental programs: motivation, tolerance for ambiguity, ability to work independently, and so on. Originally, all applicants were individually interviewed. As the program became more defined, admissions seminars were developed to create a process of "mutual disclosure": the College explains its programs and policies to potential students and the students explain their goals in returning to school. This process has helped us simplify our admissions criteria. Currently, students are admitted because they meet our target student profile and if their educational goals can be addressed by CPCS career programs.

origins of the Assessment program

One year did not provide enough time for adequate planning and implementation. The month of September 1973 finally saw the College moving from the hotel to a temporary location in a vacated University building; new faculty arrived, began developing curriculum, attending meetings regarding policy issues, and preparing courses; administrators haggled with traditional University procedures and systems of operations which dealt only with credits, not competencies. On October 1, 1973 an exhausted, but enthusiastic, faculty greeted 300 entering students.

The College plowed its way through the first semester. The problems, for both faculty and students, were immense. No one had the time to think systematically about the imperatives of a competency-based system or to consider standard mechanisms for demonstrating competence acquired through prior learning. Amidst all the chaos, however, was an atmosphere of excitement, an *esprit de corps* that existed among students, faculty, and administrators. Bound together in this innovative educational experiment, they tolerated the ambiguity, delays, disappointment, and general confusion. While some students withdrew, the majority remained, substituting commitment and strong friendships for program deficiencies.

During intersession of January 1974 the College moved to its permanent location. At a retreat held during this period faculty discussed curricular and academic issues while a nonfaculty group took on the topic of "student issues." This group began to identify issues and solutions that eventually led to the creation of an Assessment program within CPCS. Thus the overwhelming problems of the first year strongly influenced the nature of the CPCS Assessment program—it evolved, even more than other parts of CPCS, as an immediate response to crisis, not as a self-conscious or theoretical extension of the competency-based educational system.

Specifically, three unresolved, college-wide issues created problems:

1. The full curriculum had not been completed until November 1973 and already needed revision. The faculty's lack of experience in writing competency statements and the pressure to produce the competencies created discrepancies, overlaps, and omissions in competency language, format, and content.

2. Evaluation procedures were not fully in place, yet students were demanding workable processes which would allow them to demonstrate competence. Original policy requirements demanded a team of three faculty to co-evaluate every demonstration of competency which occurred outside the classroom.

3. The burdensome faculty workload was leading to discouragement and factional disputes among faculty, and between faculty and administrators. Students felt unable to demand the individual attention they needed from overworked faculty members.

The group recognized that students experienced the above problems in special ways. It proposed solutions to student problems which could occur without waiting for the faculty to rationalize its curriculum and procedures. In identifying the three problems faced by CPCS, the group, in effect, identified the goals which continue to define the assessment process as CPCS:

1. Students need to understand the competency-based educational system employed by CPCS. Basically, the College had assumed that the curriculum was self-explanatory. Yet students clearly did not understand competency-based education; faculty had developed the system and the language to go with it. CPCS students were not familiar with the language and concepts of traditional education; even less were they comfortable with a new system that was still being formulated by the faculty. The group advising sessions to which students had been assigned upon entry had not met this need, since it had not been identified.

2. Students need to understand the relevance of the CPCS curriculum to careers in public and community service. Students did not always see how competencies related to job skills. They needed to place the curriculum in context to understand its organization, requirements, and inner relationships. Finally, students needed to develop their own rationale for selecting among the various options in the curriculum.

3. Students need to understand why and how they can use their out-of-class experiences to demonstrate competence. Competency-based education, as understood at CPCS, means that students can identify for themselves what they know and can do. Faculty evaluators are needed to help students apply their knowledge and skills to appropriate standards and criteria. The system required a process to assist students in examining their experience—to recognize the knowledge and skills they brought to the experience, the new knowledge and skills gained from the experience, and how the learning accomplished related to the CPCS curriculum. Competency-based education, as employed by CPCS, requires students to play an active role in the learning process by identifying their own experiential learning. If students do not assume this role, they are dependent on the faculty not only to evaluate their competence but to identify their competence.

The group proposed a special entry "Assessment" program to be staffed by members of the group. The program would involve the thirty-five to forty incoming spring students for seven weeks and would focus on the issues indicated above. A final report was to be written which would evaluate

the experience and propose plans for future development; this became the first phase of the CPCS entry program.

further development

A number of factors contributed to the continuing development of an Assessment program along the lines identified in the first year.

