PREFACE

South Texas College (STC) developed this Competency-Based Education (CBE) Student Handbook for students admitted into the STC Competency-Based Education programs to provide them with information, guidelines, procedures, and resources to support them on their higher education journey.

CBE students are responsible for knowing the information and complying with the policies, procedures, and guidelines outlined in the CBE Student Handbook.

South Texas College reserves the right to change policies and procedures without notice. The CBE Student Handbook is not intended to be and should not be regarded as a contract between the College and/or any student or other person.

Also, please note that the electronic version of the CBE Student Handbook will be updated regularly and should be consulted as the primary resource.
**Competency-Based Education History in Texas**

In 2013, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board received a grant from the College for All Texans, EDUCAUSE, and other foundations to assist higher education institutions in the creation and development of the first competency-based bachelor's degree in the State of Texas.

South Texas College and Texas A&M University-Commerce were selected to receive funding. These institutions collaborated to develop an affordable, accessible, and accelerated competency-based bachelor's degree program. The program, a Bachelor of Applied Science in Organizational Leadership, was established in Spring 2014.

Since then, South Texas College has converted three additional bachelor programs to the competency-based format, the Bachelor of Applied Technology in Computer Information Technology, the Bachelor of Applied Technology in Medical and Health Services Management, and the Bachelor of Applied Technology in Technology Management. These four South Texas College bachelor programs are 100% online.
Competency-Based Education Model

The Competency-Based Education (CBE) model allows students to complete courses based on their ability to master a skill or competency at their own pace and in any environment. The time it takes to demonstrate competencies varies, while the learning expectations are held constant. Students acquire and demonstrate their knowledge and skills by engaging in learning exercises, activities, and experiences that align with clearly defined programmatic outcomes.

CBE has Five Core Elements:

1. Students advance upon demonstrated mastery, not seat time.
2. Students develop competencies, including explicit, measurable, and transferable learning outcomes.
3. Assessment is a meaningful, positive learning experience.
4. Students receive timely, differentiated learning support based on their individual needs.
5. Learning experiences emphasize the application and creation of knowledge and the development of essential skills and dispositions. (Sturgis & Casey, 2018)

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**Competency-Based Education at South Texas College**

The purpose of CBE at South Texas College is to provide accessible, accelerated, and affordable education.

- **Accessible**
  All CBE programs offered at the College are 100% online. Students can access CBE courses online at any time, from any place they choose.

- **Accelerated**
  The CBE curriculum at South Texas College is self-paced. Upon successful completion of a course, students can move ahead to the next course in their degree during the same seven-week term.

- **Affordable**
  South Texas College offers CBE courses for a flat tuition of $850 per seven-week term. During each term, you can take as many courses as you are able to successfully complete at no additional cost.
Competency-Based Education in the Online Environment

At South Texas College, all CBE courses include the following online components described below.

Start Here

Start Here is the home page or “welcome page” of the online classroom. This page contains the course faculty contact information, an office location should face-to-face visits be required, and in some cases the Program Chair's contact information.

The Start Here page also contains the following sections:

1. Essential Course Information
   This section has vital information including course description and competencies for the course. Also included are the faculty's brief curriculum vitae and guidelines on netiquette, Pre-Tests, learning materials and activities, and Post-Tests for each competency. Technology requirements, such as a functional video camera and a microphone, are also found in this section.

2. Syllabus, Schedule, and Course Policies
   Detailed information students need to understand the course requirements can be found in this section.
   → The course syllabus typically includes a course description, contact information and office hours, learning outcomes and course requirements, information regarding textbooks and course materials, as well as course structure and grading scale.
   → The schedule contains the course competencies to offer a more detailed view of the knowledge and skills covered.
   → The course grading criteria and exam information can be viewed in this area.

3. Students Technical Resources and Support
   → During the term, should students need to contact the Distance Learning Department, the ISP/Help Desk/Jagnet, Student Services, Financial Aid, Admissions, and Cashiers, students can find contact information under this section.
   → Students can also download the Blackboard Application to their cellular phone using the link provided here for easy access to Blackboard for students on the go as they lead their busy lives.

4. South Texas College Policy Statements
   Students will find important policy statements like the Equal Education Institution and Equal Employment Opportunity, Title IX statement, and the ADA statement in this link.
Competency-Based Education Course Structure
All CBE courses at South Texas College follow a seven-week course structure composed of three critical elements: Pre-Tests, Assignments, and Post-Tests. Each of these components are developed to ensure students have the knowledge, skills, abilities, and individual attributes necessary for the competencies required in their chosen field of study and career. With this unique structure, students are able to advance as soon as competencies are mastered. Below are descriptions of the elements contained within CBE courses.

