



ELEMENTS OF QUALITY FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE BACHELOR'S DEGREE PROGRAMS:

THOUGHT PAPER

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About CCBA

The Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA) strives to provide support and resources to community colleges that build and sustain high-value, career-focused baccalaureate degrees that maximize opportunities for all learners to achieve family-sustaining careers.

CCBA has undergone tremendous growth in recent years, expanding its institutional membership from 33 colleges in 2019 to 170 institutions and 681 programs in 2023. This increase of more than 500% reflects a significant expansion of CCB programs in community colleges across the United States. Among CCBA's institutional members are colleges in Florida, Texas, Washington, and other states that adopted state laws on CCB degrees long ago, as well as colleges much newer to CCB program adoption in states like Arizona, California, Ohio, and Oregon. Regardless of their experience, these institutions seek opportunities to learn what makes CCB-degree pathways meaningful and successful for students.

Overview

Community college bachelor's degree programs (CCBs) seek to contribute to career success for individuals, prosperity for families, and economic drivers and development for communities through their direct connection to regional employment opportunities. CCBs seek to enroll under-represented students who have limited opportunities to secure bachelor's degrees without a CCB option. Outcomes for CCBs, particularly completion rates, demographic data, placements, and salary outcomes, have been promising, and CCBA is committed to continually improving CCB outcomes across the country.

However, to date, there is no unified set of quality standards for community colleges seeking to confer baccalaureate degrees. Filling this void is critical due to the rapid expansion of CCB programs in the United States. This growth is bound to continue given the passage of AB 927 in California (signed September 2021) and new or expanded policy in eight more states over the last several years, including Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Missouri, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, and Wyoming. Further, CCB-conferring colleges need to demonstrate how these new pathways produce more equitable baccalaureate attainment outcomes for all student groups.

As programs emerge quickly across the country, leaders and practitioners who design, implement, and believe in these programs want to ensure expansion occurs in ways that maintain quality. Especially important is ensuring student success through equitable degree attainment, particularly since the US has a disparate and inequitable history of baccalaureate completion.

Due to the unprecedented growth of CCBs, there is an urgent need to crosswalk measures of impact and quality used broadly by practitioners, policymakers, and postsecondary reform communities and integrate them with CCBA's own knowledge and affiliated research on what is considered high quality.

History of CCBs

Scholars and practitioners have written about the emergence and potential for CCBs for nearly 30 years. The vision of some of these individuals to see CCBs extend bachelor's degrees to historically underserved populations was met with skepticism, while other authors lauded these new credentials. Exemplars of writings exploring the impact of CCB degrees on community college mission and access include Dougherty (1994); Floyd et. al (2005); Hanson (2009); and Levin (2004).

Among these authors, Walker (2001) was one of the earliest and most adamant supporters of CCB degrees as a means of expanding the roles and responsibilities that community colleges play in meeting the postsecondary needs of their regions. Following this work, Floyd (2006), Remington and Remington (2013), Russell (2010), and Townsend et al. (2007) documented early developments around CCB degree program implementation in the US. Though this thought paper and its preceding literature review, discussed later, are not intended to be comprehensive of the historical development of CCBs, we have drawn upon these writings to provide a foundation for the work of CCBA and its taskforce.

Exploring a Quality Framework: The Process

This seed grant had two driving questions: (1) Do community college practitioners and those in the field think a quality framework is necessary, and (2) what are the major elements of quality that would make up or be included in a quality framework?

To begin the process of exploring and developing a CCB quality framework, we convened a CCBA Quality Advisory Taskforce, conducted a comprehensive literature review, and engaged individuals from across the country with various CCB experiences in small group conversations, which culminated in this thought paper.

Quality Advisory Taskforce

To help guide the literature review and thought paper and provide valuable input about the process, a Quality Advisory Taskforce was assembled in early 2023. CCBA board member, Dr. Joyce Hammer, who has extensive experience at the state level and CCB-program level, agreed to chair the taskforce. Dr. Debra Bragg, whose consulting firm Bragg & Associates, Inc. is the formal research partner to CCBA, serves as co-chair. The chairs, in collaboration with CCBA, assembled the rest of the taskforce members. Those selected for the taskforce have vast experience in higher education and CCBs specifically. It also includes workforce and industry leaders who have a history of supporting CCBs and who have expressed a need for and a desire to hire community college graduates. The taskforce members are engaged leaders who dedicate much of their time and efforts toward CCBs and have insight into CCB quality. A complete list of taskforce members can be found in the Acknowledgements.

The goals for the taskforce included providing direction and input on the literature review and thought paper, providing recommendations for participants for the small group conversations, and advising CCBA as we explore and gather an understanding of a CCB quality framework. The taskforce participated in project discussions through a series of three virtual Advisory Taskforce meetings.

Literature Review

To better understand measures of quality used in the field that are relevant to CCB programs, CCBA then conducted a comprehensive literature review to answer the research question:

What measures of quality for CCB programs are used in the field for community colleges seeking to confer baccalaureate degrees?

The literature review draws on more than 50 sources, including scholarly publications, articles, reports, doctoral dissertations, and academic professional associations' research specifically regarding quality elements and CCB degrees. It also includes literature from other areas, such as work-based learning and guided pathways, that aligns with programmatic elements identified in CCBs.



Literature Review Findings Overview

The literature review findings relating to CCB quality coalesced around the following areas:

1. Design elements of CCB degrees

Studies found that CCB programs incorporate elements that recognize student needs and goals and prepare graduates for employment in stable and growing occupations. These programs must offer baccalaureate-level learning and provide the flexibility that learners need to be successful. Programs should prioritize key design elements that promote student success throughout the student's CCB pathway. These design elements include student-centered instruction, holistic student supports, work-based learning opportunities, and employer engagement and partnerships.

2. The assessment of industry needs and labor market alignment of CCB programs

CCB programs are intended to be responsive to industry, workforce, and community demands and student employment needs. To align with market demands, CCBs should be driven by local, regional, and/or state workforce needs and continuously engage external partners to maintain connection with workforce and community leaders.

3. Equitable student access and outcomes associated with CCB programs

CCB programs should prioritize equitable student access and outcomes for underserved learners, including students of color, adult working learners, and students whose families have limited resources to pay for college by offering varied on-ramps; providing flexibility in pace, course offerings, and delivery methods; centering cultural competency in curriculum and instruction; and integrating data collection and monitoring to address inequities and improve student access and success.

4. Criteria for states and systems to use in approving CCB programs

Most states require a justification for program need, proof of limited overlap with university programs, and high labor market demand for approval. For applied baccalaureates, program development is linked to indicators like increasing baccalaureate attainment rates, prioritizing needs of adult learners, and connecting education and workforce. The literature reveals the most common criteria center on institutional capacity; the collecting, analyzing, monitoring, and reporting of student and program data; industry demand; policies and status; and students enrolled.

The full literature review, including findings, gaps, and limitations, can be found in the appendices.



Small Group Conversations: An Overview

Following the literature review, CCBA engaged in small group conversations with 25 individuals from across the country with various experiences with CCBs. Findings from those conversations, paired with the preceding literature review and CCBA's existing knowledge, have created the basis for this thought paper on measures of quality for CCBs.