1. The proposal was administratively more efficient than individual advising. Instead of attempting to explain the system and how to use it to each student, we could use groups to structure the delivery of information which had been acquired haphazardly.

2. The development of an Assessment program shifted the focus of the College somewhat away from the immediate problems of how the current curriculum was written toward developing an understanding of the issues underlying competency-based education. The assumption was that students (and faculty) could not effectively critique the internal implementation problems until they understood the principles upon which the system was being created.

Whatever the administrative functions of the proposal, however, its main intent was increased responsiveness to students. There was a strong feeling that the College had to perform more sensitively than the other large bureaucratic system within which our students had been clients or low-status workers. The acceptance of a self-assessment program meant that faculty and staff made a conscious commitment to empower students by distributing to them information which would clarify the rules and processes of the system. The assumption was that competency-based education, by definition, could have no mystique. What students needed to know about, what they had to do, could be handed them as they walked in the door.

As the College developed and became more sensitive to the needs of its students, the objectives of the Assessment program expanded. Our concerns grew from simply helping students understand and negotiate the system to recognizing and responding to the fears, doubts, and anxieties which many adults experience when they return to school. We began to understand that the entry program environment had to be safe and supportive so that students could speak out, share, and say, "I don't understand." At the same time, we continued to recognize the basic skill issues embedded in the entry program. We saw the need to integrate a mechanism for assessing basic reading and writing skills into the entry program. We wanted new students to accomplish some "new learning" in Assessment, so that the program would not be viewed as too "process oriented." Because of the self-paced nature of CPCS, we added a planning component aimed at helping new students set educational goals and define realistic expectations for attaining their degree.

All of these goals for the Assessment program were valuable in themselves. Major problems arose, however, when we tried to combine them all into a one semester program. We tried various lengths, seven weeks, twelve weeks, a summer session. At times, new students were restricted to the Assessment program; in other semesters, students were allowed to enroll in other

courses, or in specially designed Assessment-related courses. We developed a student manual containing all the information needed for CPCS students. Similarly, we developed a faculty resource book for teaching Assessment.

The major problem which has repeatedly resurfaced during the development of an Assessment program is the extent to which Assessment should concentrate on *process* concerns: help students feel secure, learn the ropes, and build networks with other students, learn how to identify prior learning—and how much it should focus on content questions: knowledge of the curriculum policies and procedures, work in essential skills, information about public and community service, or the essential value of higher education. Throughout its development, there has been no resolution of the problem. Most faculty and students seem to want the program to do both well, so often the "compromise" was that the entry program did both somewhat ineffectively.

where we are now

Since our first experiment with an entry process in January 1974, the Assessment program has changed dramatically. As we came to better understand the implications of competency-based education, experiential learning, and the students we wished to serve, our entry process has improved. These changes, however, did not come easy and were often the result of difficult struggles between faculty, administrators, and students.

As of July 1978, the Assessment program is administered by an Assessment Director who holds a faculty appointment in our Liberal Arts Center, and whose task it is to make links with all areas of the curriculum. The skills that we were attempting to help students develop through the Assessment process have begun to be identified and to occupy a recognized place in the curriculum. As part of the general education component of the curriculum there are two competencies which all students are required to achieve: Self Awareness and Planning (see Figure 1). While requiring revision and clarification, these competencies have taken their logical place in a competency-based program that requires students to examine their experience in relation to learning outcomes and to build upon this process by structuring new experiences for learning.

The Assessment program is now officially scheduled for fourteen weeks with an intense, structured program operating during the first half of the semester. In addition to their participation in Assessment, students may enroll in entry-level courses that interface with the Assessment program. The most recent development of the program is the addition of salaried Student Advisers. Each faculty member teaching Assessment is assisted by a Student Adviser who acts as a facilitator, a peer counselor, a resource person for general information, and who brings valuable insight and ideas for program improvements and development.

The Assessment program currently serves only entering students. As such, it merely begins an on-going process for students. By the end of Assessment, students have neither identified or documented everything they know

Figure 1. Assessment Competency

Rationale:
A student competent in self-assessment and educational planning is able to live creatively with change and growth in a rapidly changing society. The ability to plan and to make decisions in one's life, career, and education involves decision making and planning skills called assessment. Aspects of this process include: the identification of personal, educational, and career goals; assessing one's learning capabilities (strengths and weaknesses); identifying resources; designing a realistic plan of action, evaluating the results, making revisions in the plans as needed, and executing the plans.

