



## BOARD OF REGENTS AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

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**Academic Affairs**

**August 14, 2025**

**AGENDA ITEM:** Proposal to establish the Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW) administered by the Division of Innovative & Learning-Centric Initiatives at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO).

**Review**       **Review + Action**       **Action**       **Discussion**

*This is a report required by Regents' Policy.*

**PRESENTERS:** David S. Jackson, Interim Provost

### **PURPOSE & KEY POINTS**

The Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) will serve as an interdisciplinary ecosystem designed to centrally connect academic learning with workforce demands. The CCSW will lead four key initiatives: (1) competency-based education (CBE), (2) the Skills Lab, (3) the Future of Work Symposium Series, and (4) Workforce Partnerships. The CBE initiative provides faculty with training, instructional design support, and assessment frameworks to help UNO develop competency-based programs that better serve adult learners. The CCSW's partnerships with businesses enable UNO to co-develop programs and integrate industry feedback into learning models. These activities will create synergies among the initiatives and ensure that education and workforce needs remain closely aligned. Funding sources will be distance education fees and tuition generated from new CBE programs. No new funding will be needed.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Section 2.11 of the Bylaws of the Board of Regents provides that multi-departmental centers for research, teaching, and/or service require approval by the Board of Regents.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The President recommends approval.

<b>SUMMARY-ESTABLISHING AN ACADEMIC CENTER</b>		
<b>CAMPUS AND NAME OF CENTER: UNO Center for Competencies, Skills and Workforce Development</b>		
Date of proposed Center establishment: Upon approval		
<b>Five-year Projected Expenses</b>		<b>Brief Explanation</b>
	Cost	Personnel include Executive and Associate Directors, Instructional Designer, and part time data analyst, coordinator, and faculty fellows. Operating expenses include faculty and staff development, training, workshops, technology tools, library resources, faculty development grants, etc.
Personnel	\$ 2,272,022.00	
Operating	\$ 290,000.00	
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 2,562,022.00</b>	
<b>Five-year Projected Revenue Sources</b>		
	Cost	Existing funds include distance education fees (\$525K annually) and foundation funds (\$15K annually). Tuition is projected revenue from new competency based education courses.
Existing Funds	\$ 2,700,000.00	
New Public Funds	\$	
Tuition and Fees	\$ 594,000.00	
Philanthropic Contributions	\$ 15,000.00	
Grants and Contracts	\$	
Other	\$	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 3,309,000.00</b>	
AAU Recognition Potential Impact: <input type="checkbox"/> Very Negative <input type="checkbox"/> Negative <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Positive <input type="checkbox"/> Very Positive <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable		
AAU Recognition Criterion Impacted (If any):		
Services/Functions of Academic Center:		
The CCSW fosters a multi-department, interdisciplinary ecosystem to support workforce-aligned learning across multiple fields. It serves as a hub where academic units share expertise in CBE, skills-based learning and digital badging, and general experiences with workforce development. The CCSW helps academic programs integrate workforce-driven curricula more efficiently, ensuring that UNO's academic offerings remain aligned with evolving industry needs, and provide structured, skills-based learning opportunities for all learners who need to upskill or reskill.		



## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** May 12, 2025

**To:** David Jackson, Interim Executive Vice President and Provost

**From:** Joanne Li, Chancellor, University of Nebraska at Omaha

**RE:** Center Proposal—Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development

The University of Nebraska at Omaha committees have reviewed and endorsed the creation of a new center.

The College of Business Administration and the Division of Innovative & Learning-Centric Initiatives request the creation of the Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW) at UNO. The CCSW represents a transformative initiative that aligns directly with UNO's mission to provide high-impact, workforce-aligned education, ensuring that students graduate with verifiable skills and competencies essential for today's job market. The CCSW will serve as a central ecosystem for four key initiatives: (1) Competency-Based Education, (2) the Skills Lab, (3) the Future of Work Symposium, and (4) Workforce Partnerships. By integrating these four initiatives, the center will help bridge the gap between academic learning and employer needs, strengthening Omaha's and Nebraska's workforce pipeline.

cc: Phil He, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Office of Academic Affairs

# University of Nebraska New Academic Center

Academic Centers include Bureaus and Institutes

## I. Descriptive Information

<b>Name of Campus Proposing New Center</b>
University of Nebraska at Omaha
<b>Name of Proposed Center</b>
The Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW) at UNO
<b>Name of the Programs (majors) Involved</b>
<p>The CCSW will support all units across the UNO campus through four key pillars:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Competency-Based Education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Current participating or interested programs include Social Work, Teacher Education, Early Childhood Education Inclusive, Aviation, Math, Languages, Scott Scholars, College of Business Administration, and the Division of Continuing Studies.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Skills Lab</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Current participating or interested programs include the College of Business Administration, College of Information, Science &amp; Technology, Honors College, Division of Continuing Studies, Digital Learning, Career Services, and Student Success.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Future of Work Symposium Series</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Participants span all six UNO colleges, with faculty and students engaging in symposium events as attendees, facilitators, moderators, or panelists. Since the first Future of Work Symposium in 2022, individuals from across the campus and the broader Omaha community have participated.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Workforce Partnerships</b> (co-led with UNO’s Division of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ CCSW will co-manage a portfolio of active workforce partnerships with local and regional employers, expanding opportunities for students and faculty to align academic programs with workforce needs.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Other Programs Offered in this Field by Institution</b>
There are no other formal programs with this scope of work.
<b>Administrative Unit(s) for the Proposed Center [e.g. college, school, division, etc.]</b>
Division of Innovative & Learning-Centric Initiatives (ILCI)
<b>Physical Location, if applicable</b>
NN
<b>Proposed Date the Center will be Initiated</b>
<i>Upon Approval</i>
<b>Date Approved by the Governing Board</b>

## II. Review Criteria

### A. Purpose and Context of the Proposed Center

## Overview

The Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) will serve as an interdisciplinary ecosystem designed to centrally connect academic learning with workforce demands. The CCSW will lead four key initiatives: (1) competency-based education (CBE), (2) the Skills Lab, (3) the Future of Work Symposium Series, and (4) Workforce Partnerships. The CBE initiative provides faculty with training, instructional design support, and assessment frameworks to help UNO develop competency-based programs that better serve adult learners.<sup>i</sup> The Skills Lab will enhance microcredentialing and digital badging by aligning industry-relevant skills<sup>ii,iii</sup> with academic programs, providing employer-recognized credentials. The Future of Work Symposium Series will host annual convenings of faculty, students, and industry experts to analyze workforce trends and integrate employer feedback into academic programming. Lastly, Workforce Partnerships, co-led with Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success (IESS), will expand industry collaborations, offer employer-sponsored upskilling programs, and establish an advisory board to ensure UNO remains responsive to Nebraska's economic needs.

Today's employers expect graduates to possess both foundational knowledge and industry-relevant skills that can be readily applied in professional settings. The proposed CCSW has begun this work by establishing a Hub,<sup>iv</sup> which enables students to earn, demonstrate, and communicate their competencies and skills. Recognizing its potential impact, the Hub was selected as an inaugural recipient of the Weitz Innovation and Excellence Fund, reinforcing its value to UNO and the broader Omaha community. By the end of six years, the CCSW is projected to have lower operating costs and increased revenue streams, ensuring its continued impact without additional institutional financial commitments. The goal is for the Hub to transition to a Board of Regents Approved Center, providing a campus-wide infrastructure for aligning education with industry needs. This ensures that UNO students are competitive in the workforce and can contribute to a skills-based economy in Omaha and Nebraska. The CCSW aligns with UNO's mission to provide accessible, high-quality education and addresses the growing need for workforce-aligned skills and credentials. Its primary goals include expanding access to adult learners, enhancing industry engagement, and integrating skills-based learning across academic disciplines. Unlike Career Services, which provides direct job search assistance and employer networking, the CCSW integrates workforce readiness directly into the academic experience. By embedding competency-based learning, microcredentialing, and skills verification within academic programs, CCSW ensures students develop employer-recognized competencies that enhance their career prospects beyond traditional job search services.

The CCSW is designed as a financially sustainable initiative with a six-year funding commitment totaling \$3.4 million, including \$75,000 from the Weitz Innovation and Excellence Fund. By the end of six years, the CCSW's costs will have decreased as the startup phase concludes. Many one-time or initial expenses, such as the C-BEN consulting fees, will no longer be required or will be reduced significantly. Additionally, during the first six years, the CCSW will collaborate with the NU Foundation to secure philanthropic support from partners who have indicated strong interest in supporting the CCSW's initiatives. As a result, at the end of six years, the CCSW expects lower operational costs and increased revenue streams, ensuring long-term sustainability. A detailed budget projection is provided and outlined in L. Adequacy of Resources, which describes startup costs, anticipated revenue streams, and long-term financial sustainability.