The following sections describe CCBA's process for planning and executing the small group conversations, including holding a Quality Session at its annual conference and engaging in small group conversations.

Quality Session at CCBA Conference

To kick off the conversations with individuals from across the country with various experiences with CCBs, CCBA facilitated an hour-long meeting called "The Quality Session" at the 2023 CCBA conference in winter 2023. The goal of the session was to determine if there was a need or interest among CCB stakeholders in further exploring a CCB quality framework.

The session took place on the last day of the conference in a large meeting space with approximately 40 self-selected participants. During the session, taskforce chair Dr. Joyce Hammer led small and large group discussions so that participants could share their experiences with components of program planning, adoption, and implementation of CCB degrees.

During the session, participants recognized and agreed that there is a need for a CCB quality framework.

Conversations with Individuals

In spring and summer 2023, CCBA engaged in small group conversations with individuals from across the country with various experiences with CCBs. Toward that end, CCBA developed a list of participants who taskforce members and other CCB stakeholders considered to be knowledgeable and engaged participants from their respective fields.

The goal of engaging in these conversations was to collect existing experiences in the field for future development of a comprehensive framework for high quality CCBs. This series of conversations complemented the literature review by further defining and building broad consensus around quality elements for CCB programs, which are discussed in detail later in this thought paper.

After inviting the participants and confirming the dates and interviewees, CCBA staff wrote possible interview questions that were focused on CCBs and CCB quality. Examples of the interview questions can be found in the appendices.

Participants included: faculty members from an array of fields, including computer technology, math and sciences, education, business and information management, and maritime and marine technology; other individuals from community colleges, including a dean, a director of partnerships, a director of graduate and online admissions, a programmer, and a senior researcher; students and alumni of CCB programs; representatives from foundations, accreditation agencies, technical assistance providers, and national associations; individuals from a county sheriff's office; and individuals from a national construction firm.

The meetings were recorded and transcribed using Otter AI, a program that provides real-time transcription, recorded audio, and automated meeting summaries. CCBA staff reviewed and updated the transcripts for accuracy. Staff then used Chat GPT to summarize the interviews for key findings. Researchers from Troy Street Professional Services read and coded the interviews, using the Chat GPT summaries as a reference, culminating in the findings shared in this paper.



Summary of Conversations

The small group conversations with 25 participants surfaced nine elements of quality CCB programs, which are described in this section.

1. High level of learning
2. Equitable access and outcomes
3. Affordability
4. Flexibility
5. Experiential learning
6. Industry partnership and collaboration
7. Student services
8. Regional labor market significance and alignment
9. Evaluation: Evidence-based programs and practices

1 High Level of Learning

A high level of learning, or “higher learning toward meaningful credentials” (Brown et al., 2023; Humphreys et al., 2023), was mentioned as an element of CCB quality in the small group conversations. Practitioners asserted that CCBs should have “high expectations met with high support.” Some shared that they should “prepare students for graduate-level learning,” stating that CCBs “have that academic rigor that really gets [students] ready to be candidates for a master’s program and not just bachelor’s degree holders,” if desired.

Higher learning is also attractive to workforce and industry leaders, who find assurances of high quality learning at CCBs as evidence of quality overall and the quality of their prospective hires. Industry leaders also shared that higher learning also helps them provide workforce diversity.

Recent writing on quality in higher learning supports this. Brown and colleagues (2023) from Lumina Foundation share:

To build a learning system for today’s students, quality assurance and improvement must be more squarely rooted in relevant, reliable data. It also must be aligned with competency-based approaches to program design that enable innovators to offer programs that give students access to federal student aid, including grants and loans. Oversight and improvement must ensure that learning is relevant, clearly framed from the outset, and rigorously assessed.

Seen here, a high level of learning is connected to other quality elements mentioned by conversation participants and in the literature review, including reliable data, flexibility, relevant and aligned curriculum, rigorous evaluation, and evidence-based approaches. In this way, higher learning does not occur in a vacuum but in relation to other quality elements of CCBs. Defining quality as it relates to higher learning remains a key consideration for CCBs.

2 Equitable Access and Outcomes

As extensively seen in the literature, participants from a range of backgrounds underscored equitable access and outcomes as primary quality elements of CCBs. Aptly stated by a university partner, CCBs can “address historic inequities” seen in higher education systems. They continued: “In general, based on research, we know that CCBs continue to serve a more diverse population than their four year counterparts. So we must look at to what extent within the community college are CCBs differentially attractive to students from different populations.”

While, as previously mentioned, equity is highly related with affordability, it is also entwined with student services. A university representative shared: “If you want to increase equity, you need to provide the resources for that in a way that people can access them.”

Another university representative continued: “If [colleges] don't have a strong financial aid office, if we don't have a strong academic advising office, if we don't have transportation to get the students to and from, we limit how individuals interact with the program.” More on student services can be found later in this paper.

Participants who are industry employers also highlighted equity. One shared that equity in CCBs leads to a more diverse workforce, which is undeniably good for workforce and regional economies. The participant also shared:

“[CCBs] must think through programs and their ability to support students in economic and social mobility. I think as we think about the kinds of programs we want to offer, [economic and social mobility] are very important. CCBs must understand who is included in high wage, high demand programs and who is not.”

A focus on equity and equitable access and outcomes is substantially supported by research. Attending to the social, cultural, and relational dimensions of learning in CCBs, including anti-bias approaches and cultural competency, can benefit not only CCB learners but those who they go on to interact with in the workplace, community, and home. Other elements of equity for CCBs to consider include streamlined admission processes that remove bias (Powers, 2022) and assess students' prior learning, previous credentials, existing college credits, and work experience, providing credit for it when possible (Freeman & McDonough, 2022). CCBs with a commitment to equity also boast smaller classes, a less rigid structure, better scheduling options, and more flexible delivery models (Floyd et al., 2005). Disaggregating data can also help in identifying, measuring, and analyzing equity and understanding related outcomes, which is discussed more later in this paper.

As seen in both the small group conversations and the literature, any quality framework for CCBs must include measures of equity.

3 Affordability

One element of CCB quality is affordability for students. One student participant shared: “I knew I couldn’t afford a university, [leaving me] stuck and stressed. What helped me [in selecting the CCB] was that the price was affordable.”

This is supported by research. Wetzstein and colleagues’ (2022) study of adult learners and graduates of CCB programs concluded, among other elements, that affordability is a key – and often a most important – consideration for students.

Affordability is also inextricably connected to equity. Rios-Aguilar and colleagues (2023) found that “the community college baccalaureate presents a new opportunity to concretely provide more accessible, affordable [...] bachelor’s degrees to advantage social mobility for racial and ethnically diverse students, and to meet local workforce demands” (p. 25). This is particularly important for adult learners and underserved student populations, many of whom are working as they earn their credential. More information on equity as a quality element can be found later in this paper.