Competencies
What is a competency?
Programs are designed around competencies that are needed for a particular career ensuring that the material is relevant. The outcome is that students are workplace ready and have expertise in their chosen fields.

How do competencies work?
As a requirement for all competency-based courses, students must show mastery in a set of competencies. For each competency, this process is started by students completing a Pre-Test which is evaluated to determine competency level.

- If a Pre-Test score is satisfactory (80% or better), the student can move directly into the Post-Test phase of a competency to prove proficiency.
- If the score is unsatisfactory (less than 80%), students will move into acquiring and demonstrating their knowledge, skills, and abilities by engaging in learning activities that align with clearly defined objectives, once completed, a Post-Test will be administered.

How many competencies in a course?
Typically, each course, on average, has a set of 3 to 5 carefully drafted competencies that define the characteristics and attributes that enable students to perform successfully in academic and professional endeavors.

Pre-Test
What is a Pre-Test?
Each competency includes a Pre-Test that a student must complete before beginning any module activity. A Pre-Test allows the learner to assess his/her current knowledge of the subject matter listed. It is a raw measurement of the learner's understanding of module learning objectives and applicable competency before any action and learning.

Are students required to take the Pre-Test?
Students are required to take the Pre-Test for all competencies to assess which knowledge and skills they have mastered.

Do I need to study for the Pre-Test?
There is no studying for the Pre-Test. This is a diagnostic tool used to assess knowledge prior to course work.
How is it taken?
The Pre-Test can only be accessed by going into a course competency folder and clicking on the Pre-Test sub-folder link. The Pre-Test for Competency 1 should be taken as soon as possible within the first week of the 7-week term.

How many times is it taken?
The Pre-Test for each of the competencies can only be taken once, regardless of the score obtained in an attempt.

What happens if I do not score an 80% or higher?
- If the student scores an 80% or higher, the Post-Test will automatically open.
- If the score is below 80%, the faculty of record will provide feedback on which assignments in that competency the student needs to focus on to increase their knowledge of the material to prepare for the Post-Test. It is highly recommended that students work on the learning activities to gain the needed knowledge and skills.

If I do not pass the Pre-Test with an 80% or higher, do I fail the competency?
Obtaining a score below 80% in any Pre-Test does not mean the student has failed the competency or failed the course.

Is the Pre-Test grade calculated into the final grade for the course?
The Pre-Test grade is not included as a component in the final course grade calculation.

Assignments
In a Competency-Based course, assignments are used to prepare students to take the Post-Test by increasing their knowledge of the specific competency content/material. Below are the most frequently asked questions about competency-based course assignments.

Are students required to do the assignments?
- Students are not required to complete the assignments
- However, they are highly encouraged to complete them after the faculty has provided feedback, based on the Pre-Test or Post-Test results.
- Assignments are meant to prepare the student to take the Post-Test and help them succeed in the course.

How do I know what assignments to do?
If a student has taken either a Pre- or Post-Test and did not score an 80% or higher, the faculty will guide the student to the assignments they should complete to help them prepare for the Post-Test.

Do assignment grades count towards my final grade?
Assignment grades do not count toward the final grade.

Do faculty provide feedback?
Faculty must provide feedback on all assignments to ensure the student understands the material for a particular competency.
Are there assignment deadlines?
There are no assignment deadlines; however, the student is encouraged to complete them in a timely manner to obtain feedback from the faculty member. This practice will enable the student to finish the course within the seven-week term.

Post-Test
- Competency-based education Post-Tests are constructed to assess how much the student has learned about the material presented to them in that competency.
- The test can take either an objective assessment that comprises multiple choice, multiple answer, true/false, etc. format or a subjective assessment that includes essay questions, essays on scenarios or case studies, or project-based assessments.
- The Post-Test is the only grade that will factor into the final grade for the course.

Below are the most frequently asked questions about competency-based course Post-Tests.

How will I know when I am ready to take the Post-Test?
There are two ways to know when the student is ready to take the Post-Test.
- If the student passed the Pre-Test with 80% or higher, the Post-Test will automatically open.
- If the student did not score an 80% or higher in the Pre-Test, then the student is encouraged to complete the faculty identified assignments to prepare for the Post-Test. If the completed assignments reflect that the student has gained knowledge of the content, then the faculty member will open the Post-Test.