Unlike traditional academic departments, which focus on discipline-specific curricula, the CCSW fosters a multi-department, interdisciplinary ecosystem to support workforce-aligned learning across multiple fields. It serves as a hub where academic units share expertise in CBE, skills-based learning and digital badging, and general experiences with workforce development. The Hub has already engaged the following colleges, departments, and units in its work (CBE, Skills Lab, Future of Work Symposium, and Workforce Partnerships: Aviation, College of Business Administration, College of Business Administration, College of Information, Science & Technology, Division of Continuing Studies, Division of Continuing Studies, Early Childhood Education Inclusive, Honors College, Languages, Math, Scott Scholars, Social Work,

Teacher Education, and others. In addition to supporting individual programs, the CCSW provides a structured employer engagement and feedback infrastructure, ensuring that UNO's academic offerings remain aligned with evolving industry needs. By streamlining the implementation of industry-aligned learning models, the CCSW helps academic programs integrate workforce-driven curricula more efficiently. These efforts will equip UNO students with in-demand skills, enhance their employability, and strengthen Omaha and Nebraska's skills-based economy.

## B. Centrality to Campus Role and Mission

The CCSW is directly aligned with UNO's Strategic Plan, reinforcing the university's commitment to Transformative Education, Workforce and Economic Advancement, and Community-Driven Partnerships. The CCSW advances UNO's core strategic pillars in several ways. First, by supporting the integration of skills- and competency-based learning into workforce-aligned programming, it supports transformative education for all learners by ensuring that students gain both foundational knowledge and industry-specific skills. The CCSW enhances academic offerings and provides students with verifiable skills that improve their career readiness.

Second, by actively partnering with workforce organizations and community leaders, the CCSW plays a critical role in co-creating workforce solutions that drive Omaha and Nebraska's economic growth. This enhances community-driven partnerships and engagement by supporting UNO's position as an engaged urban university, fostering reciprocal relationships with employers and workforce leaders to align education with labor market needs.

Third, the CCSW contributes to impactful research, discovery, and innovation by developing research on CBE models, workforce trends, and skills-based learning outcomes. This research generates data-driven solutions to improve career pathways and informs the evolution of academic programming to better serve students and industry needs. By tracking workforce trends and skills gaps, the CCSW ensures that UNO remains at the forefront of higher education innovation and workforce alignment.

By aligning with UNO's Strategic Plan and advancing UNO's core strategic pillars, The CCSW strengthens UNO's ability to deliver on its mission of providing accessible, innovative, and career-focused education that meets the evolving needs of students and the workforce.

## C. Relationship of the Proposal to the University of Nebraska Strategic Priorities

The CCSW is a campus-wide initiative engaging multiple colleges, departments, and community stakeholders and is directly aligned with the University of Nebraska's five strategic planning pillars introduced in November 2024. In particular, it supports its overarching pillars of Extraordinary Teaching & Learning and Extraordinary Partnerships & Engagement. The CCSW will play a critical role in advancing these two pillars. First, in terms of Extraordinary Teaching & Learning, the CCSW addresses access and affordability through CBE and microcredentialing, ensuring degree-seeking students and lifelong learners can acquire industry-aligned skills through innovative, flexible, and affordable learning pathways. It advances research and innovation in CBE, workforce readiness, and skills, supporting NU's goal of fostering applied research related to teaching and learning that has real-world impact. It supports student success and completion by embedding competency-based learning and workforce-aligned skills into academic programs. This can support academic programs with student retention, career readiness, and job placement outcomes.

Second, in terms of Extraordinary Partnerships & Engagement, the CCSW supports workforce and economic development by partnering with workforce organizations and community leaders to co-develop skills-based programs that can drive regional economic growth and prepare students for high-demand jobs in Omaha and Nebraska. It also

fosters community and industry engagement through the Future of Work Symposium Series and Workforce Partnerships. Thus, the CCSW strengthens NU's community engagement and civic impact.

The CCSW positions UNO at the forefront of innovative educational initiatives, including CBE and skills-based learning models. As the first institution in the NU system to implement and scale these programs, UNO will not only enhance its own workforce-aligned offerings but also serve as a model for other campuses looking to adopt similar strategies. Through shared research, best practices, and cross-campus collaboration, the CCSW will contribute to the broader NU system's commitment to innovation in teaching, learning, and workforce development. As a leader in CBE, UNO will share insights and best practices to help expand career-ready education models across the NU system.

## D. Consistency with the Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Post-Secondary Education

The CCSW aligns directly with the Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education by addressing Nebraska's higher education priorities, particularly in the areas of workforce development, educational accessibility, and lifelong learning. The CCSW will support workforce and economic growth by ensuring UNO graduates are equipped with in-demand skills needed for Omaha and Nebraska, strengthening our workforce and increasing employability. The CCSW will also lead CBE, microcredentialing, and skills verification through digital badging, expanding UNO's flexible learning options so that education can be more accessible to current and prospective UNO students. Additionally, through innovative collaborations with employers, economic development agencies, and industry leaders, The CCSW is positioned to support the alignment of educational offerings at UNO with labor market demands.

## E. Evidence of Need and Demand

### 1. Need

The demand for a workforce-ready population in Nebraska is growing, and a significant skills gap persists in key industries. According to recent data, 21.7% of adults in Nebraska have some college education but no degree. This mirrors national trends, where approximately 36.8 million adults in the United States aged 18 to 64 have some college experience but no credential, and this number is increasing by approximately 3.0% each year.<sup>v</sup> Additionally, Nebraska has approximately 26,000 more adults with some college but no degree than the national average. However, re-enrollment of adult learners in Nebraska is lower than the national average, with the largest disparities coming from learners aged 35-64. These data point to a large population in need of alternative educational pathways that provide verifiable, employer-recognized skills.<sup>vi</sup> Additionally, Nebraska's projected job growth, especially in areas of business and education (projected 9.2% and 8.1% growth, respectively, between 2020-2030).<sup>vii</sup> This highlights the urgent need for targeted, skills-based learning programs that help students and working professionals fill critical labor market gaps.

The CCSW addresses these needs by supporting the development of CBE programs by UNO colleges and departments. Additionally, The CCSW will provide structured, skills-based learning opportunities for all learners who need to upskill or reskill. Through skills assessment and verification, students can earn digital badges and microcredentials that hold value in the marketplace and can be shared professionally with employers. Additionally, the CCSW will create stronger alignment between UNO education and employment by ensuring that students gain competencies and skills directly tied to Nebraska's high-demand occupations. These efforts will contribute to reducing workforce shortages by offering skill-building experiences that accelerate career entry and professional advancement for UNO learners.



## 2. Demand

There is demand for the initiatives that The CCSW will lead. CBE programs are experiencing rapid growth, both in the number of institutions offering CBE programs and enrollment. Between 2012 and 2015, CBE programs grew from 20 to more than 500. As of 2020, approximately 600 institutions offered over 1,000 CBE-based programs in the U.S., and 80% of institutions surveyed believe CBE programs will continue to grow.<sup>viii</sup> A sampling of CBE programs across the United States is included in Table 1 in the Supporting Documents. This table outlines the growing emphasis on CBE and Skills-Based Education across various US universities, many of which offer both undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Institutions such as Northern Arizona University, Texas A&M University-Commerce, University of Michigan-Dearborn, and the University of Wisconsin System have implemented CBE models, while the University of Kansas System, University of Louisville, and the University of New Hampshire incorporate a blend of skills-based education and CBE to support career readiness. These programs are designed to provide flexible, workforce-aligned education, catering to adult learners and working professionals. The program length varies, with most institutions offering CBE or skills-based programs that range from 1 to 4 years, depending on the degree level. Many universities, such as the University of Wisconsin System, emphasize fully online or hybrid learning formats, allowing students to progress at their own pace. Several institutions, including East Texas A&M University (formerly Texas A&M University-Commerce) and the University of Michigan-Dearborn, have specialized CBE programs in fields such as business, data science, and leadership, ensuring alignment with industry needs.

A significant focus on workforce development and employer partnerships is evident in these programs, with universities like Louisville leveraging professional studies and industry collaboration to enhance employability outcomes. Many institutions have developed graduate certificates, digital badging, and stackable credentials to offer students incremental progress toward degree completion while making their skills more visible to employers. The University of New Hampshire's skills-based pathways and the University of Wisconsin's UW Flexible Option exemplify how institutions are tailoring programs to meet regional and national labor market demands. Overall, these institutions are prioritizing flexible learning models, workforce integration, and competency-based frameworks to bridge the gap between education and employment. Aside from CBE, organizations and workforce development programs have expressed interest in collaborating with UNO to develop and support tailored skills training programs. The Skills Lab will lead these conversations, providing opportunities for UNO and organizations to co-develop digital badges, microcredentials, and even CBE programs. The CCSW is uniquely positioned to do this because it collaborates with UNO colleges and departments. Multiple academic programs have signaled the need for structured workforce-aligned curricula and assessment tools, and CCSW can serve as the central hub for leading and supporting these initiatives. In doing so, the CCSW will support enrollment and job placement outcomes for UNO students. UNO can be a leader in preparing students for career success while supporting Nebraska's economic growth.