4 Flexibility

Flexibility was also highlighted as an element of CCB program quality, particularly by practitioners and students. Practitioners, particularly faculty members, shared the importance of flexible on-ramps and class offerings for students to access coursework and persist. Practitioners posited that online courses as part of the curriculum were likely crucial for students, particularly adult working students.

The focus on flexibility was supported by a student participant. The student shared: “Flexible course schedules and offerings were really important for me, although I prefer in-class options.” This student noted that, while in-class coursework helped them concentrate and engage more effectively, they knew some students relied on other modes, like online and asynchronous options.

This feedback is supported by literature. In their review of California’s CCBs, Rios-Aguilar et al. (2023) found flexibility in multiple areas to be crucial for student success and for closing racial equity gaps. Such flexibility includes more malleable scheduling, more affordable pathways, reduced transfer barriers, and additional student services (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2023). Students pursuing a CCB prefer flexible learning environments that foster collaboration over competition while embedding social support, including using cohort models (Bragg et al., 2022; Fino, 2020).

As a student participant shared, flexibility also includes courses with multiple modes of delivery (e.g., hybrid courses, online courses, competency-based models) (Floyd et al., 2005). Flexible modes allow students to meet their immediate financial need through gainful employment while maintaining the ability to complete their studies (Floyd et al., 2003).

In a quality framework for CCBs, multiple measures of flexibility, including flexibility in scheduling, course offerings, and modes of delivery, among others should be included.

5 Experiential Learning

Participants in the conversations, including community college practitioners, research and university partners, students, and workforce leaders, agreed that experiential learning is a key element of CCB quality. Experiential learning, such as work-based learning, project-based learning, real-world applications of coursework, hands-on learning, internships, and apprenticeships, that are tied to course credit better prepare students for their future work environments.

One participant, who is an industry leader, shared: “I always tell any student that you will learn 100 fold more in your first year of work than you will learn in a classroom. Not that education isn't very important, but I think real-world application is extremely important.”

By embedding experiential learning into CCB programs, students can gain valuable experience in a supportive environment that others might not get until they are on the job.

A faculty member echoed the importance of hands-on learning, stating:

“I think project-based learning is critical for preparing students for the workplace, experience working in teams, building products for real clients, collecting feedback, making improvements, and communicating with one another. All of that is just happening on a daily basis when you're in an applied program. That is what helps our students differentiate themselves from traditional students from the university who might just take a perfunctory Capstone at the very end of their program, or maybe no Capstone at all.”

What's more, students in the small group conversations indicated enjoying experiential learning and seeing the benefit. One student recounted:

“I liked hands-on projects because my degree was in biotech. You know, our projects often included actually working with bio reactors, growing up cells, making solutions, purifying protein, you know, we got to do a lot of stuff like that. And then there was also projects concerning facility layout and design.”

Early exposure to job-based tasks, equipment, and situations helped this student feel more prepared upon degree completion.

When it comes to internships as part of experiential learning, compensation is an important consideration. Paid work-based learning, including internships, should be integrated into CCB programs to the fullest extent possible. In situations when citizenship and immigration status prohibits these learning experiences, colleges are advised to develop unpaid, volunteer, or mentoring arrangements that advance learning in the workplace. A technical assistance partner reflected that unpaid work-based learning experiences are a barrier for students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. They shared: “I hope that we will move towards the greater possibility and likelihood of paid work-based learning experiences, as it is an equity concern.”

Literature supports the participants' input. Soler and Bragg (2015) share that work-based or work-aligned experiences in CCB programming leads to increased workforce preparedness and relevance. Further, in their chapter of 13 Ideas that are Transforming the Community College World, Floyd and Skolnik (2019) share that work-based learning should include opportunities at each level in a pathway and embedded into the program design. This is especially important when considering CCBs' tight alignment to local, regional, and state workforce needs, discussed more later in this paper.

6 Employer Partnerships and Collaborations

Conversation participants highlighted the importance of workforce and industry partnerships and collaborations, curriculum alignment to employer needs, advisory councils with workforce leaders, and course instructors with workforce and industry experience.

Workforce and industry partnership is crucial for curriculum relevance. As aptly put by one participant: “I think industry and higher education have to figure out how they’re going to work together to continue to have more effective symbiotic relationships in the development of curriculum.”

A participant who is an industry leader stressed the importance of advisory councils in helping maintain relevant curriculum. They shared: “When setting up [CCBs], they [should get] a lot of input from the industry and have a very strong industry advisory board [that can] give a lot of direction as far as what they should be teaching.”

However, this close relationship cannot end once the program is built, as work-based skills change quickly. The same participant continued:

“That [skills and learning] really changes quickly. You know, if you go back and look at a book from 10 years ago on [curricular needs related to industry], that would be ancient history. You have to stay up to date on what’s changing out there in the industry, and advisory board input really helps.”

Another workforce partner concurred, stating: “It cannot just be like a simple ‘Hey, these are the skills we need.’ It has to be a relationship between the two where there’s a lot of information sharing about both lanes.”

A university partner agreed, connecting workforce partnerships to experiential learning. They stated: “CCBs should connect project-based learning with mentorship with local companies to apply classroom concepts,” as well as collaborate with workforce leaders in the curricular development of such project-based learning experiences.



6 cont.

To help with curricular relevance and partnership, a practitioner indicated the importance of instructors with industry and workforce experience. Instructors with experience in the field of study can design experiences and facilitate learning that is more aligned to actual skills and competencies needed on the job. However, workforce and industry leaders often lack the credentials needed to instruct.

A practitioner shared how their institution navigated this predicament: “How we handled that was that we set it up as a team course with one of our existing full-time faculty members. We worked around it by hav[ing] a little bit more reasonable allowances in place by recognizing industry experience within the field and helping them meet their minimum qualifications.”

Research supports the importance of workforce and industry partnership. Soler and Bragg (2015) found that experiential learning bolsters the workforce relevance of curriculum, which improves student and employer perceptions of CCB programs. Further, CCB literature indicates that CCB programs are responsive to industry, workforce, and community demands and student employment needs. In order to align with market demands, CCBs should be related to local, regional, and state workforce needs and engage external partners to maintain connection with industry and community leaders. More information about workforce alignment can be found later in this paper.

Further, community colleges and employer, industry, workforce, and community leaders must have a close, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial relationship to be successful and responsive to each stakeholder’s needs (Floyd et al., 2005). Collaboration with external partners, including employers, economic development entities, and workforce boards, helps to ensure coursework, including work-based learning, builds knowledge and skills in learners’ chosen fields of study (Bragg et al., 2022; Bragg & Harmon, 2022).

A framework for quality in CCBs must include partnership and collaboration with local, regional, and national industry leaders.



COMMUNITY COLLEGE

7 Student Services

Robust student services were also mentioned as a quality element for CCBs. Student services discussed in the conversations included: financial aid offices, academic advising, libraries and learning centers, tutoring centers, career services like resume writing workshops and internships, and staff appointments, like dedicated counselors for CCBs, college navigators, mentors, and other student support staff. Participants shared that an important aspect of student services is what they achieve *beyond* their explicit role. For instance, participants shared that student services help to market CCBs on campus, as well as more intentionally help students who are coming back to college and having difficulty navigating the system.