Competence in self-assessment and planning is essential to progressing successfully through the program at CPCS. A competency-based system, such as at CPCS, requires that all students become self-directing learners. This means that a student can make sound decisions about what kinds of learning to pursue and how. Since there are no required courses or prescribed sequences of learning, each student must develop an individualized learning plan which relfects his or her individual educational and career goals and the means by which these goals will be met. The learning plan includes both a general map of the total learning the student will undertake at CPCS and a carefully worked out plan for attaining competencies in the first semester. Moreover, the process must be repeated and plans must be reviewed and revised as the student progresses toward the degree.

The assessment competency is in essence a planning competency. Students will find these planning and self-assessment skills helpful in their progress through their program at CPCS. Furthermore these skills will continue to be useful in short and long range planning in career development and learning beyond the completion of the B.A. program at CPCS.

Competency:
The student can make rational decisions about how to develop a learning plan and demonstrate competencies based on realistic self-assessment and a reasoned plan of action.

Method of Evaluation:
The student will develop a learning plan and provide a rationale for that learning plan. The plan should include an overview of learning sequences planned for the B.A. degree placed within a context of education and career goals. It should include careful planning for the first semester and be placed within a realistic time frame.

Criteria:
The learning plan should indicate that the student has included the following steps:
1. Set educational goals which can be met by attaining the Bachelor of Arts degree at CPCS.
2. Identified prior learning which can be related to these educational goals and applied toward the demonstration of competencies.
3. Developed strategies for demonstrating prior learning and for having this learning certified through competency evaluation.
4. Identified new learning essential to meet the educational goals.
5. Developed strategies for acquiring competencies involving new learning.
6. Developed an integrated learning plan within a realistic time frame. The plan should include an overview of the whole B.A. degree and specific planning for the first semester.
7. Developed a "rationale" for the learning plan indicating how the plan relates to previously stated educational and career goals.

Standards:
1. Must be written clearly enough to be understood by the average reader.
2. Must be clearly organized into areas designated by the criteria so each criterion is addressed distinctly and separately.
3. There must be no internal inconsistencies.

Conditions:
1. The plan may be prepared in or out of class and with all the outside help the student may need.
2. The plan must be submitted by the end of the first semester in which the student is enrolled in the College.
3. Students are encouraged (but not required) to complete evaluation of prior learning by the end of the first semester.

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and can do nor have they designed a learning plan which will be their final one. We are beginning to understand that the process of Assessment continues to evolve as students grow and change. Therefore we plan to continue additional activities which will support students in continued self-assessment.

We now understand that the skills we originally identified as necessary for students to survive in a competency-based program also have major implications for continued growth and development of students beyond their College program. Ultimately, students are empowered by the realization that they can exert some control over their lives by using the same skills they employed at CPCS. As students confirm for themselves that learning can and does occur beyond the traditional walls of academe, the principle of lifelong learning is more than encouraged, it is at hand.

We hope to develop an exit Assessment process defined by an "exit assessment" competency. Again, this results from needs of students who are completing their degrees. Such needs range from the concrete—to prepare a resume, to develop job-hunting skills, to prepare an autobiographical statement for graduate school—to the abstract—to bring closure to undergraduate education and to begin the personal reassessment necessary to move to another stage of one's life.

While this proposal is in the elementary stage of development, it reflects a common theme of the College and the Assessment program—that the system is never static; that we are constantly developing our understanding of what we are doing and where we should grow.

competency-based education and the CPCS faculty

At this point, the careful reader might wonder: Whatever happened to the faculty? We have given evidence which indicates the development of a program that strives to respond to student needs, but we have provided little indication of concern for faculty problems. Indeed, our narrative reflects a major shortcoming of the College—we have been much more effective in defining and responding to student issues than we have been in addressing our own needs as faculty and staff. Although occasional voices have spoken out about "burn out" or "faculty development," little real energy has been spent

in considering faculty roles. This omission is especially unfortunate, since there are natural parallels between the problems we help our students address and the problems we face as faculty members:

- *Legitimacy.* Both students and faculty have been affected by the constant scrutiny under which CPCS has developed. Faculty have faced several institutional reviews and have often had to defend their institution to unsupportive professional colleagues. Students, likewise, are called to defend the very aspect of the program which drew them to CPCS—the ability to receive credit for experiential learning. Fellow students, employers, and family often question the legitimacy of a degree which does not require four years of full-time study.
- *Criteria/Reward Structure.* CPCS faculty work in an environment which does not always value or allow time for the traditional activities that lead to tenure. They need a system of tenure criteria and standards which can be broadly understood and which will recognize that CPCS faculty engage in other activities that attribute to their professional worth. This has obvious parallels with the flexibility that CPCS students require from the competency system.
- *Time Priorities/Goal Setting.* The problems here are exactly alike for our students and our faculty. We are all adults with responsibilities outside CPCS; the demands of our program are overwhelming.
- *Tensions/Anxiety.* CPCS students and faculty find themselves in similarly stressful situations. Roles are not always defined and many encounters between students involve issues of negotiation, not issues of authority. Therefore, students feel under pressure to know exactly what they want and how to get it, and faculty feel pressured to impose standards they do not believe in or even do not fully understand.

It is indeed unfortunate that CPCS has not been able to create out of these common problems a stronger sense of mutual struggle. Instead, faculty have "been strong" and denied their problems in order to meet student needs. The Assessment program not only confronted these issues for students, but it did so in a supportive environment. There was no program for faculty nor any such sanctioned support system. We are now beginning to realize that our success depends on creating a sense of support for students *and* faculty. We have seen faculty become brittle and unable to respond sensitively to students because of overload and lack of a clear role. We cannot overlook faculty problems just because faculty are "paid a decent salary" or because they should "know better."

Major issues which need consideration as a part of this process are:

- How can faculty teach effectively in a competency-based system that does not require students to attend classes, only to demonstrate competence?
- How do faculty learn to venture away from their narrow specialties and learn to play a more facilitating role?
- How do we define and present options for individual work with students so that they may fill gaps in their prior learning without taking courses?
- How do faculty continually develop and expand their connections in the field so that they have other sources of activity outside of the College?

The most effective way of supporting faculty is, as we have now learned, to begin to identify what the system requires of faculty. To the extent that we can begin to identify the competence required of faculty, we will have already supported them. While we should provide faculty with training or programs that will help them to meet their specified concerns, we should encourage faculty to more openly share the issues and problems which they think are theirs alone. Monies should be provided for faculty to visit other programs, if only to find relief in the fact that other institutions are grappling with similar problems. Above all, upper-level administrators must recognize that innovation requires innovation and that a new breed of faculty requires changes in the reward system, particularly more flexibility in the criteria and standards for evaluation of performance.

lessons from the CPCS experience

Before drawing general conclusions from the CPCS experience, we must review more carefully the values behind its competency-based system. Over the years the College has evolved a dominant, if not total, ideology around how we define competencies and what we expect of students and faculty. A curriculum has been developed that attempts to define the general competencies required for work in the human services and for an adequate "liberal arts" approach to the world. Faculty have defined the appropriate criteria and standards for all competencies (see Figures 2, 3, and 4).

The CPCS system assumes, however, that faculty and students also have the right to negotiate with each other over ways to demonstrate competence. Faculty are presumed to understand the intent and underlying standards of competence. Students are able to suggest interpretations of the criteria and methods of evaluation that are more relevant to their needs, but still within the rationale and spirit of the competency. Faculty are considered able to study such student requests and to determine whether they meet the general standards of the competency. The negotiations rest upon the basic assumption that students are adults with integrity and that attempts to modify competency requirements (even when deemed inappropriate by faculty) stem from a quest for relevance, not an attempt to undermine standards or to cheapen degree requirements. There is then, necessarily, an expectation of mutual trust between students and faculty upon which the entire system depends.

Obviously, such assumptions do not underlie all competency-based programs. The CPCS program bears more resemblance to contracted programs where students negotiate expected outcomes, than it does to "objective," testing-based programs whose purpose is to achieve totally verifiable results among all students. We do strive for accountability to the competency statements and standards, but we also recognize the need for professional judgments on the part of faculty evaluators, and we promote the development of a wide variety of methods for demonstrating competence.