## F. Organizational Structure and Administration

There are two relevant structures and administrations to the CCSW. The first is the organizational structure of the CCSW, which includes Phil He, Ph.D. who serves as the Executive Sponsor overseeing academic affairs, and Jaci Lindburg, Ph.D., as Chief Adult Learning Strategist & Associate Vice Chancellor of ILCI who provides supervisory oversight for the CCSW. The CCSW is led by Erin Bass, Ph.D., as the Executive Director (1.0 FTE), who reports directly to Jaci Lindburg. The CCSW will also have an Advisory Board that collaborates with the leadership team. The Advisory Board will include Omaha and Nebraska business and community leaders. The CCSW will have two faculty fellows (0.25 FTE each) who will report directly to the Executive Director to contribute expertise in research, assessment design, and data collection. Additionally, the CCSW includes Stephanie Larsen, who serves as Associate Director (1.0 FTE), Kaela Arant, as the Administrative Coordinator (0.5 FTE), and John Kerins, who serves as the Senior Data Analyst (0.25 FTE). All three of



these employees report to the Executive Director. Additionally, an Instructional Designer (1.0 FTE) position will be added to collaborate across the CCSW to support CBE development. The organizational structure is graphically depicted in Figure 1 in the Supporting Documents.

In addition to the organizational structure, the CCSW will thrive as an ecosystem that connects UNO and External Stakeholders with its four key initiatives. The stakeholders involved in CBE include UNO Colleges and Departments, faculty senate, student services, information technology services, academic affairs, and business and finance to align curriculum with workforce needs. Additionally, the CCSW has engaged C-BEN as an external consultant and will use feedback from Omaha businesses for input and marketing of CBE at UNO. The Skills Lab engages many of those same stakeholders (UNO colleges and departments, UNO Information Technology Services, and Omaha businesses) to inform programming so that UNO students and learners are engaging with in-demand skills. The Future of Work Symposium Series similarly engages the same stakeholders and also community organizations (e.g., Omaha Chamber of Commerce) and state organizations (e.g., Nebraska Department of Economic Development). Finally, Workforce Partnerships engages similar stakeholders, but also collaborates closely with the UNO Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success and the six formal UNO Workforce Partners, including Werner Enterprises, Metropolitan Community College, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska, Physicians Mutual, Mutual of Omaha, and Union Pacific. A graphical depiction of the CCSW's ecosystem is included as Figure 2 in the Supporting Documents, which demonstrates the breadth of stakeholders involved in these initiatives and that many stakeholders will be involved in multiple initiatives.

The CCSW will continue to build strategic partnerships across UNO colleges, faculty, staff, and administrative units, ensuring alignment between academic programming and workforce needs. This collaboration extends to employers and external organizations, creating shared ownership of workforce-aligned learning initiatives.

## G. Partnerships with Business

The CCSW will collaborate with businesses across all four of its initiatives (see Figure 2). The CCSW's partnerships with businesses enable UNO to co-develop programs and integrate industry feedback into learning models. This will create synergies among the initiatives and ensure that education and workforce needs remain closely aligned. Additionally, the CCSW will seek external funding for philanthropic and grant-funded support of its work. The CCSW's business partnerships will be categorized into three levels based on scope and engagement.

National business partnerships include large corporations, industry leaders, and national workforce organizations. These partners will be central to the Workforce Partnership initiative and will provide insights to the center based on broad workforce trends and evolving skill needs through workforce discussions and speaker engagements, such as the Future of Work Symposium Series. These partners also have the potential to co-develop and/or endorse skills through the Skills Lab. Some of our existing partners in this category include Union Pacific, Mutual of Omaha, Kiewit, C-BEN, and Jobs for the Future.

Regional business partnerships include Nebraska-based employers, industry groups, and economic development organizations that can offer perspectives on regional workforce trends and hiring needs via the Future of Work Symposium Series. These partners will be especially critical for collaborating on skill development and CBE curriculum alignment. Some of these partners could be involved with the Workforce Partnership initiative, serving as a key source of student career opportunities. Some of our existing partners in this category include Omaha Public Power District (OPPD) and NP Dodge.

Local business partnerships include small businesses, startups, and community organizations. These partners can attend the Future of Work Symposium Series and can inform some of the Skills Lab and CBE work, ensuring that our curriculum aligns with local needs. Some of our existing partners in this category include Carson, Omaha Public Schools, and the Omaha Chamber of Commerce.

We have letters of support for many of these existing business partners and have included a select few in this proposal.

## H. Collaborations with Higher Education Institutions External to the University of Nebraska

The CCSW provides UNO with a formal structure for engaging with other higher education institutions on CBE, skills-based learning, and workforce development initiatives. Through the CCSW, UNO can collaborate with peer institutions, share best practices, and explore opportunities for joint research, curriculum development, and skills verification models.

Currently, we collaborate with the University of Wisconsin and the University of Kansas, as both institutions have implemented CBE programs and have been able to share insights and best practices related to curriculum and research. The CCSW will continue these collaborations and look to develop further collaborations with other CBE institutions. For example, we intend to partner with and learn from Georgia Tech's Center for 21st Century Universities.<sup>ix</sup>

There are several institutions with strong skill and workforce development models. For example, the University of Louisville's (UofL) Center for Engaged Learning<sup>x</sup> partners with regional business and economic development organizations and offers a Workforce Leadership Academy focused on upskilling. Ideas from this model could be leveraged for the CCSW at UNO. The CCSW's Executive Director, Erin Bass, has direct ties to Kristin Lucas at UofL, who has recently served as the Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and the Assistant Dean of Program Innovation & Strategic Initiatives in UofL's College of Business. Erin Bass has a large network of colleagues that can be leveraged to advance the CCSW's collaborations.

## I. Constituencies to be Served

The CCSW will serve a broad range of stakeholders. For students, the CCSW will provide skills training, competency-based learning, and workforce connections. For faculty, the CCSW will provide support in curriculum development and integration of skills-based education. For employers and industry partners, the CCSW will support aligning workforce needs with academic programs and offering recruitment pathways. For UNO colleges and departments, the CCSW will enhance academic offerings with skills-based learning and employer engagement. For community and workforce organizations, the CCSW will collaborate on upskilling initiatives and regional economic development.

## J. Anticipated Outcomes, Significance, and Specific Measures of Success

The CCSW aims to enhance student career readiness, workforce alignment, and employer engagement through CBE and skills-based learning. Given its nascency, many of these outcomes and measures of success will be revised as each of the CCSW's four initiatives mature. However, there are broad outcomes that the CCSW intends to accomplish, even in its nascency.

The first is increasing student participation in competency-based learning and digital badging. This includes growing competency-based programs at UNO and expansion of UNO's digital badging strategy through the UNO Skills Lab. This supports UNO's enrollment growth while improving student employability through verified skill attainment. Success will be measured by the number of CBE programs introduced, student enrollment in CBE programs, and the number of digital badges earned and awarded annually.

The second is strengthening workforce partnerships by growing the depth and breadth of relationships with Workforce Partners and improving retention of existing workforce relationships. This strengthens industry engagement, ensures curriculum relevance, and enhances graduate employability. Key metrics include the number of new partnerships established, retention rates of existing Workforce Partners, and their active involvement in CCSW initiatives.

The third is enhanced faculty engagement in skills-based learning, increasing integration of skills verification in courses through digital badging. This ensures that students graduate with industry-relevant competencies, promoting a culture of skills-based learning. The effectiveness of this initiative will be tracked by the number of courses incorporating digital badging and faculty participation in UNO Skills Lab initiatives.

Additionally, the CCSW is committed to tracking workforce trends and supporting graduate employability through the publication of an annual UNO Skills Report and employer feedback. The report will provide data-driven insights to improve academic offerings and align them with Omaha and Nebraska's workforce demands. This will be measured by the annual publication of the UNO Skills Report and the number of industry engagements for feedback on curriculum alignment. The key anticipated outcomes, significance, and measures of success are included in Table 2 in the Supporting Documents.

## K. Potential for the Center to Contribute to Society and Economic Development

The CCSW will strengthen Omaha's and Nebraska's workforce pipeline by aligning education with regional and national industry needs. By equipping students with verifiable skills and employer-recognized competencies, The CCSW will support economic development in Omaha and Nebraska by preparing a highly skilled workforce. The CCSW will also enhance career mobility for students and working professionals through CBE, upskilling, and reskilling. It provides an alternative pathway for some of the 21.7% of adults in Nebraska with some college education but no degree to earn a CBE degree. It provides current UNO students the opportunity to upskill via skills-based learning and digital badging. It also provides the opportunity for individuals across Omaha, Nebraska, and beyond to upskill and reskill via microcredentialing and digital badging. The CCSW will foster industry partnerships that drive innovation in learning and workforce development, contributing to Nebraska's economic resilience by staying at the forefront of workforce trends and supporting the development of programming that aligns with these trends. The CCSW will be one of Nebraska's tools for economic development and resilience.

