

# DECONSTRUCTING CBE

---

*Portraits of  
Institutional Practice*

---

 EDUVENTURES

ellucian

 ACE ® American  
Council on  
Education®  
100 YEARS  
Celebrating the Next Century of Leadership and Advocacy

Howard Lurie

*Principal Analyst, Online and Continuing Education, Eduventures*

## INSTITUTIONAL PORTRAITS

### Institutional Portraits in Context

Each of the seven portraits is designed to provide insights into the strategic and operational requirements of both creating and sustaining CBE, whether at the course or program level, or across an entire institution. In order to provide context, each portrait begins with a summary of the institution and its CBE effort. Summaries include the following information:

- Institution Type
- CBE Student Profile
- Enrollment in CBE programs or courses
- Year CBE was first developed at the school
- CBE Program Scope
- Pricing Model
- CBE Components:
  - o Attributes: characteristics of CBE offerings
  - o Student Experience: modality, pedagogy, and pacing

### 2017 INSTITUTION PORTRAITS OF PRACTICE

Institution	Carnegie Control	Primary Location
Kirkwood Community College	2-year, public	Iowa
Lipscomb University	4-year, private, not-for-profit	Tennessee
New Charter University	4-year, private, for-profit	Online
Salt Lake Community College	2-year, public	Utah
Texas A&M University-Commerce	4-year, public	Texas
Thomas Edison State University	4-year, public	New Jersey
Valdosta State University	4-year, public	Georgia



## NEW CHARTER UNIVERSITY – WHOLLY ONLINE CBE

Institution Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For-profit, 4-year</li> </ul>
CBE Student Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult learners</li> <li>• Career changing professionals</li> </ul>
Enrollment in CBE programs or courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All students are enrolled in CBE programs and courses. Enrollment is roughly 500 students annually.</li> </ul>
Year Founded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Founded 1994</li> <li>• 2010 completely online transformation</li> </ul>
CBE Program Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institution-wide; dominant mode of instruction throughout the school</li> <li>• Programs include business, criminal justice, education, communication, information technology</li> </ul>
Pricing Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subscription model – Bachelor’s Degree up to \$12,432; Associates Degree up to \$6,216 depending on prior learning assessments and transfer credit</li> <li>• Masters up to \$12,000 depending on transfer credit</li> <li>• 100% self-pay, employer tuition reimbursement, donor sponsorship, accepts VA</li> <li>• Does not accept federal aid</li> </ul>
Attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent and rigorous course structure</li> <li>• Standardized competency and assessment model</li> <li>• Instructional staff and advisors collaborate on supporting class groups and individuals.</li> <li>• Bifurcated faculty model to ensure objectivity of assessment results</li> <li>• Flexible pacing, student autonomy within term structure</li> <li>• Traditional GPA calculation</li> </ul>
Student Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100% online, asynchronous and synchronous components</li> <li>• Student Advisor assigned for entire program and provides frequent contact</li> </ul>

New Charter University (NCU) is an attempt to build a new online, for-profit school fully designed around CBE principles. Unlike other institutions aspiring to expand existing CBE programs, NCU has had the advantage of building its courses, programs, and departments from the bottom up. This approach is reflected in NCU’s name and branding: its URL is simply “new.edu”, and its marketing and promotional efforts invite prospective students to experience “a new you,” “education uncomplicated,” or “a university designed for you.”

Following a new round of investment and rebranding in 2012, NCU has developed a new set of CBE program offerings in business, criminal justice, education, and technology. NCU has leveraged the experience and expertise of several key administrators who had previously worked at institutions with established CBE programming, such as Western Governors University (WGU), Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU), and Utah State University (USU). This combined experience has expedited the development of institution-wide CBE policies and practices.

NCU offers a fixed-price degree model, priced to enable students to enroll and complete their programs without relying on any federal financial aid. Undergraduate programs are offered at a monthly rate of \$259 or \$300 per course. According to its website, an NCU bachelor's degree can cost up to \$12,432 and an associate's degree up to \$6,216. Graduate programs average either \$499 per month, or \$1,000 per course, and a master's degree is priced at about \$12,000. As an entirely CBE model, these costs may decrease if a student demonstrates their mastery of the required degree program competencies more quickly or if other credits and life experiences are factored in.