It is inappropriate here to engage in a debate over the merits and problems of the CPCS definition of competency-based education. It is impor-

Figure 2. Values: Bureaucracy and Moral Responsibility

Rationale:
Too often in recent years we have been haunted by the voice of the army officer or bureaucrat accused of a crime. "I am not responsible," he says. "I was doing what I was told." He may claim further that no one is responsible; the organization is just too big. We would guess that he is hiding his own guilt, but experience tells us also that lines of responsibility are ambiguous and complex in bureaucracies. Furthermore, one's ambition is usually best served by obedience to one's superiors or to the "organization" and there are minimal rewards for speaking out. The person in an organization must learn to ask: what are my absolute values (racial justice, for example); to what extent does my organization share these values; what power do I have in the organization; and at what point have I compromised my values beyond what I consider morally responsible?

The question of moral responsibility within a bureaucracy may be the crucial moral question of our time. It is certainly a question for human service workers.

Competency:
Can define and analyze the extent and limits of an individual's responsibility in institutional and social settings.

Method of Evaluation:
You may write an essay or present an oral account. You are encouraged to choose a case from your own experience in an organization.

Criteria:
Your analysis must include:

1. An explained statement of a value that you hold to be important (racial or sexual equality, for example).
2. A description of a social or institutional setting which violates the value in some measure.
3. The way in which you define the *limit* of responsibility within the setting.
4. The actions one ought to take when one's values have been threatened with compromise.

Standards and Conditions:

1. The essay must be at least 1500 words.
2. The violation of values within an institution must be documented by presenting policy statements, violations of written policy, testimony, historical precedent.

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tant, however, to elaborate on the basic systemic requirements which necessitated the development of our Assessment program: In the CPCS system, both students and faculty must understand the rationale behind competency statements, criteria, and standards. Only when there is mutual agreement on the meaning of the competencies as written can there be successful negotiation around appropriate means for demonstrating them. If faculty are not familiar with the purpose of the competency, they cannot properly evaluate student suggestions for modification. And if students do not understand the competencies, they cannot differentiate between reasonable and unreasonable applications of prior or field learning to demonstrations of competence.

Figure 3. Community Change Certificate

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Rationale:
Given a basic understanding of financial records and reports which are necessary in order to adequately understand the fiscal condition of a community agency, the student then needs to be able to apply basic budgeting and accounting principles to solve financial problems of agencies. The second level competency in financial management will enable students to develop skills in performing major financial tasks for community-based agencies.

Competency:
Can use basic concepts of financial management to carry out a major financial task for a community-based agency.

Criteria:

1. Describe a specific community-based agency including the size of the staff and budget, the services offered, the objectives of the agency, and the organizational form (that is, nonprofit, cooperative, and so on).
2. Complete a major financial task for the agency using:
   a. relevant financial records
   b. budget information
   c. an understanding of the particular agency's system of financial controls
3. Present both a discussion and dollar calculation of how the task was accomplished.

Standards:

1. The agency selected must have at least five paid staff and an annual budget of $50,000 or more.
2. All calculations must be mathematically correct.
3. The financial records, budget information, and information about the system of financial controls must be identified as to source.
4. The tasks completed must be on appropriate forms (if applicable) and in a manner which is directly useful to an agency.
5. The tasks must be performed in a manner which is realistic, legal, and within the constraints of any regulatory requirements of the granting agency.

Example of Evaluation:
Using an existing agency's financial data and system, do one of the following using the above criteria and standards:

1. Write the budget and calculate the unit cost for a Department of Public Welfare purchase of service contract.
2. Fill out agency forms for having a rate established by the Massachusetts Rate Setting Commission.
3. Prepare an agency's year end financial report.

Furthermore, if students do not understand the whole set of competencies in the curriculum, they are unable to design a total program that will meet their educational needs. Indeed, at CPCS we have come to understand that our entire system is utterly dependent upon student and faculty awareness. Faculty cannot "teach to" competencies unless students know what the criteria for

Figure 4. Interventions with Individuals

Rationale:
As a worker in a helping profession, you may be making interventions into the lives of individuals. For these interventions there are a variety of approaches or techniques to choose from depending on who the client is, what the specific behavior to be changed is, and your basic assumptions about how people initiate and make changes in their behavior. This competency gives you the opportunity to choose a specific intervention approach for individuals which is of special interest to you. You will examine the approach's theoretical bases, concepts, terms, and techniques and utilize it to effect change in your client's behavior.

Competency:
Can use a specific approach to effect change with an individual.

Method of Evaluation:
You can present an oral or written description of the intervention plan which was implemented. This presentation should include a description of the approach utilized (see standard 5) and a discussion of the interaction of your personal style and assumptions about how people change with the specific approach you used. You should also include in your presentation process notes, behavioral charts, progress reports, tapes of interviews, or whatever direct evidence is appropriate to the approach utilized. If possible, a letter should be obtained from the supervisor attesting to the competence of the intervention.