How does the Post-Test work?
- The Post-Test may be a timed exam that is taken in one sitting, or a project-based assessment.
- If the Post-Test is an exam, the faculty will determine and communicate what the student can have available in the testing environment to use during the exam.
- Students have three attempts to score 80% or higher to move to the next competency.
- To maintain exam integrity, students will use online assessment tools through Respondus, including LockDown Browser and Respondus Monitor. Additional details regarding these assessment tools are provided below.

LockDown Browser is a custom browser that "locks down" the online testing environment and disables functions that can compromise ethical test taking.

Respondus Monitor is a remote proctoring system that uses the webcam of a student’s computer, laptop, or other device to observe and record what the student is doing while taking the Post-Test.

If a student does not wish to use Respondus Lockdown Browser and Respondus Monitor, arrangements may be made with their faculty member for other alternatives.
Use these directions to download the Respondus Lockdown Browser.

→ **Log in to Blackboard** using your normal Jaget username and password
→ Click on the **Student Services** tab located on the top-right menu
→ Locate the Respondus LockDown Browser section and choose your system's link (either for Windows or Mac version)
→ Follow the installation directions
→ Once installed, you should find a new icon on your desktop:
→ Double click on this icon to open the browser and take the exam

**What happens if I don't pass the Post-Test with an 80% or higher?**
If the student uses all three attempts and fails to pass the Post-Test with an 80% or higher, they will fail the course and must retake it.

**What happens if I score an 80% or higher on the Post-Test?**
- If the student passes the Post-Test with an 80% or higher, the following competency will open to allow them to move forward.
- Passing all of the competency Post-Tests with an 80% or higher will mean that they will have passed the course.
- If the student does pass the Post-Test and still has attempts left, they can use those attempts to better their score. The highest attempted grade will be posted for that Post-Test.

**Are there Post-Test deadlines?**
The final deadline to complete all Post-Tests is the last day of the course. You should not wait until the last week to complete all course competencies.

**What is an artifact?**
An artifact is a work product that can take the form of a project, case study, research paper, etc. In some courses, an artifact serves as the final Post-Test. Artifacts may also be used for later submission in the Capstone course. If the artifact is in the form of a case study or research paper, the assignment should be written in APA format.

**Virtual Meeting**
This link is a real-time video conferencing tool where students and the course faculty meet weekly for lectures, office hours, and other meetings as needed. The faculty may set a recurring time for the term or communicate the time of weekly meetings.
**Student Progress for Each Competency within a CBE Course**

**Pre-Test**

- If score is 80% or higher: Post-Test
- If score is lower than 80%:
  - Assignments
  - Post-Test

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**Grading Policy**

The following grading system is used for CBE courses:

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Grade Points Per Cr. Hour</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90-100% Excellent</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80-89% Good</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>79% or below Failing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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A grade of "I" (for Incomplete) may be given by faculty in certain circumstances for a course in which a student could not complete all of the objectives for the passing grade level attempted. The student must complete all of the competencies by the end of the next seven-week term. Failure to complete all requirements by the end of the following seven-week term will result in a final grade of "F" for the course.

Except for the "I", all grades are considered final unless College error is involved. In the event of a grade dispute, an appeal process is provided.

In a repeated course, the last grade received will be used for degree plan requirements as applicable and as part of the student's cumulative grade point average.

- Faculty are to grade assignments and/or Post-Tests within 36 hours.
- If not graded within 36 hours, the student should contact their faculty member via email or Pronto messenger.
- If the faculty member does not respond or grade the assignments/Post-Tests, please contact the Academic Coach or Student Success Specialist.
Academic Coach Role & Responsibilities

An Academic Coach is a professional individual who builds a solid partnership with students to ensure their well-being and success. Academic coaching carries the responsibility of supporting students through any educational challenges.