NCU's pricing model reflects a commitment to simplicity and affordability. Based on their experiences at other CBE-oriented schools, NCU leadership suggests that a reliance on federal aid may encumber an institution and stifle innovation while not adding significant value to the learning experience, and ultimately, the employability of its students. Further, eliminating a federal debt burden for NCU students resonated with the university's investors. According to NCU's leadership, the absence of excessive overhead costs for instructional practices and program design has enabled more innovation and positively impacted students. A lack of reliance on Title IV monies has meant that NCU has not had to hire administrators wholly focused on processing federal aid.

Unlike institutions that introduce CBE into existing degree programs, NCU views CBE as an essential component to meeting the needs of all of its students. This is largely a byproduct of having leaders who have experienced CBE programming firsthand. According to one NCU administrator, herself a former WGU employee and graduate, "it would be unfathomable for me to sit in a traditional class. With my prior experience, I was able to complete my bachelor's degree in 18 months." NCU leadership asserts that its for-profit model results in a lean business structure driven by carefully controlled costs. The business model also enables a considerable degree of design uniformity at the program and course level.

### Self-Directed Students and Program Consistency

NCU programs feature a consistent course structure and schedule. NCU registers students weekly, on a rolling basis, with each term running 12 weeks. Course development is based on principles of backward design, in which the desired outcomes and mastery of competencies form the blueprint for the entire course. Courses feature both comprehensive summative projects and exams. Three formative exams form the backbone of every course, with ongoing formative feedback as students proceed through content at a pace of their choosing.

For NCU's administration, consistency in course design yields significant value when comparing completion rates across programs and departments. According to NCU's leadership, this enables a more precise collection and use of student and course-level data. As a result, NCU is able to operationalize a CBE-informed course design and assessment across the entire institution.

Within NCU courses, there is an explicit message to students that they need to be as self-directed as possible in their own learning. This poses both significant opportunities as well as challenges for NCU. Students who are already independent learners accelerate through their programs. Students who are less independent receive higher levels of support. An entirely flexibly paced, online program requires both student and institution to recognize the need for constant vigilance and communication. For Amie Ader-Beeler, NCU's Executive Director of Academic Operations, control over the learning path and pace must shift from the institution to the individual learner: "[New Charter] relinquishes control of the learning path. Then it's up to [students]. They are in control of their path."

As an entirely online school, NCU's premium on self-direction requires a significant effort to familiarize students with core CBE principles, strategic learning practices, and the operations of NCU's learning management system (LMS). Faculty and advisors maintain contact with their students through NCU's Canvas' LMS, utilizing conventional email, synchronous communication tools, and just-in-time web apps. One current student indicated that this toolset, as well as NCU's expectation for self-directed learning, resonates with his professional background and requirements for support. In a recent interview, Peter, a 36-year old midcareer software professional, reported, "I don't have time for a brick and mortar school. I'm more focused on proving my knowledge and skills I already have rather than how many hours I'm going to have to sit in your class. [New Charter] treated me like a person, and not a student or a source of income."

### Prospects for Growth

Reflecting on their experiences at WGU and SNHU, NCU leaders are confident that their approach is scalable. NCU leadership seeks to build more partnerships with employers, humanitarian organizations, NGOs, and other institutions in order to expand its program offerings into new disciplines. From NCU's perspective, the value proposition of flexibly-paced CBE model is clear: employers want measurable evidence of personal work habits, as well as both hard and soft skill attainment.

The leadership, staff, and students at NCU describe their progress and efforts with the headiness and exuberance of a start-up. Given the reservoir of experience with other schools, NCU's leadership understands the complexities that often destabilize institutions experimenting with CBE. Despite their optimism, they realize that significant obstacles stand between New Charter and its next chapter of growth.

Although NCU is fully accredited by Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC), enrollment in the domestic market remains low, as many U.S. students are wholly reliant on federal financial aid programs to fund their educations. International growth is increasing, yet questions remain about how quickly NCU's non-traditional approach to education will become accepted. Can NCU's fixed price subscription model remain low enough to attract students but still generate an adequate income? How valuable could a peer cohort be to student success, and should NCU pivot to include this experience? How much peer interaction do students want and need as they juggle the demands of adulthood?

As the wholly online degree market gets more crowded, NCU hopes to differentiate their approach and add new programs in order to attract new students.