Criteria:
Your demonstration should include the following:

1. Identification of the problem issue or behavior to be dealt with;
2. A thorough assessment of the problem;
3. Consideration of ethical issues involved in making an intervention in this situation;
4. Demonstration of an adequate understanding of the principles and techniques of the specific approach employed;
5. A plan and the implementation of the plan for intervention using the techniques and principles of the specific approach chosen;
6. Demonstration of your ability to communicate effectively with the client;
7. A record of progress made in the intervention;
8. Critical appraisal of the plan and ongoing revision where necessary;
9. Final evaluation of the intervention.

Standards:

1. Identification of the problem must include a specific description of the problem and those affected by it (who will gain from the intervention?).
2. Your assessment of the problem must include possible causes, possible consequences, detailed information about the history of the problem and the context in which it exists before your intervention. The sources of your information should be reliable and direct observation of the problem should be used where possible.
3. Ethical issues which must be considered prior to any intervention on your part are: you must determine that you are the appropriate person and this is the appropriate time to intervene. You must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that your personal values do not conflict with or interfere with the client's interest.
4. Your choice of intervention must be in harmony with your personal style of interaction and with the client's needs.
5. You should demonstrate general knowledge of the major theoretical bases, concepts, terms, and techniques which is consistent with current texts on the specific approach you choose.
6. The strategy plan should include a statement of realistic goals (agreed upon by you and the client if possible) and all steps (in order) to be taken to reach the goal(s).
7. Implementation of the plan must be consistent with the techniques and principles of the method chosen.
8. Records of the progress of the intervention could be either in the form of written progress reports, charts of direct observation of behavior, or records kept by the client. They should indicate clearly that you, as intervener, have been attentive to the effects of your intervention on the client during the process of the intervention.
9. The final evaluation of the intervention must include assessment of the positive and negative aspects of the intervention, your strengths and weaknesses as the intervener, any revisions made, and proposals (with rationales) for changes in the intervention which might improve its effectiveness. There should also be a discussion of the results of the intervention: Did change occur in the individual? Why or why not?

Conditions:

1. The intervention must take place in a setting acceptable to the certificate adviser, preferably a recognized agency or other human service setting where a supervisor is aware of the progress of the intervention.
2. The intervention must be implemented over a minimum of eight weeks or its equivalent.
3. The intervention may be done with others as part of a team under specific circumstances agreed to by the certificate adviser.

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competence are. Students cannot demonstrate competence unless they know what it is. It is this *necessity* for student empowerment, more than any sustained value commitment, that supports the continued development of our Assessment program.

requirements for an effective assessment program within the CPCS model

The CPCS Assessment program has undergone an important evolution. Originally developed as a response to the crisis of initial chaos, its first mandate was to provide clear and appropriate information so that students would, at least, know the language and rules of the system. Gradually, it placed more emphasis on the most difficult aspect of our curriculum—the means of applying prior learning in demonstrating competence. As that process has become better defined and as the processes of the College have become more stable, the current task for Assessment is emerging: to help students become more aware of the tasks which are appropriate for entering students and which should be carried on later in their program. For example, we have

learned that many entering students have a strong need and desire to identify the general areas of the curriculum to which their prior learning applies, but that they also want to delay actual presentation of that learning to an evaluator until they feel more powerful within the system—that is, until they have had some experience with the system.

Through increased understanding of the continuing self-assessment needs of our students, we have arrived at certain conclusions regarding the assessment of experiential learning in a system such as ours:

1. Adult students need to consider their experiences (prior and current) in relationship to a specific curriculum. Adults with years of learning cannot "assess their experience" in a vacuum; there is too much of it. Given an understood curriculum and set of competencies, however, most adults can ably evaluate the relevance of learning they have gained elsewhere. Our task as educators is to help students learn from the process of evaluating their experience—learn both about the principles of our curriculum and about the inherent connections among many of their experiences. We still must guard against narrowing students' focus too much; here is where the adaptability of our curriculum is crucial. But we must also avoid the foolishness of certain portfolio-oriented programs, where students are simply asked to give evidence of what they have "learned." At CPCS, we try to have students relate what they have learned to what they need to know.