## L. Adequacy of Resources

The CCSW does not require new institutional funding and will not impose additional financial obligations on existing UNO colleges, programs, or departments. Its funding model is built on a sustainable base of allocated existing resources. Specifically, \$540,000 annually is drawn from the Division of Innovative & Learning-Centric Initiatives (ILCI), with \$525,000 coming from accrued distance education fees and \$15,000 from competitively awarded NU Foundation support (renewable annually up to \$75,000). The surplus in distance education fees resulted from increased online activity at UNO during the COVID-19 pandemic, which generated unallocated reserves intended to support digital innovation. These funds are now being redirected to establish the CCSW, rather than being used for one-off or isolated digital learning projects. This is appropriate given that the majority of CBE programs (supported by the CCSW) will be

online programs. This funds allocation ensures continued investment in systemwide goals—like workforce readiness and CBE—without diminishing existing college-level resources or operations. Additionally, projected revenue from tuition and fees is anticipated to generate \$270,000 in Year 4 and \$324,000 in Year 5 from distance education fees associated with new CBE degree programs.

While UNO is not currently authorized to offer CBE programs, it has been actively preparing for that future through a deliberate and collaborative process. Since 2022, UNO has explored CBE models and opportunities. In Spring 2023, a survey was distributed to 100 faculty across the UNO campus, and there was significant interest by those faculty in UNO’s exploration of competency-based educational opportunities. In 2024, UNO engaged with the national Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) as a strategic consultant. Currently, UNO is in the second quarter of an 18-month infrastructure-building project led by C-BEN, which involves more than 50 faculty, staff, and administrators across all colleges. This initiative is focused on building the necessary academic, technological, and operational systems to support high-quality CBE implementation.

As part of this work, UNO will engage in the appropriate approval processes, both on and off campus, to seek authorization to offer CBE degree programs, with the earliest expected program launches occurring in 2027 if approvals are secured. If authorization is delayed or denied, UNO and the CCSW will revise the timeline accordingly and continue to provide support for faculty and departments developing innovative learning models. Should CBE authorization ultimately not be granted, the CCSW will continue to lead efforts in workforce-aligned education to meet the needs of learners across Nebraska. This approach ensures that the infrastructure and insights gained from this planning phase will continue to benefit UNO’s broader mission of delivering flexible, high-impact learning opportunities.

No additional financial commitments will be required from UNO colleges, programs, or departments. The CCSW is structured to function independently of existing departmental budgets while expanding institutional capacity for workforce-aligned education.

## Faculty/Staff

The CCSW will require dedicated faculty and staff to oversee its four key initiatives. These are reflected in the attached budget and outlined below.

Two faculty fellow positions (each at \$25,000, totaling \$50,000 annually) will rotate each semester to ensure broad participation across disciplines and align with the CCSW’s evolving academic and research needs. This rotational model allows the CCSW to engage faculty from multiple departments, programs, and colleges over time. Additionally, faculty from all six UNO colleges are already involved in CCSW’s four key initiatives, demonstrating strong, campus-wide faculty commitment and engagement. Faculty will remain in their home colleges, but will be provided support by the CCSW. CCSW personnel include the following Non-Teaching Professional Staff: Executive Director (1.0 FTE) – Provides strategic leadership and oversees all initiatives; Associate Director (1.0 FTE) – Manages operations, faculty collaborations, and employer engagement; Instructional Designer (1.0 FTE) – Supports CBE course development, digital badging integration, and curriculum enhancements; Senior Data Analyst (0.25 FTE) – Analyzes workforce trends, skills demand, and produces the annual UNO Skills Report; Administrative Coordinator (0.5 FTE) – Manages logistics, communications, and reporting. Total personnel costs for Year 1 amount to \$367,400, with a 4.8% annual increase budgeted for Years 2-5.

While these dedicated roles support the CCSW’s core functions, the center also leverages the expertise of faculty, staff, and administrators from across UNO. Currently, 56 individuals are engaged in workgroups related to CBE (there is a stand alone “Academic Workgroup” that consists of seven faculty), skills-based learning, and workforce partnerships—including 24 faculty members representing 15 different departments across all six UNO colleges. This broad participation

ensures meaningful cross-campus collaboration and demonstrates strong faculty commitment without requiring additional departmental funding.

General Operating Expenses are budgeted at \$53,000 annually to support faculty and staff development, including training, workshops, and conference participation to keep CCSW aligned with national best practices, staff travel and memberships to foster industry engagement and collaboration, office supplies, communications, and technology tools to support operations and faculty development grants to incentivize the integration of CBE and digital badging into UNO programs.

As CCSW expands, additional faculty and staff may be needed based on program growth and employer demand.

## Physical Facilities and Equipment

The CCSW will be a virtual resource and will not require physical facilities and equipment.

## Library/Informational Resources

The CCSW will share some of the cost of UNO's subscription to Lightcast, which provides comprehensive data on labor market trends, skills demand, and workforce dynamics (\$5,000 annually, no projected increase in cost for the CCSW's share of this resource).

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<sup>i</sup> *About Us | C-BEN*. (2023, December 31). C-BEN. <https://www.c-ben.org/about-us/>

<sup>ii</sup> *The Future of Jobs Report 2025*. (2025). World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/in-full/3-skills-outlook/>

<sup>iii</sup> *Transforming systems for the workforce of the future - Jobs for the Future (JFF)*. (2025, February 6). Jobs for the Future (JFF). <https://www.jff.org/>

<sup>iv</sup> *Competencies, Skills and Workforce Development Hub*. (2024, September 27). University of Nebraska Omaha. <https://www.unomaha.edu/innovative-and-learning-centric-initiatives/current-projects-initiatives/competencies-skills-and-workforce-development-hub.php>

<sup>v</sup> *Some College, No Credential | National Student Clearinghouse Research Center*. (2024). Nscresearchcenter.org. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/some-college-no-credential/>

<sup>vi</sup> *2024 Nebraska Higher Education Progress Report Executive Summary*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 12, 2025, from [https://ccpe.nebraska.gov/sites/default/files/PR\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](https://ccpe.nebraska.gov/sites/default/files/PR_Executive_Summary.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> Nebraska Department of Labor. (2023). *Nebraska Workforce Trends*. chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://dol.nebraska.gov/webdocs/Resources/Trends/July/August/Trends%20July-August%202023%20.pdf?

<sup>viii</sup> Klein, J. (2023). *CBE growth supports demand for skills-based hiring (opinion)*. Inside Higher Ed | Higher Education News, Events and Jobs. <https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/views/2024/01/19/cbe-growth-supports-demand-skills-based-hiring-opinion?>

<sup>ix</sup> *Home*. (2025, February 3). Center for 21st Century Universities | Georgia Institute of Technology - Atlanta, GA. <https://c21u.gatech.edu/>

<sup>x</sup> *Center for Engaged Learning*. (2025). Louisville.edu. <https://louisville.edu/engaged-learning>

**TABLE 1: PROJECTED EXPENSES - NEW ORGANIZATIONAL UNIT**

	(FY 25-26) Year 1	(FY 26-27) Year 2	(FY 27-28) Year 3	(FY 28-29) Year 4	(FY 29-30) Year 5	Total
<b>Personnel</b>	Cost	Cost	Cost	Cost	Cost	Cost
Faculty <sup>1</sup> Faculty Fellows (4 per year @ \$12,500 each, rotating)	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$250,000
Non-teaching staff: Professional <sup>2</sup>	\$367,400	\$385,035	\$403,517	\$422,886	\$443,184	\$2,022,022
Graduate assistants	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Non-teaching staff: support	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Subtotal	\$417,400	\$435,035	\$453,517	\$472,886	\$493,184	\$2,272,022
<b>Operating</b>						
General Operating <sup>3</sup>	\$53,000	\$53,000	\$53,000	\$53,000	\$53,000	\$265,000
Equipment <sup>4</sup>	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
New or renovated space <sup>5</sup>	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Library/Information Resources <sup>6</sup>	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$25,000
Other <sup>7</sup>	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Subtotal	\$58,000	\$58,000	\$58,000	\$58,000	\$58,000	\$290,000
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$475,400</b>	<b>\$493,035</b>	<b>\$511,517</b>	<b>\$530,886</b>	<b>\$551,184</b>	<b>\$2,562,022</b>

+4.8%/year

<sup>1</sup> Show the number of additional full-time equivalent faculty and related salary and fringe benefit expenditures needed to implement and maintain the unit.

<sup>2</sup> Show the number of additional full-time equivalent professional staff and related salary and fringe benefit expenditures needed to implement and maintain the unit.

<sup>3</sup> Included in this category should be allowances for faculty development, laboratory supplies, travel, memberships, office supplies, communications, data processing, equipment maintenance, rentals, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Show anticipated expenditures for the acquisition of new or upgrades or replacement of existing equipment necessary for the implementation and/or operation of the unit.

<sup>5</sup> Identify the space for the proposed unit, if appropriate. Show projected expenditures for any facilities (general classroom, laboratory, office, etc.) that will be required. Include renovation of existing facilities and construction of new facilities.

<sup>6</sup> Show anticipated expenditures for library materials or other informational resources directly attributable to the new unit.

<sup>7</sup> Additional Other Expenses: Show other expenses not appropriate to another category.

NOTE: All items requiring explanation may be included on this page or in the proposal narrative.