In relation to faculty and staff providing student services, one research partner shared: “Staff and college navigators who help with all sorts of different career services, like scheduling, and who’s just intimately involved with CCB students...I think is a major signal of quality.”

The importance of student services shared in the small group conversations is reflected in the literature. Research shows that learners are likely more successful when CCBs take a holistic approach to teaching and learning, including student supports. Some CCBs, like West LA College, have found success in faculty mentors and peer mentors for students (Bragg et al., 2022). Others, such as MiraCosta College, have hired Student Success Specialists to “serve as an advocate, career coach, and advisor to first generation, low income, and racially minoritized students [in order to] connect students to campus resources [and] serve as a liaison between the academic world and that of the home and workplace” (Fino & Gomez, 2022, p. 57).

Research shows that student services are also tied to flexibility. Rios-Aguilar and colleagues (2023) found that flexibility, discussed earlier in this paper as an element of CCB quality, includes not only flexible scheduling, affordable pathways, and reduced transfer barriers, but also additional student services, such as career navigation and advising, credit for prior learning, proactive “intrusive” advising, and experiences to prepare for the job search, such as resume writing workshops and mock interviews.

A CCB quality framework should include measures for student services, especially for racially underrepresented learners, adult working learners, or students who have limited resources to attend college.

8 Regional Significant and Labor Market Alignment

Conversation participants found that a CCB’s regional significance, particularly its alignment to the labor market and local and regional workforce needs, is an element of CCB quality. One practitioner from a community college shared: “When choosing a CCB, we want to make sure we pick programs that provide high employability in our geographical area and where students can pretty much be assured a job once they complete.”

8 cont.

An industry partner expressed why CCBs and labor market information (LMI) go hand in hand, particularly for economic mobility. They stated: “We recognize you need to work. Let’s make sure that you have a pathway to completing credentialing that gives you more resiliency in the labor market and gives you more earning power and economic mobility going into the future.”

Aligning CCBs to local and regional workforce needs connects to equity. One participant showed the connection: “[CCBs] provide us with a really important service to our regional communities that they serve, to make sure that they have the workforce that they need, at the skill set that they need. So I think it’s been one of the things that gets me most excited about that whole movement is that we’re really now providing opportunities for folks that never had it before.”

A participant who is a technical assistance provider underscored the importance of not only using LMI data to create CCBs but also sharing that LMI data with students. They argued:

“Students should have early access to labor market information when choosing [a program]. We often are not giving students enough information to understand if this is going to be a good return on their education and good return on their investment. So earlier, and more often I think it’s important, [LMI data] is good for us and also good for them.”

Alignment to the labor market has long been a focus of CCB research. Extensive literature shows that CCB programs must be responsive to industry, workforce, and community demands and student employment needs. In their 2022 review of CCBs, California Community Colleges wrote that CCB approval criteria may include curricular alignment with industry skills, program alignment to regional and local workforce needs, evidence of industry partners, and student demand for workforce related programs.

In order to align with labor market demands, CCBs should be related to local, regional, and state workforce needs and engage external partners to maintain connection with industry and community leaders. Many states require colleges to substantiate labor market demand prior to CCB program approval (Floyd et al, 2005) to ensure relevant, industry-recognized CCB programs. CCB programs in states like Washington and Florida align with local and regional labor market demands (Meza & Love, 2023).

Regional Significance: Strengthening Communities Beyond the Workforce

Aligning CCBs to local labor markets also impacts the community beyond jobs (Aguilar et al., 2022; Rios-Aguilar, et al., 2023). For instance, Rios-Aguilar and colleagues (2023) share that “CCB programs strategically designed for both technical training and the development of the student as a citizen, family member, information consumer, and human may do even more to enhance the well-being of the student and their surrounding community” (p. 62). In their review, Aguilar and colleagues (2023) state: “In addition to economic benefits, college degrees can also lead to non-monetary benefits including more frequent voting and improved health outcomes” (p. 1).

As has long been shown in the literature, and as supported by the small group conversations, the assessment of workforce needs and labor market alignment are key considerations in measuring CCB quality.

9 Evaluation: Evidence-based Programs and Practices

Evaluation, particularly evidence-based programs and practices, also surfaced in the small group conversations as an element of quality. Participants shared that this includes using data and outcomes when making curricular or programmatic decisions and revisions related to CCBs. Practitioners emphasized collecting data, capturing feedback, and building data-informed or evidence-based practices into the program to routinely check student progress and make course corrections if needed.

As surfaced in the conversations, collecting the right data can help in identifying, measuring, and analyzing equitable access and outcomes. One practitioner shared that disaggregating and analyzing data empowers leaders to address any disparities or inequities through resource allocation and support. Another practitioner mentioned the importance of dashboards and other data organizations to help make decisions. They shared: “We have a public dashboard where you can see all the demographic background that you'd have because it ties into our student information system. This is a vital part of why we've observed success.”

Further, Cueller and Gandara (2021) share that CCBs need consistent data collection, disaggregation, and analysis to help measure and reduce equity gaps. While we know that data is instrumental in working toward more equity in CCBs, there is more work to do in collecting and analyzing data on where CCB learners find employment post completion, if it is in their field of study, and if they are earning a family-sustaining wage.

The literature also underscores the importance of data and assessment. Research shows that CCBs should streamline data and reporting systems, involve multiple stakeholders in determining metrics to measure, include qualitative data on student experiences, and disaggregate data by race and other identities (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2023).

Of course, data is also tied to the aforementioned labor market alignment, as LMI data allows institutions to invest in the CCBs that matter most for the workforce. Bragg and Harmon (2022) suggest using multiple measures of workforce analysis and data to determine labor market gaps and specific workforce needs within regions or states to create relevant CCB degree programs.

Recommendations and Next Steps

This seed grant had two driving questions: (1) Do practitioners and those in the field think a CCB quality framework is necessary, and (2) what major elements of quality would comprise a quality framework?

The initial conversation, held during the 2023 National CCBA Conference, demonstrated the strong interest in and need for a quality framework for CCB program development. Further, during the small group conversations, support for a CCB Quality Framework was resounding, with many colleges, partners, and other stakeholders expressing a pressing need for guidance. Leaders and practitioners who design, implement, and believe in these programs want to ensure that CCBs are expanding in ways that maintain quality. They see this work as providing a framework for CCB practitioners to follow in developing exemplary programs.

The results generated by this Ascendium Foundation seed grant have shown that a second phase of this work is needed to build and implement the CCB Quality Framework. The creation and implementation of a CCB Quality Framework is ultimately required, as CCBA and CCB stakeholders need to respond to the demand for practical support and technical assistance in the design, adoption, and implementation of new CCB programs.

We will seek an implementation grant to further the development of the CCB Quality Framework to guide colleges as they either begin the process of baccalaureate development or improve their existing programs.

In Phase II, we will expand on the elements of quality discussed in this thought paper. To start, we plan to present the findings of Phase I during the 2024 CCBA National Conference and to other groups, including regional accreditors and state association directors, to increase awareness, deepen understanding, and build buy-in for the importance of quality CCB degree implementation nationwide.