2. The role of faculty teaching in the Assessment process is a critical and unique one. Assessment instructors have a limited content to teach: the language and rules of the system, the way to read and comprehend competencies. Most of the work in the entry program is the students' own. Students must learn to assess their own experiences in relationship to the curricula; they must begin plans to achieve a set of competencies which will meet personal and career goals; they must assess their ability to advocate and negotiate for what they want and to improve their skills if necessary. In short, Assessment faculty must "teach" students how to be self-directing learners. This requires special group process and mentoring skills. We have discovered that other students are essential instructors in the process and therefore they are employed as Student Advisers in the entry program.

3. The validity of the entry Assessment process stems from its integration into the whole College. Since evaluation is undertaken by all CPCS faculty, it is important that our entry program prepares students to deal with other faculty, and that the Assessment process is viewed as legitimate by the CPCS faculty. An Assessment Center remote from day-to-day concerns of faculty and students is not a possible model within the CPCS framework. Existing faculty must teach in the entry program and must serve as liaisons between entering students and faculty evaluation.

4. Self-Assessment and the development of self-directing learners is a continuing process. The College is learning that what begins in the first semester must be continued, on a modified basis, throughout a student's career at the College. Students need to continually develop their awareness of the competencies and to continually consider the application of relevant experiences

in their work to attain new competencies. We are in the process of expanding our understanding of the advisory role by giving students more training as to what they should expect from an adviser, as well as by providing training for faculty. Again, we recognize that at every stage, competency-based education, as we define it, requires a self-motivated and directed student body. We are also attempting to develop an exit-assessment process to help students maintain an active learning status in the world beyond CPCS.

In short, we have learned that we must have a program which promotes student self-assessment of their past and current learning in order for our College to function. We also seek to admit students whose social and personal backgrounds may have restricted their ability to see themselves as powerful and self-directing. Therefore, we find that the self-empowerment goal which is necessary for our College to function is also an important goal for our students in other areas of their lives. We strive to highlight the function of these complementary processes. As students become more self-directing, they are not only more able to attain competencies in our system, they also are able to achieve other kinds of personal and social goals which are important to them.

lessons for new programs

This brief overview of one area of the history of the College of Public and Community Service shows, if anything, that experience is a hard teacher. Our ongoing efforts to create, without a prior model, a competency-based educational system with a strong self-assessment component have not been easy. Currently, we are learning the importance of providing ongoing support so that faculty, as well as students, may be self-directing. Often, our experience seems so particular to ourselves that we wonder whether any of it is relevant to those considering new programs. Certain of our experiences do suggest lessons for future planners, even through these lessons may not be seen by those with visions only of fiscal salvation dancing in their heads (see Strange, 1977).

1. Any effort to create a competency-based program which recognizes experiential learning will be hard because students, faculty, and administrators will be operating with new rules. Anxiety, tension, and frustration are to be expected. We cannot promise our college presidents an easy transition; they will have to be prepared to hear complaints and problems. If a new program cannot guarantee itself a supportive (or at least experimentally inclined) administration, it may not be worth the effort.

2. The creation of any internal assessment model without the claim to provide objective testing of competence will create anxiety in faculty and students. In times of stress, people, whether they be faculty or students, will want more certainty about "standards" than such a negotiable competency system will provide. Any new program which opts to avoid narrow "testing-out" mechanisms will have to constantly define its standards. Again, stout-hearted faculty and students with a tolerance for confusion and a set of strong values are a basic requirement for success.

3. Finally, we cannot avoid the social change implications of our programs. Implemented as planned, programs such as that of CPCS's are an inherent threat to the existing educational order. When we contend that competency-based education demands students who are actively negotiating for definitions of competence that meet student needs and searching for ways of demonstrating competence that reflect student priorities, we are calling on institutions to tolerate relatively radical principles. We are asking them to embrace programs which embody implicit, if not explicit, criticisms of traditional education. Exactly because such programs really are a risk—if only because they create students and faculty who "cause problems" by necessarily questioning such sacred practices as grades, tenure, credit hours, and so on—we cannot expect college administrators to sleepily accept them.

A justification may be that our programs can save institutions from irrelevance, or that the changes required by them are merely the extension of long-held goals in humanistic education. By being open about our failings and limits we can more ably present our potential. Precisely because of the reality of the "crisis in higher education" which so worries college administrators, they may not be able to defend their traditional programs, no matter how threatening the values and goals of innovative programs.

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