**TABLE 2: REVENUE SOURCES FOR PROJECTED EXPENSES - NEW ORGANIZATIONAL UNIT**

	(FY 25-26) Year 1	(FY 26-27) Year 2	(FY 27-28) Year 3	(FY 28-29) Year 4	(FY 29-30) Year 5	Total
Existing Funds <sup>1</sup> \$525,000 annually from ILCI \$15,000 annually from NU Foundation	\$540,000	\$540,000	\$540,000	\$540,000	\$540,000	\$2,700,000
Required New Public Funds <sup>2</sup>						\$0
1. State Funds	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
2. Local Funds	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Tuition and Fees <sup>3</sup>	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$270,000	\$324,000	\$594,000
Other Funding <sup>4</sup>						\$0
1 New Philanthropic Funding	\$0	\$0	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$15,000
2						\$0
3						\$0
Total Revenue <sup>5</sup>	\$540,000	\$540,000	\$545,000	\$815,000	\$869,000	\$3,309,000

<sup>1</sup> Show the total amount of dollars the institution will reallocate from its budget to support this unit. Identify the source of funding and provide an explanation of the impact that the redistribution of funds and other resources will have on exiting programs or unit.

<sup>2</sup> This represents a requirement for additional public funds to support this unit. If additional state funds are required, this request will have to be included in the institution's budget request. Separately detail all sources for additional funds. For community colleges, this would include local tax funds.

<sup>3</sup> Show additional tuition and fee revenues that will be used to support this unit.

<sup>4</sup> Show the amount of external funding or donations which will become available each year to support this unit. Include a brief explanation of the nature of these resources including their specific source and the term of the commitment.

<sup>5</sup> **Revenues are not expected to match expenses.**

NOTE: Where appropriate, show calculations and/or formulas that were used to project new revenue; e.g. number of new students projected multiplied by tuition and fees.

CCPE; 11/19/08



**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS**

**TABLES AND FIGURES & LETTERS OF SUPPORT**

**Table 1: A Sampling of Competency-Based Education (CBE) Programs across the United States**

<b>Institution Name</b>	<b>Offers traditional 4-year undergraduate and/or graduate degree programs</b>	<b>Type of Program Offered</b>	<b>Approximate Enrollment Numbers</b>	<b>Program Length &amp; Colleges/Schools</b>	<b>Additional Details</b>
Northern Arizona University	Yes (4-year undergraduate and master's)	Competency-Based Education (CBE)	31,000	Varies by program, typically 2–4 years College of Engineering, Informatics, and Applied Sciences	Offers Personalized Learning (CBE) programs, especially in STEM fields
East Texas A&M University	Yes (4-year undergraduate and master's)	Competency-Based Education (CBE)	12,000	Typically 1–3 years   College of Business	CBE in Organizational Leadership; focus on adult learners and military personnel
University of Kansas System	Yes (4-year undergraduate and master's)	Skills-Based Education & Competency-Based Education (CBE)	28,500	Varies by program	School of Professional Studies, Edwards Campus, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
University of Louisville	Yes (4-year undergraduate and master's)	Skills-Based Education & Competency-Based Education (CBE)	23,000	Varies by program, typically 2–4 years	School of Professional Studies, College of Education and Human Development

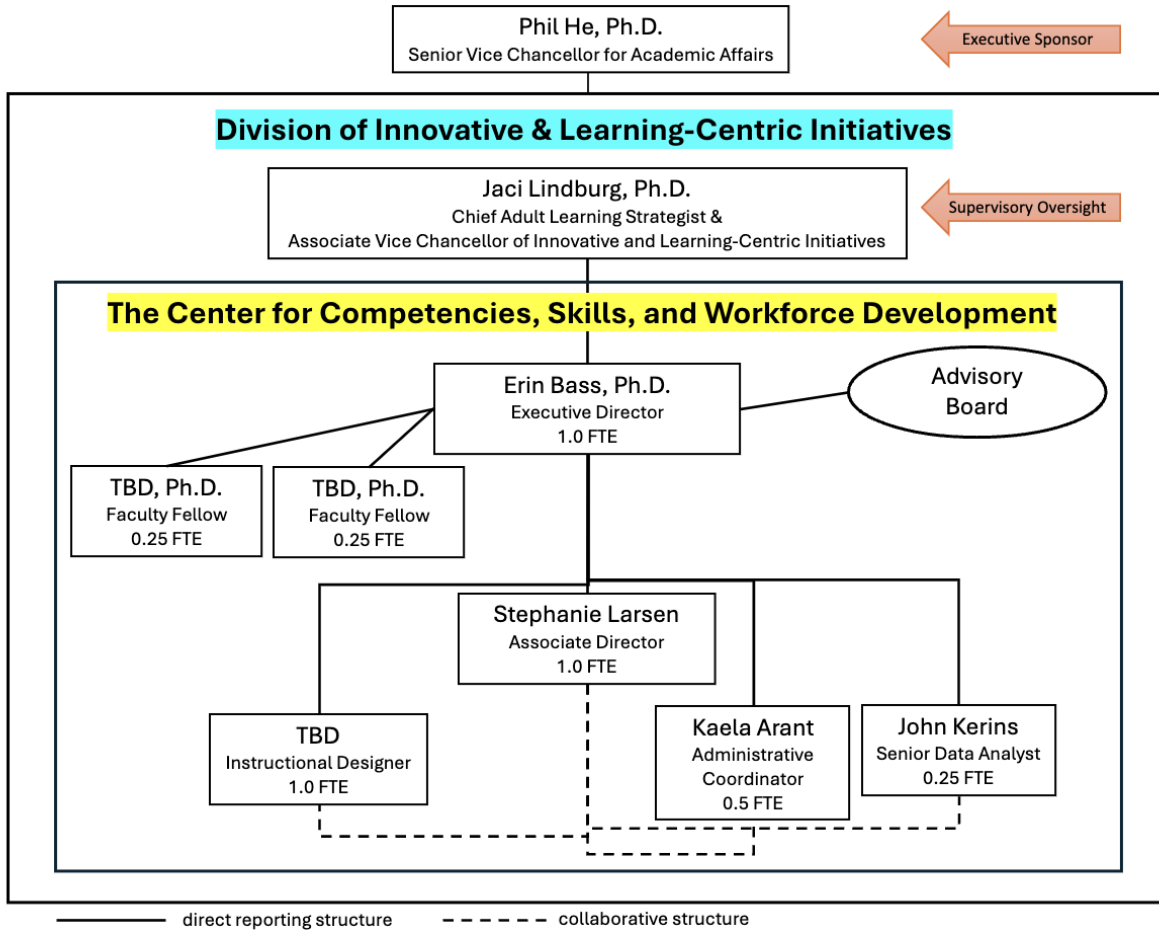
University of Michigan-Dearborn	Yes (4-year undergraduate and master's)	Competency-Based Education (CBE)	8,000	Typically 1–2 years   College of Engineering and Computer Science	Offers MicroMasters and CBE programs in business analytics, data science.
University of New Hampshire	Yes (4-year undergraduate and master's)	Skills-Based Education	15,000	Varies by program   College of Professional Studies	Focus on micro-credentials and skills-based pathways in business, tech, and healthcare.
University of Wisconsin System	Yes (4-year undergraduate and master's)	Competency-Based Education (CBE)	165,000 (system-wide)	UW Flexible Option: ~1–3 years Colleges of Nursing, Business, and IT	UW Flexible Option is designed for working adults; fully online programs in select disciplines.

**Table 2: Key Outcomes, Significance, and Measures of Success for The Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO)**