Next, we will gather more information from our members, the CCBA Quality Advisory Taskforce assembled for this work, state associations, regional accreditors, and others in the field with various experiences with CCBs to advise us on how the CCB Quality Framework would be most beneficial. This includes: (a) deepening our understanding of the primary uses of a CCB Quality Framework; (b) gathering input on how the CCB Quality Framework should be constructed and organized, including learning from national partners who have created quality frameworks; (c) determining how quality should be measured and who should measure it; and (d) discussing how the CCB Quality Framework should be presented to the field and used by various stakeholders.

Recommendations and Next Steps, cont.

The above steps will culminate in a foundational CCB Quality Framework as a vision for the future of CCBs. The nine elements of quality within this thought paper will provide a starting point for our proposed quality framework. In collaboration with the taskforce and other stakeholders, and with support from our funders, we will continue to build out and/or revise the nine elements, including adding descriptive characteristics for each and a corresponding rubric.

Once a draft of the CCB Quality Framework is created, CCBA will field test it with functioning CCB programs so that we know if it is valid, credible, and operational. We will work with CCB-conferring colleges that are CCBA partners in a systematic way to gather, analyze, and report data.

After field testing, we will make necessary changes and improvements. Once finalized, CCBA will house the CCB Quality Framework.

The CCB Quality Framework may include resources for designing a new, high quality CCB program and for assessing and improving CCBs that already exist. In future phases, with additional funding, we anticipate creating a companion document of CCB exemplars that incorporates CCBA's collection of promising practices. These resources are integral to promoting a continuous quality improvement process that further advances programs and practices and connects institutions. Such efforts may extend to creating a peer consulting network with peer reviewers or CCBA quality coaches, drawing on the expertise of CCBA members.

The framework may open opportunities for CCBA to partner with state associations, and it could serve as a useful resource for advocacy with legislatures or lobbyists. Additionally, we will confer with regional accreditors to ensure that the framework and resources developed will help states and colleges ensure that CCBs are of high quality and focused on student outcomes.

Our intent is not to create a prescriptive accreditation process. At this point, we envision the CCB Quality Framework as a voluntary, user-friendly guiding process to help community colleges examine their CCBs through an evidence-based, reflective lens. We envision a tool that will be flexible and that is designed for growth opportunities, evolving as new research and promising practices emerge.

Through the development and sharing of the CCB Quality Framework, CCBA hopes to evolve from an organization that shares high-quality practices to one that helps define high quality for CCBs.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Listed below are examples of questions posed during the small group conversations. The conversations were fluid and semi-structured, with other questions surfacing in the natural course of conversation. Not all of these questions were asked during each meeting. Questions were also tailored depending on the backgrounds of the participants in each conversation.

- When designing/thinking about a quality CCB program, what aspects come to mind?
- Which criteria are important for states and systems to use in approving CCB programs?
- How do you think about the interaction of quality with the needs of low-income, non-traditional, working and adult learners?
- Are there certain student services you feel are or should be critical for CCB programs to have?
- What role should industry play in designing and maintaining CCB curriculum?
- What aspects of CCBs are important to align with industry?
- Which practices do you use for this engagement?
- How do you establish quality in terms of regional labor market needs?
- How could programs ensure equitable access and outcomes, i.e., admissions, graduation and placement rates, etc.?
- What kind of flexibility is important in a CCB program?
- How do you build flexibility into your programs?
- How important is work- or project-based learning?
- Which types of work- and/or project-based learning are successful?
- What are the different modes of delivery used in successful CCBs courses?
- Do you have advisory committees? If so, describe the role they play.
- What would it mean to you if colleges had quality standards for their baccalaureate programs that you and an advisory committee helped establish?
- Why have you supported your college colleagues in starting CCB programs?
- What skills and competencies do you hope CCB graduates will come out with?
- What do you feel are the most important aspects of CCB programs?
- Are you supportive of internships?
- In your experience, do you feel these programs contribute to equity and inclusion in your field?
- As you foresee the future job market, what are possible careers that will be needed?

Appendix B



Measures of Quality for Community College Bachelor's Degree Programs: A Literature Review



2023

Prepared by:
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The literature review was written and designed by Dr. Colleen Pawlicki of Troy Street Professional Services, with assistance from Bethany Yeoman and Hannah Keizer.

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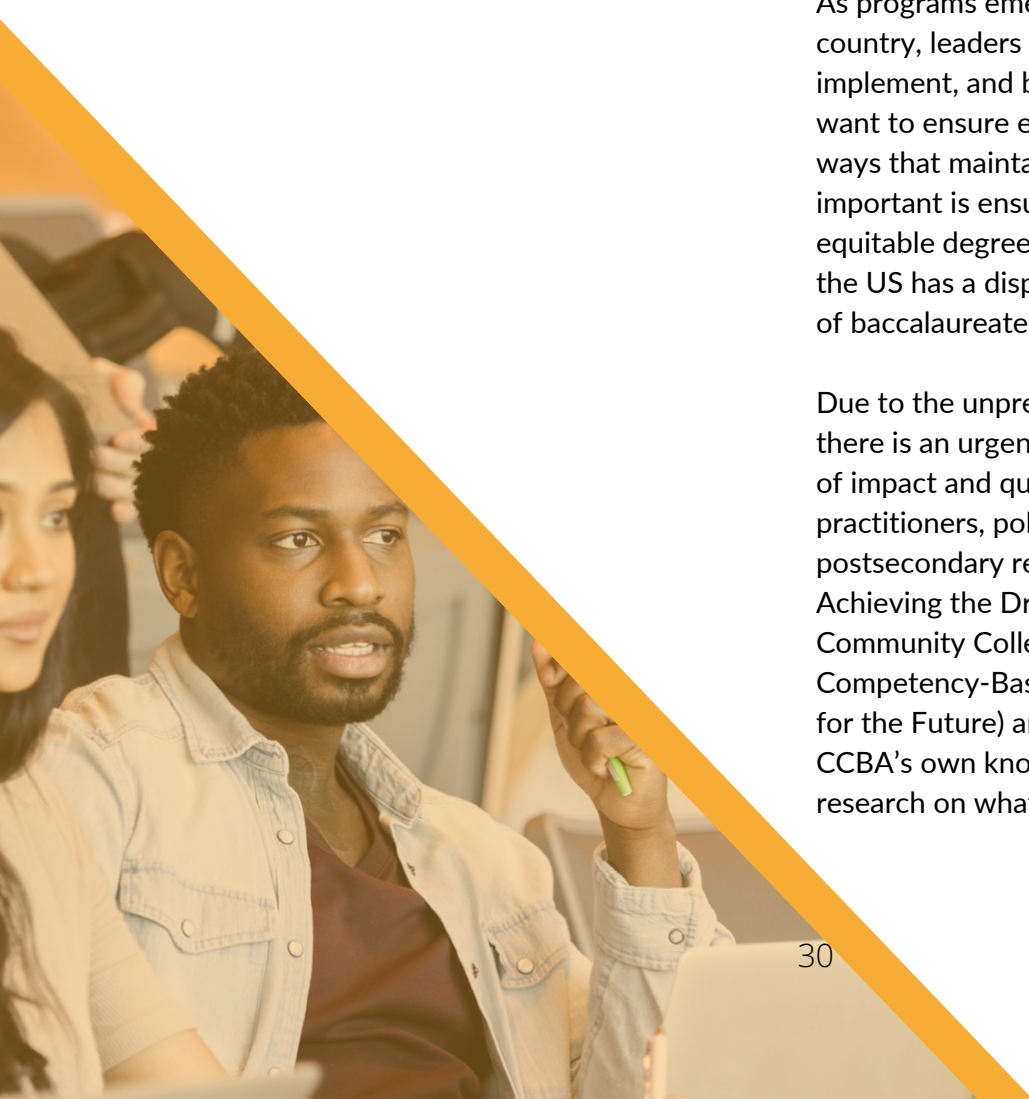
Introduction