Support services provided by academic coaches are as follows:

- **Advising Activities**
  - Provide academic advisement to students from intake to assessment of academic and career goals
  - Assist students to develop and achieve their educational goals
  - Provide advisement, such as selecting classes for degree plan maintenance
  - Connect students with resources such as counselors, tutors, and financial aid.
  - Plan student schedule, recommend courses and determine appropriate educational solutions for different types of students
  - Assist students in developing good study habits and other skills to ensure their success

- **Registering for CBE Courses**
  - Assist with accessing and completing registration, admissions, and financial aid process
  - Work with student services to verify information for accuracy and completeness
Contact Information

Bachelor of Applied Science in Organizational Leadership (BASOL)
Alejandra L. Garcia, Student Success Specialist
Pecan Campus G-247
Email: alozano2@southtexascollege.edu
Phone Number: (956) 872-8376

Bachelor of Applied Technology in Computer Information Technology (CITP)
Manuel Sanchez, Academic Coach
Pecan Campus G-250
Email: msanch11@southtexascollege.edu
Phone Number: (956) 872-7286

Bachelor of Applied Technology in Medical & Health Services Management (MHSM)
Valeria Guerra, Academic Coach
Pecan Campus G-249
Email: vguerr21@southtexascollege.edu
Phone Number: (956) 872-7276

Bachelor of Applied Technology in Technology Management (TMGT)
Alexandra Morales, Academic Coach
Pecan Campus G-251
Email: amorales_0397@southtexascollege.edu
Phone Number: (956) 872-6755

Child Development and Early Childhood Program
Veronica Rodriguez, Department Chair
Pecan Campus P2-157
Email: vrodrig2@southtexascollege.edu
Phone Number: (956) 872-7265

Public Administration Program
Diana Lucio, Department Chair
Mid-Valley Campus B-202Q
Email: dlucio@southtexascollege.edu
Phone Number: (956) 447-1264
Student Resources

General Financial Aid/Cashiers Department Questions
Financial Aid Information can be found at: https://studentservices.southtexascollege.edu/finaid
Phone Number: (956) 872-8375
Email: finaid@southtexascollege.edu

Cashiers Information
https://finance.southtexascollege.edu/businessoffice/cashiers/
Phone Number: (956) 872-3455
Email: stc_cashiers@southtexascollege.edu

Distance Learning Services
Distance Learning assists with any Blackboard issues.
If you have any problems, please use the link below:
https://www.southtexascollege.edu/online/support.php

I.T. Service Desk
Should you encounter any hardware or software-related issues that do not have anything to do with Blackboard the link below leads you to the services available through Information Services.
https://isp.southtexascollege.edu/

Library
The following link can be used to access Library services: https://library.southtexascollege.edu
Phone Number: (956) 872-8330
Email: https://southtexascollege.formstack.com/forms/askalibrarian
Chat: 24/7 Support
Open Labs
Services Available:
- Computer assistance
- Printing services
- Multimedia editing
- Windows & Mac computers
- Scanning stations
- Group stations
- Specialized software
- Blackboard support

https://library.southtexascollege.edu/aboutus/openlabs/
Phone Number: (956) 872-2212

Centers for Learning Excellence (CLE)
CLE provides tutoring, and students can work on homework assignments, meet with study groups, and attend study skills workshops. All services offered through the CLE are free to all enrolled students of South Texas College.

https://www.southtexascollege.edu/cle/
Phone Number: (956) 872-8303

Career & Employer Services
The Office of Career & Employer Services is committed to empowering students and alumni to connect their academic experience with career success by developing professional marketability. Students can access more information through the following link:

https://studentservices.southtexascollege.edu/careerservices/
Phone Number: (956) 872-6318

Mental Health Services
The Counseling Department reflects South Texas College's commitment to provide access to higher education and support students' educational goals from diverse backgrounds. Their staff help achieve academic success through the following services: academic counseling, career, and mental health counseling, and assistance to vulnerable populations.

https://studentservices.southtexascollege.edu/counseling/mental-health.html
Phone Number: (956) 872-2173

Counseling and Student Accessibility Services
https://studentservices.southtexascollege.edu/counseling/
Phone Number: (956) 872-2173
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South Texas College Accreditation
South Texas College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award Baccalaureate and Associate degrees. Contact the Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097 or call 404-679-4500 for questions about the accreditation of South Texas College.

Notice of Non-Discrimination
South Texas College is an equal education and equal employment opportunity/affirmative action employer. South Texas College does not discriminate or tolerate discrimination against any employee, an applicant for employment, student, or applicant for admission based on race, color, national origin, ethnicity, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, parental status, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other protected category under applicable local, state, or federal law. Conduct that excludes participation, denies benefits, or subjects others to discrimination is prohibited. The College complies with all applicable policies and state and federal legislation in order to combat discrimination. https://www.southtexascollege.edu/about/notices/notice-of-non-discrimination.html