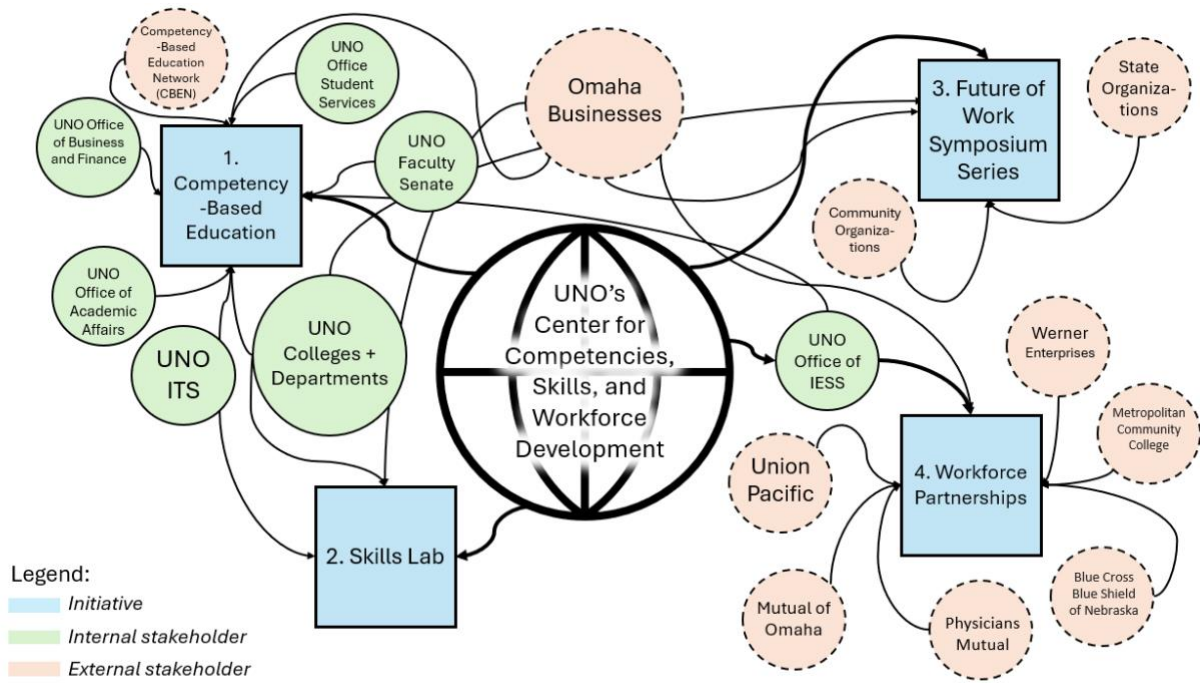
Criterion	Anticipated Outcomes	Significance	Measures of Success
<p><b>Increased Student Participation in Competency-Based Learning and Digital Badging</b></p>	<p>Growth in competency-based programs at UNO.</p> <p>Expansion of UNO digital badging strategy through the Skills Lab.</p>	<p>Supports UNO's enrollment growth and enhances student employability through verified skill attainment.</p>	<p>Number of CBE programs introduced.</p> <p>Number of students enrolled in CBE programs.</p> <p>Increase in UNO enrollment via CBE programs.</p> <p>Number of digital badges earned annually.</p> <p>Number of distinct skills offered (target: 10–25, aligned with WEF).</p> <p>Number of students earning digital badges.</p>
<p><b>Stronger Workforce Partnerships</b></p>	<p>Growth in depth and breadth of relationships with workforce partners and improved retention of existing workforce relationships.</p>	<p>Strengthens industry engagement, ensures curriculum relevance, and enhances graduate employability.</p>	<p>Number of new workforce partnerships established annually.</p> <p>Retention rate of existing workforce partners.</p> <p>Involvement of workforce partners in the CCSW's initiatives.</p>
<p><b>Enhanced Faculty Engagement in Skills-Based Learning</b></p>	<p>Increased integration of skills verification in courses through digital badging.</p>	<p>Ensures that students graduate with industry-relevant skills, fostering a culture of skills-based learning.</p>	<p>Number of courses incorporating digital badging</p> <p>Faculty participation in Skills Lab initiatives.</p>

<b>Publication of an Annual Skills Report</b>	Regular assessment of industry needs and curriculum alignment, with inaugural publication in late 2025/early 2026.	Provides data-driven insights to improve academic offerings and align them with Omaha and Nebraska workforce demands.	Annual publication of Skills Report.  Number of industry engagements for feedback on curriculum alignment.
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**Figure 1: The Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW) Organizational Structure at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO)**



**Figure 2: The Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW) Ecosystem at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO)**





February 12, 2025

To: Members of the Review Committees

From: Dr. Jaci Lindburg, UNO Associate Vice Chancellor for Innovative & Learning-Centric Initiatives and Chief Adult Learning Strategist

Subject: Strong Support for the UNO Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development Proposal

Dear Members of the Review Committees:

It is my privilege to submit for your consideration the proposal for **The Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW) at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO)**. The Center represents a transformative initiative that aligns directly with UNO's mission to provide high-impact, workforce-aligned education, ensuring that students graduate with verifiable skills and competencies essential for today's job market.

The CCSW will serve as a **central ecosystem** for four key initiatives: **(1) Competency-Based Education, (2) the Skills Lab, (3) the Future of Work Symposium, and (4) Workforce Partnerships**. By integrating these four initiatives, the center will help bridge the gap between academic learning and employer needs, strengthening Omaha's and Nebraska's workforce pipeline. This ecosystem has already garnered strong interest from business and industry leaders across the state, demonstrating its timeliness and impact.

I am also pleased to highlight that this initiative has already received private funding through the NU Foundation to ensure its successful launch. Additionally, The CCSW is well-positioned for long-term sustainability, leveraging UNO's existing resources, employer partnerships, and competency-based education expertise.

Furthermore, this proposal directly aligns with The University of Nebraska's ***Odyssey to the Extraordinary*** strategic planning pillars introduced by President Gold in November 2024 – particularly the areas of **extraordinary teaching & learning** and **extraordinary partnerships & engagement** – and closely supports UNO's core statement and the campus's ongoing commitment to student success, workforce engagement, and economic development.

**UNO Core.** UNO is an urban public research university educating people of the world. We innovate for the public good through pragmatic and impactful research and discovery. We advance the social and economic mobility of our learners and serve our communities through inclusion rather than exclusion. We assume responsibility for workforce and economic development within our state and beyond. We devote each day to transforming lives.





The documentation submitted includes:

- The full **CCSW proposal**, outlining the structure and vision of the center.
- **Letters of support** from internal and external stakeholders, demonstrating strong institutional and industry backing.
- The **budget tables** detailing how the center will be resourced and sustained.

I fully support this proposal and urge your consideration of this initiative. The CCSW will elevate UNO's role as a leader in workforce development, benefiting students, faculty, and industry partners alike.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful review.

Sincerely,

**Jaci Jenkins Lindburg, PhD**

UNO Associate Vice Chancellor for Innovative & Learning-Centric Initiatives and Chief Adult Learning Strategist

February 15, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

The College of Business Administration (CBA) at the University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO) is pleased to express our full support for the proposal to establish the Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW) at UNO. In accordance with university guidelines requiring a college to submit a proposal for a new center, we are proud to serve as the submitting college in support of Dr. Erin Bass, Associate Vice Chancellor Jaci Lindburg, and Senior Vice Chancellor Phil He in their efforts to advance this important initiative.

What makes this proposal unique is that it is accompanied by two key cover memos:

- This letter from CBA, as the submitting college, affirms our support and commitment to the proposal.
- A letter from Dr. Jaci Lindburg of Innovative Learning-Centric Initiatives (ILCI), which outlines the key initiatives and strategic vision of the CCSW.

We strongly encourage the review committee to review both cover memos to gain a full understanding of the scope and impact of this initiative.

The CCSW represents a critical investment in workforce development, skills-based education, and competency verification, areas that align closely with our mission as a business college. We recognize the tremendous value that Dr. Bass and her colleagues are bringing to UNO, Omaha, and the state of Nebraska through this center.

CBA looks forward to collaborating with the CCSW as it leads efforts to integrate skills verification, digital badging, and competency-based education into the university's academic ecosystem. These initiatives will help UNO students develop career-ready skills, enhance employability, and bridge the gap between education and workforce needs—a mission that aligns with our ongoing commitment to preparing future business and community leaders.

We are confident that the establishment of the CCSW will strengthen UNO's position as a leader in innovative education while fostering economic development in Nebraska. We enthusiastically support this proposal and look forward to working alongside the CCSW team to ensure its success.

Sincerely,



**Steve Schulz, Ph.D.**

Interim Dean

Lucas Diamond Professor

College of Business Administration

University of Nebraska at Omaha



January 3, 2025

Dear Members of the Review Committees,

I am writing this letter in enthusiastic support of Dr. Erin Bass as the Executive Director of the proposed Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW). As the Interim Dean of the College of Business Administration (CBA), I have been continually impressed by Dr. Bass's ability to bring people and organizations together to advance student success. I am also excited about the opportunities for CBA to participate in the programs that will be part of the proposed center—especially in the development of competency-based education at UNO and the new Skills Lab. These collaborative efforts will deepen CBA's alignment with UNO's mission and greatly benefit our students and the wider Omaha community.

Since joining UNO in 2014, Dr. Bass has repeatedly demonstrated exemplary leadership, most notably in her co-leadership of the Capstone Cup. She has forged strong connections with community partners like Scooter's Coffee and Rocket Car Wash, securing their buy-in to participate in a semester-long business competition for our BSBA seniors. By recruiting upward of 40 judges every semester and raising approximately \$20,000 annually, she has created a high-impact learning experience that bridges classroom instruction with real-world business challenges. Her capacity to unite academic objectives with community engagement has made the Capstone Cup a hallmark of the CBA student experience.

Dr. Bass's leadership extends well beyond the Capstone Cup. Under her guidance, the Management Advisory Board rebounded from seven members on the verge of disbanding to over 40 engaged professionals who regularly share their expertise and resources with our students. She has organized the Schumacher Ethics Speaker Series, advised multiple GRACA projects, and chaired search committees that successfully recruited new faculty. In each of these endeavors, Dr. Bass has proven her knack for building partnerships and creating meaningful professional opportunities for students and faculty alike.