Community college bachelor's degree programs (CCBs) seek to contribute to career success for individuals, prosperity for families, and economic development of communities because of their direct connections to employment opportunities. The Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA) strives to provide support and resources to community colleges that build and sustain high-value, career-focused baccalaureate degrees that maximize opportunities for learners to achieve family-sustaining careers. Outcomes for CCBs, particularly completion rates, demographic data, placements, and salary outcomes, have been promising, and CCBA is committed to continually improving CCBs across the country.

However, to date, there is no unified set of quality standards for community colleges seeking to confer baccalaureate degrees. Filling this void is critical now due to the rapid expansion of CCB programs in the United States. This trend is bound to continue given the passage of AB 927 in California (signed September 2021) and new or expanded policy in eight more states over the last several years, including Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Missouri, Ohio, South Carolina, Texas, and Wyoming. Further, CCB conferring colleges need to demonstrate how these new pathways produce more equitable baccalaureate attainment outcomes for all student groups.

As programs emerge quickly across the country, leaders and practitioners who design, implement, and believe in these programs want to ensure expansion is being done in ways that maintain quality. Especially important is ensuring student success through equitable degree attainment, particularly since the US has a disparate and inequitable history of baccalaureate completion.

Due to the unprecedented growth of CCBs, there is an urgent need to crosswalk measures of impact and quality used broadly by practitioners, policymakers, and postsecondary reform communities (e.g., Achieving the Dream, American Association of Community Colleges, Aspen Institute, Competency-Based Education Network, Jobs for the Future) and integrate them with CCBA's own knowledge and affiliated research on what is considered high quality.



Introduction, cont.

History

Scholars and practitioners have written about the emergence and potential for CCBs for nearly 30 years. The vision of some of these individuals to see CCBs extend bachelor's degrees to historically underserved populations was met with skepticism, while authors lauded these new credentials. Exemplars of writings exploring the impact of CCB degrees on community college mission and access include Dougherty (1994); Floyd, Skolnik, and Walker (2005); Hanson (2009); and Levin (2004).

Among these authors, Walker (2001) was one of the earliest and most adamant supporters of CCB degrees as a means of expanding the roles and responsibilities that community colleges play in meeting the postsecondary needs of their regions. Following this work, research and writing by Floyd (2006), Remington and Remington (2013), Russell (2010), and Townsend et al. (2007) documented early developments around CCB degree program implementation in the US. Though this paper is not intended to be comprehensive of the historical development of CCBs, we have drawn upon these writings to provide a foundation for the work of CCBA and its task force. This paper is intended to understand measures of quality for CCB programs that are used in the field for community colleges seeking to confer baccalaureate degrees.

Research Question

To better understand measures of quality used in the field that are relevant to CCB programs, CCBA conducted a comprehensive literature review to answer the research question:

What measures of quality for CCB programs are used in the field for community colleges seeking to confer baccalaureate degrees?

This literature review draws on over 50 sources, including scholarly publications, articles, reports, doctoral dissertations, and academic professional associations' research specifically regarding quality elements and CCB degrees. It also includes literature from other areas, such as work-based learning and guided pathways, that aligns with programmatic elements identified in CCBs.

Introduction, cont.

Findings Overview

In reviewing the relevant literature, findings relating to CCB quality coalesced around the following areas:

1. *Design elements of CCB degrees*
2. *The assessment of industry needs and labor market alignments of CCB programs*
3. *Equitable student access and outcomes associated with CCB programs*
4. *Criteria for states and systems to use in approving CCB programs*

Each of these four areas is described within the following sections, including relevant findings supported by the literature and notable gaps or limitations of each.

This literature review will be paired with data from ongoing national conversations with postsecondary and workforce stakeholders, including researchers, practitioners, industry partners, association members, reform groups, students, graduates, and others, culminating in a thought paper to be disseminated nationally to existing and potential stakeholders in the CCB space. The thought paper will synthesize information gathered through the national conversations, this literature review, and CCBA's existing knowledge to identify the broad design elements and practices of CCB programs.



1 Design Elements of CCB Degrees

Findings

Across the literature, studies found that CCB programs incorporate elements that recognize student needs, student goals, and prepare students for industry-specific work. These programs should **maintain baccalaureate-level learning** and **offer the flexibility that learners need** to be successful. Programs can prioritize key design elements to promote student success throughout the CCB journey. These design elements include **work-based learning opportunities** and **curriculum alignment with industry needs**.

Learning

Curriculum and learning outcomes in CCB programs must demonstrate baccalaureate-level learning (Morman, 2020; Washington State Board, 2016). The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges Baccalaureate Leadership Council stated that general education in CCBs must meet the “breadth and depth” of baccalaureate requirements (Washington State Board, 2016). Some researchers have referred to this as “rigor,” although the use of this word is debated among scholars for its exclusionary connotation and history. Some specialized accrediting agencies, such as the Higher Learning Commission, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN), and ABET, have standards for rigor, but these are not used uniformly across CCBs. While “rigor” remains variously defined, Carol Morman (2020) found that rigor in CCB programs should include a high level of problem solving; opportunities to apply learning, such as through project-based learning; and a deep level of engagement in critical thinking that is assessed.

Flexibility

Flexibility is key for students, particularly adult learners, who are one of the primary learner groups CCB programs tend to enroll (Meza & Love, 2023). In their review of California’s CCBs, Rios-Aguilar and colleagues (2023) found flexibility in multiple areas to be crucial for student success and for closing racial equity gaps. Such flexibility includes more flexible scheduling, more affordable pathways, reduced transfer barriers, and additional student services (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2023). Students pursuing a CCB thrive in flexible learning environments that foster collaboration over competition while embedding social support, including using cohort models (Bragg et al., 2022; Fino, 2020).



1 Design Elements of CCB Degrees, cont.

Flexibility also includes courses with multiple modes of delivery (e.g., hybrid courses, online courses, competency-based models) (Floyd et al., 2005). Wetzstein and colleagues (2022) found that some students, especially working students, preferred the flexibility offered by online and hybrid/blended options, often opting for a hybrid approach that paired with night or weekend class options. Other types of course flexibility include completing technical or job-related coursework first so that students can secure employment while they continue to complete their other academic coursework (Floyd et al., 2003). Flexible modes allow students to meet their immediate financial need through gainful employment while maintaining the ability to complete their studies (Floyd et al., 2003).

