



University of Maryland University College

Office of the President

July 10, 2014

Representative John Kline, Chairman
House Education and the Workforce Committee
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Representative George Miller, Ranking Member
House Education and the Workforce Committee
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Miller:

On behalf of University of Maryland University College (UMUC), the largest public online university in the country, I am pleased to write to you today in support of HR 3136, the Advancing Competency-Based Education Demonstration Project Act of 2014.

This bill is based on a highly successful online education demonstration project conducted in the mid-1990s. At a time when online learning was emerging as a popular and useful education model, more information was needed about practical application, different versions and models development, its effect on student outcomes, and best practices. Largely due to the invaluable information gleaned and shared as a result of that demonstration project, online education is flourishing in a way that meets rigorous education standards and has opened doors to adult learners and contemporary students in ways previously unimagined.

Like online learning before it, competency-based education is emerging as a powerful education model. It can help adult and contemporary students accelerate their time to graduation and therefore decrease college costs, while actually improving learning outcomes and acquiring the competencies that employers are seeking in new employees.

A 2012 Gallup/Lumina Foundation Poll found that most Americans agree that earning a college degree is important for financial security. Still, many did not have more than a high school education because they could not afford to take four or more years to get a traditional education. Of those surveyed, 87 percent said they believe students should be able to receive college credit for knowledge and skills acquired outside of the classroom, and 75 percent of those polled said that if they could be evaluated and receive credit for what they know, they would be more likely to enroll in higher education.

According to the Council for Adult Experiential Learning (CAEL), students who have been awarded credits through prior learning assessments are 2.5 times more likely to finish their degree than those who have not.

Representative John Kline
Representative George Miller
July 10, 2014
Page 2 of 2

But if we are going to advance this exciting education model, we need to learn as much as possible about it. That is exactly what this bill would allow educators to do. A competency-based education demonstration project would provide schools the freedom to experiment with the competency-based models they are developing by relaxing certain rules and statutes that currently make it difficult or impossible to implement these programs. Higher education institutions would be free to build the best programs for their particular students.

For example, UMUC educates thousands of students every year who come to the university with a tremendous amount of knowledge gained outside the classroom. Very often, significant credits can be awarded through direct assessment of their prior learning. But even with that, there are often gaps in learning that need to be filled through coursework. By combining prior learning assessment, coursework, and the competency-based education model, the UMUC hybrid model would be particularly useful for the professional and adult students UMUC serves.

However, even though the Department of Education has recently allowed Federal Title IV student aid to be awarded for competency-based education, it is only for classes and courses that are purely competency-based. Currently, federal financial aid rules do not allow Title IV funds to be awarded for the hybrid programs that we find most useful for UMUC students.

A demonstration project would allow schools to expand and develop the models that work the best for them and report what they learn to the education community as a whole.

The Department of Education will evaluate programs in the project, report widely on what is learned, and all of higher education will benefit from the experiences of the schools that the department selects to participate in the demonstration.

The vast majority of today's students have changed from the traditional first-time, full-time students to nontraditional, working adults. Education delivery systems must change, too. It is inevitable that rules and regulations made decades ago—for a student body that, in large part, no longer exists—will need to be altered.

Through the demonstration project this bill would establish, we can learn as much as possible about what rules and regulations need to be changed and about different competency-based education models themselves. This information will inform our future decisions and ensure that we continue to innovate without giving up educational rigor and oversight.

Thank you to the House Education and the Workforce Committee for considering this very important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,



Javier Miyares
President
University of Maryland University College