Looking ahead, Dr. Bass's vision for the proposed Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development aligns perfectly with her record of innovation and collaboration at CBA. Our college is eager to support competency-based education and the Skills Lab under her guidance, reinforcing our collective commitment to preparing job-ready graduates for the Omaha community and beyond. I fully endorse her appointment as Executive Director and the proposed CCSW and am confident that she will lead with the same passion and expertise that have defined her impact at UNO.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Schulz".

Steve Schulz, Ph.D.  
John Lucas Interim Dean  
College of Business Administration  
University of Nebraska at Omaha  
Email: [sschulz@unomaha.edu](mailto:sschulz@unomaha.edu)  
Phone: 402-554-2303

October 1, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to offer my support for the proposed Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development and for Dr. Erin Bass as its inaugural Executive Director. Dr. Bass is a colleague of mine in the College of Business Administration. She has proven herself to be a dedicated academic and an excellent leader, consistently demonstrating a deep understanding of both the academic needs of our students and the broader needs of the Omaha community.

Dr. Bass has a unique ability to bridge the gap between UNO's programs and the workforce development needs of Omaha. She understands the importance of pairing the strengths of our faculty and the university's resources with the skills necessary to build a successful and future-ready workforce. I am confident that Dr. Bass will lead this center with a vision that aligns with UNO's mission while also addressing the pressing workforce demands of our community.

Her leadership, combined with her knowledge of the Omaha area and her passion for academic excellence, makes her an ideal choice to guide this initiative. As President of the Faculty Senate at UNO, I fully support the creation of this center and believe that Dr. Bass will ensure its success in shaping the workforce of tomorrow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patty Bick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "P" and "B".

Patty Bick , Ph.D.  
Faculty Senate President  
University of Nebraska at Omaha



Deborah Circo PhD  
Assistant Professor  
Grace Abbott School of Social Work  
University of Nebraska at Omaha  
October 11, 2024

UNO Academic Center Review Committee  
University of Nebraska at Omaha  
Omaha, NE 68182

Dear Members of the UNO Academic Center Review Committee,

I am writing to express my full support for the establishment of the Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Having participated in the competency-based education (CBE) pilot, I have seen firsthand the transformative impact this approach has had on my teaching, my students, and the alignment of academic programs with workforce needs.

The CBE pilot has significantly reshaped the way I teach by moving beyond traditional time-based assessments and focusing on mastery of key skills. This shift has allowed me to deliver more personalized online learning experiences, where students can progress at their own pace while achieving clearly defined, measurable outcomes. The real-world applications of these outcomes have equipped students with the skills needed for success in the workforce, enhancing their readiness and confidence in providing social work services.

However, the pilot has also revealed a critical gap in UNO's infrastructure—there is currently no formal avenue for fully implementing CBE across the institution. The absence of dedicated resources and institutional support for scaling CBE limits the program's broader potential and the ability of academic departments from utilizing CBE. It is clear that the comprehensive adoption of CBE would require the backing of a center that could provide the necessary frameworks, tools, and support systems for faculty and students alike.

Throughout the pilot, the guidance and instructional design support provided by Stephanie Larsen, Associate Director of the Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development, have been invaluable. Stephanie's expertise has been critical in helping me develop the skills to redesign my courses to align with CBE principles. In addition, her leadership in the "Empowering Faculty in the World of CBE" Canvas course gave me and my colleagues the practical strategies we needed to navigate the complexities of CBE, significantly enhancing our teaching approaches.

The university needs a Center that can help faculty develop CBE courses. I strongly believe that establishing the Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development is essential to fully realizing the potential of CBE at UNO. This center would provide the critical infrastructure needed to support faculty in delivering high-quality, competency-based programs while ensuring that students gain the skills necessary for workforce success.

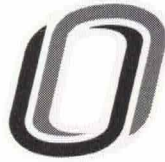
I urge you to approve the creation of this center, which I am confident will enhance our university's commitment to innovative and workforce-aligned education.  
Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Deborah Circo  
Assistant Professor  
Grace Abbott School of Social Work  
University of Nebraska at Omaha



**Grace Abbott School of Social Work**  
6001 Dodge St., CPACS 206 | Omaha, NE 68182 | 402.554.2793 | [graceabbott@unomaha.edu](mailto:graceabbott@unomaha.edu)  
[socialwork.unomaha.edu](http://socialwork.unomaha.edu)





10/11/2024

UNO Academic Center Review Committee  
University of Nebraska at Omaha  
Omaha, NE 68182

Dear Members of the UNO Academic Center Review Committee,

I am writing to express my full support for the establishment of the Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Having participated in the competency-based education (CBE) pilot, I have seen firsthand the transformative impact this approach has had on my teaching effectiveness and the learning of my students.

The CBE pilot significantly reshaped the way I teach by moving beyond traditional time-based assessments and focusing on mastery of key skills. This shift allows me to deliver more personalized learning experiences, where students can progress at their own pace while achieving clearly defined, measurable outcomes. The real-world applications of these outcomes have equipped students with the skills needed for success in the workforce, enhancing their readiness and confidence.

Throughout the pilot, the guidance and instructional design support provided by Stephanie Larsen, Associate Director of the Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development, have been invaluable. Stephanie's expertise has been critical in helping me redesign my courses to align with CBE principles. In addition, her leadership in the "Empowering Faculty in the World of CBE" Canvas course gave me the practical strategies we needed to navigate the complexities of CBE, significantly enhancing our teaching approaches. A center dedicated to CBE, therefore, with adequate resources to research, train, and recommend best practices at UNO will only enhance greater faculty effectiveness and impact.

The impact of CBE on my students has been overwhelmingly positive. They have reported greater clarity in understanding course expectations and have demonstrated increased confidence in applying the skills they mastered. A focus on real-world skills has not only improved their academic performance but also prepared them to meet the demands of their future careers.

Considering these experiences, I strongly believe that establishing the Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development is essential to fully realizing the potential of CBE at UNO. This center would provide the critical infrastructure needed to support faculty in delivering high-quality, competency-based programs while ensuring that students gain the skills necessary for workforce success.

I urge you to approve the creation of this center, which I am confident will enhance our university's commitment to innovative and workforce-aligned education.  
Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arvind Agrawal". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Dr. Arvind Agrawal  
Assistant Professor  
Marketing and Entrepreneurship  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

15 October 2024

Letter of Support for the proposed UNO Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development

My name is Kelly Gomez Johnson, and I am the Hollie Bethel Professor of Education, an Associate Professor of STEM Education, and the Department Chair of Teacher Education at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). I am honored to write this letter of support for the development of a UNO center focused on competency-based learning with a focus on diverse skill and workforce development strategies and structures. As a faculty member, unit administrator, and faculty fellow in the STEM TRAIL Center, I can confidently say that the infrastructure of a center at UNO in this area is needed and would have direct impact on our ability to be innovative partners in providing relevant learning opportunities to our students and community.

Recent findings from an NSWERS workforce shortage report shows that the educator workforce is at a crisis point. In 2023, 908 teaching positions were left vacant Nebraska—a 13% increase from the year before. Changes to teacher licensure expectations and new legislation are opening doors to innovative learning opportunities to educate and advance the next generation of educators across our state differently. Our Teacher Education Department has always been a state leader in innovative and intensive field-based work with onsite instructional coaching and supervision. We are determined to produce highly qualified and caring educators in every classroom because that is what we know each and every child deserves. As we enter this new age of certification opportunities, competency-based learning strategies and structures are essential to maintain our high standards for excellence, honor their depth of learning during over 120 hours of field-based work, and address the educator workforce shortages in our state and region.

The proposed Center is coming at a critical time as we are seeing more philanthropic and school district support and funding than ever before. UNO is viewed as a collaborative partner and our funders and schools are all asking how we can better prepare teachers...and faster. CBL pedagogical and assessment structures open doors for new preparation models including educator apprenticeships and para to teacher programs which have historically been challenging to execute while maintaining rigor and relevance. The Skills Lab, as a proposed component of the center, would be a vital resource for our department, school district partners, and community agencies to co-construct “the most in-demand skills and critical knowledge” necessary in this new age of education and teacher certification. With my experience in the UNO STEM TRAIL Center, I know the center’s infrastructure is critical to providing interdisciplinary innovations and vital supports in areas under-resourced departments or not designed to address global institutional structures. I have benefited many times from access to shared resources that have streamlined grant proposals, curriculum development, and community engagement that were only possible due to the center structure. I know the value of the center model and I would be a fierce champion of our department and college leveraging the infrastructure and systems to “work smarter” for cohesion and quality under this model.

Again, I fully support the proposed development of a UNO center focused on competency-based learning, skills, and workforce development. Our educator preparation field would benefit greatly from this campus center and we are eager to begin work with the current hub in the coming months.



For further information, questions, or comments, please contact me at [kgomezjohnson@unomaha.edu](mailto:kgomezjohnson@unomaha.edu).

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Kelly Gomez Johnson  
Hollie Bethel Professor of Education  
Department Chair and Associate Professor of STEM Education  
College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences  
UNO STEM TRAIL Center Leadership Fellow  
University of Nebraska at Omaha



October 15, 2024

Dr. Jaci Lindburg  
Associate Vice Chancellor for Innovative and Learning-Centric Initiatives  
University of Nebraska at Omaha  
6001 Dodge Street, 110B EAB  
Omaha, NE 68182

Dear Dr. Lindburg,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development Hub at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) and to emphasize the importance of categorizing this Hub as an official Center. As Director of the Grace Abbott School of Social Work, I believe this designation will further delineate the purpose and critical role this unit plays in aligning UNO's mission with the pressing workforce needs of our community—particularly in mental health and social work.