There should also be flexibility in remediation with embedded academic support services. Multiple approaches to remediation coursework help students stay on track toward program goals (Cuellar & Gandara, 2021). Some CCBs have adopted “co-curricular programming” to support student success and remediation when needed (Cuellar et al., 2021).

Wetzstein and colleagues (2022) study of adult learners and graduates of CCB programs concluded CCBs should include: (1) opportunities for learners to maintain employment while in the program; (2) the ability to pause and restart the program as needed; and (3) affordability as a key – and often most important – consideration.

Work-Based Learning and Curriculum Aligned to Industry Needs

Work-based learning, which involves real-world projects in coursework, helps students combine academic knowledge with necessary career skills in a safe environment (Gallagher et al., 2020). Soler and Bragg (2015) share that work-based or work-aligned experiences in CCB programming leads to increased workforce preparedness and relevance. They also found that experiential learning increases the workforce relevance of curriculum, which improves student and employer perceptions of CCB programs.

In their chapter of *13 Ideas that are Transforming the Community College World*, Floyd and Skolnik (2019) share that CCB programs “make extensive use of hands-on learning, learning by doing, and work-integrated learning” (p. 103). Work-based learning should include opportunities at each level in a pathway and should be embedded into the program design.

1 Design Elements of CCB Degrees, cont.

Gaps and Limitations

Measuring learning: More research is needed on measuring learning and outcomes. This is sometimes, and perhaps problematically, referred to as “rigor.” The field lacks a shared understanding or definition of rigor as it relates to CCBs. Moreover, there is considerable debate about whether rigor should be a central tenet of CCB programming, given the priority of these degrees to ensure more equitable access and outcomes than has been present in baccalaureate attainment historically in the US. Still, defining what quality means remains a key concern for CCBs. More research is needed to strengthen the importance of applied and active learning that leads to outcomes.

Delivery modes: Research is lacking as it relates to modes of instruction. Whereas some students thrive in hybrid or online models, others express a preference for in-person community college degree options (Wetzstein et al., 2022). While it is known that students, particularly working learners, need flexibility, more research is needed to better understand delivery format, scheduling, and pacing of courses and course load, which relates to credit attainment toward CCBs.



2 The Assessment of Industry Needs and Labor Market Alignments of CCB Programs

Findings

CCB programs are responsive to industry, workforce, and community demands and student employment needs. In order to align with market demands, **CCBs should be related to local, regional, and national workforce needs** and **engage external partners** to maintain connection with industry and community leaders.

Programs and Curriculum Aligned to Workforce Needs

Many states require colleges to substantiate labor market demand prior to CCB program approval (Floyd et al., 2005) to ensure relevant, industry-recognized CCB programs. CCB programs in states like Washington and Florida align with local and regional labor market demands (Meza & Love, 2023). Aligning programs to local and regional needs is critical, as it contributes to learners' self-sufficiency, career mobility and advancement, and economic mobility (Bragg & Harmon, 2022). It also "improve[s] career and economic capital of individuals' families and communities, especially for minority students" (Meza & Love, 2023).

Further, aligning programs to local needs empowers learners to advance their education without leaving their communities. It ensures work in their field of study is available locally or regionally, which is often where they are already employed and seek to advance in careers (Floyd & Skolnik, 2019). Bragg and Soler (2017) also found Applied Baccalaureate (AB) graduates are likely to remain in their communities and support local economic growth, stating:

The narrative of employers also suggests that AB degree graduates tend to be retained as citizens in their communities more than students who leave their communities to attend universities. By attaining baccalaureate credentials by attending college in their communities, AB degrees build local talent that sustains the economic vitality of localities. (p. 139)

When aligning to local and regional workforce needs, stakeholders should consider: (1) a statement of need supported by workforce data; (2) employer demand for program and industry support; (3) employer preferences for skills, knowledge, and competencies more readily available through baccalaureate degree offerings; (4) evidence of job placement; (5) evidence that program completion leads to higher wage opportunities; and (6) consultation with regional employers and workforce boards (CCC, 2022).

2 The Assessment of Industry Needs, cont.

In a recent study using supply and demand analysis to support the adoption of new CCB degree programs, Bragg and Harmon (2022) suggest using multiple measures of workforce analysis and data to determine labor market gaps and specific workforce needs within regions or states to create relevant CCB degree programs.

Aligning CCBs to local labor markets also impacts the community beyond jobs (Aguiar et al., 2022; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2023). Rios-Aguilar and colleagues (2023) share that “CCB programs strategically designed for both technical training and the development of the student as a citizen, family member, information consumer, and human may do even more to enhance the well-being of the student and their surrounding community” (p. 62). In their review, Aguiar and colleagues (2022) state: “In addition to economic benefits, college degrees can also lead to non-monetary benefits including more frequent voting and improved health outcomes” (p. 1).

External Partners

Community colleges and employer, industry, and community leaders must have a close, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial relationship to be successful and responsive to each stakeholder’s needs (Floyd et al., 2005). Collaboration with external partners, including employers, economic development entities, and workforce boards, ensures coursework is aligned with work-based skills necessary for success in learners’ chosen field of study (Bragg et al., 2022; Bragg & Harmon, 2022).

While not directly aligned to CCBs, quality frameworks for competency-based education provide some guidance related to external partners. For example, in their quality framework, C-BEN stresses the importance of external partnerships that provide real-life learning, training, assessment, internships, and employment opportunities (Bushway et al., 2017). Stakeholders, chosen based on their alignment to the program purpose and industry, should regularly meet and communicate about program performance, need, and alignment (Bushway, 2017).



2 The Assessment of Industry Needs, cont.

Gaps and Limitations

Perceptions of CCBs: External and industry perceptions of CCBs is unclear. Though limited research has been done to measure labor market outcomes of CCB graduates, including Bragg and colleagues' (2022) examination of whether CCB programs qualify learners for the same wage and employment opportunities as universities, the research base is still emerging. That said, there is evidence that workforce relevancy, built through strong partnerships with employers, may improve perceptions of CCB quality among students, employers, and communities (Morman, 2020). More research is needed to bridge the gap between the perception and reality of CCB quality, particularly among employers.



3 Equitable Student Access and Outcomes

Findings

A commitment to equitable student access and outcomes is a fixture of CCB program success. In their report on closing racial equity gaps in California’s community colleges, Rios-Aguilar and colleagues (2023) found that “the community college baccalaureate presents a new opportunity to concretely provide more accessible, affordable [...] bachelor’s degrees to advantage social mobility for racial and ethnically diverse students, and to meet local workforce demands” (p. 25).

It is important to recognize that racial disparities in university bachelor’s programs still exist, and CCBs may offer more accessible options to underrepresented students without the difficulty of university transfer (Wetzstein et al., 2022). CCB programs need goals specific to racially underserved students, rather than general equity related to socio-economic factors (Cueller & Gandara, 2021). In states like Washington and Florida, CCB programs have worked to address racial equity by “improv[ing] and simplify[ing] [the] postsecondary education ecosystem,” ensuring accessibility and affordability for underserved student populations and allowing options for working or part-time students to advance or change their careers (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2023).

