

Competency-Based Theological Education: core values expressed in variety of delivery models

BY RUTH MCGILLIVRAY
AND STEPHEN R. GRAHAM



Much of the conversation on competency-based theological education (CBTE) has steered toward the innovative and disruptive delivery models that schools like Northwest Baptist Seminary, Grace Theological Seminary and Sioux Falls Seminary have introduced to incorporate CBTE values. Disruptions have included eliminating dependence on fixed-term courses, spreading assessment across cross-functional mentor teams, and making demonstrated competency the standard for completion versus minimum percentage grades.

Other schools, however, have found less disruptive ways to integrate the values of CBTE into programs by adapting, not abandoning, traditional delivery models. Horizon College, for example, maintains a conventional course model but bases assessment on demonstrated achievement of industry-defined outcomes. Gaps are scheduled between courses to allow students extra time and coaching to achieve and demonstrate mastery, as needed. Lexington Theological Seminary combines online and onsite intensive courses with mandatory in-ministry site components. Competency is developed through course work and demonstrated through competency exercises midway through the curriculum and a capstone portfolio.

These different approaches beg the question, what makes a program CBTE versus conventional education? Are there common markers or qualities we can point to that would enable us to define CBTE as an educational model versus a delivery model? Answering these questions would provide a common lexicon and frame on which to develop this emerging field of practice, and open the door for CBTE-interested schools to explore and celebrate variety and innovation in delivery models. Like CBTE itself, answering these questions would shift focus from the means to the ends.

Some organizations have already articulated quality frameworks for competency-based education (CBE). In 2017, the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) released its *Quality Framework for CBE Programs* to provide institutions, policy makers and accreditors with a common set of “principles and standards to inform the design, implementation or scaling of high-quality programs.”¹

In 2018, Northwest Baptist Seminary drew on C-BEN’s work to create a quality framework for its own CBTE programs, articulating core values that underpin its

¹ Competency-Based Education Network, 2017. *Quality Framework for Competency-Based Education Programs*. Available from <https://www.cbenet-work.org/resources/>, p. 2

programs along with guidelines for quality and consistency in program design.²

Exploring this question will be a key focus at this year's conference on CBTE. A dedicated competency-based theological education track will be offered at C-BEN's annual CBExchange Conference, to be held October 22 to 25, 2019, in Palm Springs, California. The conference will feature a CBTE-dedicated pre-meeting during which the Presidents of Northwest Baptist Seminary, Sioux Falls Seminary and the In Trust Center for Theological Schools will examine the value proposition for CBTE, the educational philosophy underpinning various delivery models, and introduce recent research contrasting CBTE program models across five different schools. In addition to attending CBExchange plenary sessions, CBTE participants will have opportunity to attend CBTE-specific breakout sessions and meet daily with theological education peers to share and reflect on learnings. For more about CBTE 2019, visit cbte.ca.

Discount for ATS member schools

ATS is pleased to support this event by subsidizing the cost for representatives from ATS member schools to attend. The first 25 ATS schools to register will be given a discount code for \$500 off the CBExchange registration fee (one per school). Many schools have already taken advantage of this offer, but there are still spaces left. If you are interested in attending and would like to take advantage of the ATS school discount code, please contact Ruth McGillivray at cbte@nbseminary.ca.

ATS will also offer a limited number of registration discounts to students doing doctoral-level research on CBTE. To apply for this discount, please email a one to two-page summary of your research to Ruth McGillivray at cbte@nbseminary.ca. All applications will be reviewed by ATS, and successful applicants will receive a discount code for conference registration.

² Northwest Baptist Seminary, 2019. NBS Quality Framework for CBTE Programs. Available on request from Ruth McGillivray at cbte@nbseminary.ca.



Ruth McGillivray is Chief Innovation Officer at Northwest Baptist Seminary in Langley, British Columbia, and Stephen R. Graham is Senior Director of Programs and Services at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