The need for qualified professionals in these fields is more urgent than ever. Communities are facing mounting challenges, from the mental health crisis to the opioid epidemic, and social workers and mental health professionals are essential to addressing these complex issues. The new Center will provide the necessary infrastructure to ensure that our academic offerings remain responsive to these demands by aligning the skills and competencies taught at UNO with the real-world needs of employers and service providers.

Officially designating the Hub as a Center will underscore its role as vital to UNO's mission to provide high-quality, accessible education that leads to meaningful employment and community impact. By organizing a centralized, coordinated effort across campus to promote competency-based education (CBE) and skills development, the Center will ensure that academic programs, particularly in fields like social work, have the tools and frameworks necessary to adopt innovative, workforce-aligned pedagogical strategies. The development of campus-wide learning maps, which will document the relationship among competencies within specific fields, will serve as an invaluable resource for academic programs looking to prepare their students for the workforce.

As mental health and social work increasingly require a workforce equipped with both specialized knowledge and practical skills, the Center's support of competency-based education will play a crucial role in developing highly skilled practitioners. The framework provided by the Center will ensure that graduates are well-prepared academically and equipped to meet the community's evolving needs from day one in their professional careers.



For all these reasons, I firmly believe that the Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development Hub deserves to be designated as an official Center. This status will solidify its position as a cornerstone of UNO's strategic commitment to workforce development, and it will further define its critical role in preparing students to address the challenges of our time.

I am excited to lend my full support to this initiative and look forward to the positive impact the Center will have on both our students and the community. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you need any additional information or support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Reay".

Dr. Susan Reay, Director  
Grace Abbott School of Social Work  
University of Nebraska at Omaha  
[sreay@unomaha.edu](mailto:sreay@unomaha.edu)



October 21, 2024

Dear Members of the Review Committees,

I am writing to offer my enthusiastic and strong support for the proposed Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW) and for Dr. Erin Bass as its inaugural Executive Director. I have had the pleasure of collaborating with Dr. Bass for over five years, during which time we have worked on multiple grants and publications together. One of the most significant projects we collaborated on was UNO's Big Idea on Transforming Wellness and Aging through Business, Informatics, and Technology, where Dr. Bass served as the CBA Pillar Principal Investigator. I was part of this interdisciplinary group, and I witnessed firsthand Dr. Bass's ability to co-lead a diverse team of faculty and students with great success. Her breadth of knowledge and technical skillset provide her with a solid foundation upon which to collaborate, and her leadership skills made it one of my most favorite and productive cross-campus groups to work with.

From 2019 to 2023, this Big Idea initiative had a budget of \$1.4 million, and Dr. Bass played a key role in ensuring that project milestones were met and objectives were achieved. Her leadership was instrumental in navigating the complexity of this initiative, and her ability to manage both the strategic and operational aspects of the project was impressive. Given her track record, I am confident that Dr. Bass will be an effective leader for the new center and will drive its success with the same level of commitment and excellence.

Additionally, I fully support the work the proposed center will undertake to enhance the skills and competencies of UNO students, making our workforce future-ready. This represents another forward-thinking initiative by UNO, and I am proud to be part of an institution that values innovation and workforce development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kathryn Cooper'.

Kathryn Cooper, Ph.D. | she/her/hers  
Associate Professor, Bioinformatics and Biomedical Informatics  
College of Information Science and Technology  
University of Nebraska at Omaha | [www.unomaha.edu](http://www.unomaha.edu) [[unomaha.edu](http://unomaha.edu)]  
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October 8, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to offer my enthusiastic support for the proposed Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW) at the University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO). Nebraska's economy is strong and growing; the state's GDP increased 5.3% in the second quarter of 2024—the third-fastest rate in the nation. This growth is creating great career opportunities across industries. As a state, we've seen record employment this year in our construction and leisure/hospitality industries. Manufacturing employment in Nebraska is also at its highest point in over 20 years.

While we're generating plenty of great jobs, employers often have trouble finding the talent they need to maximize their growth potential. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Nebraska has the 7<sup>th</sup> most severe labor shortage among U.S. states—with 39 workers per 100 open jobs.

As a state, it's imperative that we better connect our students to the great career opportunities in Nebraska. Our future success hinges on a workforce that is highly skilled and capable of sustaining our economic growth, and CCSW will play a critical role in ensuring that our state has the talent it needs to thrive. By focusing on developing essential skills and competencies, this initiative will equip students to embark on rewarding careers right here in Nebraska.

I recently served as a panelist at the "Future of Work" symposium at UNO on 9/24/24 where the proposed center was made public. I believe CCSW is well-suited to meet the need to prepare Nebraskans for the workplace. I am thrilled that UNO is taking the lead on this critical effort, and I am confident it will make a significant impact on our state's workforce development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "KC Belitz".

KC Belitz  
Director  
Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED)

October 1, 2024

University of Nebraska at Omaha  
6001 Dodge St  
Omaha, NE 68182

RE: Letter of Support for proposed Center for Competencies, Skills, & Workforce Development

Dear Members of the Academic Center Review Committee,

On behalf of the Greater Omaha Chamber and nearly 3,000 members, I am writing to express our strong support for the proposed Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development at University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO).

Its dual focus on competency-based education and skills development aligns perfectly with the workforce needs of the greater Omaha region as we look to the future. This innovative initiative has the potential to change Nebraska's talent landscape by developing a workforce that is not only well-prepared, but also agile and adaptable.

Recently, I had the pleasure to serve as a panelist at the University of Nebraska at Omaha's "Future of Work" symposium, where we explored this very topic of how business, higher education, and workforce development stakeholders can partner better to support skill development of Nebraskans for the future. The innovative approach of this proposed Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development will help do exactly that from the higher education sector and will help ensure our region strengthens our competitiveness in the rapidly changing global competition for talent.

As a proud economic development partner of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the Greater Omaha Chamber enthusiastically supports the establishment of the new Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development and looks forward to seeing its impact on our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heath Mello".

Heath Mello  
President & CEO



October 1, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I am pleased to write this letter supporting the proposed Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development (CCSW) at UNO. Developing skills and competencies is crucial to the growth and sustainability of both our organization and the broader Omaha and Nebraska workforces. These foundational elements are critical to ensuring that we have a workforce prepared for our industries' future challenges and opportunities.

The new CCSW Center will solidify these skills and competencies in students, providing them with the tools they need to find success in their careers. By doing so, it will also help our community continue to grow. OPPD is excited about this forward-thinking initiative, and I fully support UNO's effort to shape a highly skilled and competent workforce.

Sincerely,

CJ Jackson

Director of Organizational Development, Human Capital

Omaha Public Power District (OPPD)



October 7, 2024

Dear Members of the Academic Center Review Committee,

It is a pleasure to write in support of the Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development at University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO).

I understand that the Center will be an incubator for UNO to begin building a portfolio of competency-based (CBE) programs.

UW-Milwaukee has offered a suite of CBE programs—the UW Flexible Option—for the past decade in partnership with the UW-System Office of Online & Professional Learning Resources (formerly UW Extended Campus). Working in the CBE space has yielded numerous benefits to UWM:

- We are reaching a truly new audience of learners who need maximum flexibility to pursue higher education. Flex Option students are older (average age is 37) and they balance work and family responsibilities with their studies. The self-directed CBE approach to learning meets these students where they are, with twelve monthly starts, short three-month terms, and an “all you can learn” subscription model that enables students to find the path to degree completion that suits their needs as an adult learner. Students can take one course at a time, or complete as many courses as they are able to during a three-month subscription period.
- All of our CBE programs are operating in the black, yielding positive revenue after expenses are accounted for, helping programs’ fiscal sustainability.
- The CBE approach to learning, which has required rethinking basic course design as well as some aspects of operational infrastructure, has increased UWM’s capacity for innovation. For example, UWM faculty have embraced new curricular models such as skills-focused microcredentials (CBE is inherently about skills) and open educational resources (most Flex Option courses use OERs).

- Our CBE programs help us meet our mission. Like UNO, UWM is an urban-serving institution, and our student mix includes adult learners with some college and no credential—the target audience for Flex Option CBE programs.

UWM's CBE programs launched in 2014, and since that date UWM and UW System's Office of Online & Professional Learning Resources have been in the forefront of national conversations on competency-based education. I can strongly affirm that this unique educational model has been a highly worthwhile endeavor for our institution and the students we serve, and I trust that that would also be the case for UNO's Center for Competencies, Skills, and Workforce Development.

Best,



Laura Pedrick  
Special Assistant to the Provost for Strategic Initiatives  
Executive Director, UWM Online  
UW-Milwaukee

414-229-3203  
lpedrick@uwm.edu

UWM Online  
online.uwm.edu