CCB programs can prioritize equitable student access and outcomes for learners, including students of color, underserved students, adult working learners, and learners of low socio-economic status by offering varied **on ramps; flexibility in pace, course offerings, and delivery; data** collection and monitoring; and centering **cultural competency**.

On Ramps

Adult learners in CCB programs tend to seek out more accessible and affordable program options, highlighting the importance of accessible on ramps into CCBs. While related to guided pathways and not CCBs, a quality framework for guided career pathways authored by Freeman & McDonough (2022) suggests that high-performing programs have multiple entry points to allow for more equitable access, particularly for adult learners. This finding would seem to apply to quality programming for CCB degrees as well. As part of the on ramp, community colleges should have streamlined admission processes that remove bias (Powers, 2022) and assess students’ prior learning, previous credentials, existing college credits, and work experience, providing credit for it when possible (Freeman & McDonough, 2022).

3 Equitable Student Access and Outcomes cont.

Flexibility in Pace, Course Offerings, and Delivery

Institutions should ensure accessibility and inclusion in learning environments, content, and communications, including culturally relevant curriculum and delivery (Nider, 2022). This includes varied learning experiences to promote engagement, with multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery. CCBs with a commitment to equity also boast smaller classes, a less rigid structure, better scheduling options, and more flexible delivery models (Floyd et al., 2005).

Data

Collecting the right data can help in identifying, measuring, and analyzing equity and understanding related outcomes. Community colleges should monitor demographic data to ensure equitable access and outcomes, making programmatic adjustments as necessary (Potter, 2022). Cueller and Gandara (2021) share that CCBs need consistent data collection, disaggregation, and analysis to help measure and reduce equity gaps.

Cultural Competence

A focus on the social, cultural, and relational dimensions of learning in CCBs is critical. This includes anti-bias approaches and cultural competency.

For example, in North Seattle College, the Early Childhood Education (ECE) BAS program “emphasizes anti-bias educational practices in its curriculum to advance cultural responsiveness and social justice in the early childhood education system” (Nider, 2022, p. 31). A survey is administered at the beginning and end of the program to measure the efficacy of the anti-bias curriculum. The authors share:

The driving theory of change behind this pre-post assessment is that the anti-bias teaching coursework students complete in the ECE BAS program should: (1) increase knowledge about systemic inequities; (2) improve cultural responsiveness and enhance an anti-bias approach to education; and (3) increase educator confidence in implementing culturally responsive and anti-bias teaching practices. (Nider, 2022, p. 31)

Embedding cultural competency benefits not only CCB learners but also those whom they go on to interact with in the workplace, community, and home.

3 Equitable Student Access and Outcomes cont.

Gaps and Limitations

Missing or inadequate data: Data can be key in measuring and improving equity. However, many gaps exist in data collection, including incomplete or missing data to assess learning outcomes and missing or insufficient data post-completion. While states like Florida and California have made strides in data on salary and placement rates, there is more work to do in collecting and analyzing data on where CCB learners find employment post completion, if it is in their field of study, and if they are earning a family-sustaining wage.

Student support services: Additional research should focus on how support services enhance equitable student success. Learners are likely more successful when CCBs take a holistic approach to teaching and learning, including student supports. Some CCBs, like West LA College, have found success in faculty mentors and peer mentors for students (Bragg et al., 2022). Others, such as MiraCosta College, have hired Student Success Specialists to “serve as an advocate, career coach, and advisor to first generation, low income, and racially minoritized students [in order to] connect students to campus resources [and] serve as a liaison between the academic world and that of the home and workplace” (Fino & Gomez, 2022, p. 57). Still, more research is needed on what holistic approaches look like for CCB programs, especially for racially underrepresented learners, adult working learners, or students who have limited resources to attend college.



4 Criteria States and Systems Use for Approving CCB Programs

Findings

States and approval boards use a wide variety of criteria to approve new CCB programs. Most states require a justification for program need, proof of limited competition with university programs, and high labor market demand for approval (Wright-Kim, 2022). For applied baccalaureates, program development is linked to indicators like increasing baccalaureate completion, prioritizing needs of adult learners, and connecting education and workforce (Bragg & Ruud, 2011). The literature reveals the most common criteria center on **institutional capacity, data, industry demand, policies and status, and students enrolled.**

Institutional Capacity

In order to show institutional capacity, CCB programs need proof of adequate funding; faculty, facilities, and administrative capacity; and relevant accreditation (California Community Colleges, 2022). This includes qualified, engaged faculty and demonstrated student demand for the proposed CCB (Potter, 2020).

Ensuring appropriate, sustained funding is critical to improve the longevity and, importantly, quality of CCBs (Floyd et al., 2005).

Data

Programs should have a clearly defined data plan to ensure collection, analysis, monitoring, and reporting of student and program data (Love & Palmer, 2020). Pilot programs can use and provide program data to inform future legislation and regulation on CCB programs (Love & Palmer 2020). Relevant to data, CCBs should streamline data and reporting systems for CCBs, involve multiple stakeholders in determining metrics to measure, include qualitative data on student experiences, and disaggregate data by race and other identities (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2023). Programs should also be expected to collect, monitor, and report “equitable outcome” data (Washington, 2016).

Industry Demand

CCBs are intended to be an “addition” or extension to the community college role, not a replacement of the original mission, which includes a focus on workforce-related programming (Ferguson, 2022; Floyd & Skolnik, 2019). As such, in most states, approval for CCBs hinges on industry demand for the program. Approval criteria may include curricular alignment with industry skills, program alignment to regional and local workforce needs, evidence of industry partners, and student demand for workforce related programs (California Community Colleges, 2022).

4 Criteria States and Systems Use for Approving CCB Programs cont.

Policies and Status

Most states follow CCB governance prescribed in state legislation (Love & Palmer, 2020). While this criteria varies by state, it often includes:

- A detailed admissions process
- Rigorous courses included in the degree program, commensurate with bachelor's coursework
- Labor market data
- Institutional capacity
- Funding sources
- Accreditation

In order to prevent or reduce direct competition with university programs, some states and approval boards require relevant accreditation and non-duplicative status. As is the case in Washington, systems should ensure that the proposed CCB is not already offered by a four-year institution within the geographic region and that it complies with state community college tuition expectations (Potter, 2020).

Students Enrolled

Some states' program approval guidelines ask for descriptions of students who are targeted to enroll and be served by new CCB programs. For example, California requires, as part of the program approval process, that certain student populations are served through the program, including considerations like income level, local access to higher education, disability status, family educational attainment, work/family responsibilities, veteran status, or refugee status (Harris, 2016). Other states require CCBs to serve students without local access to bachelor's degree offerings, students who are unable to relocate for higher education access, students with low-income status, older students, students of color, and students with "life circumstances" that make flexible options necessary (e.g., work or family commitments) (Fulton, 2018).

Gaps and Limitations

Variation across states: States and approval boards vary considerably in their criteria to approve new CCB programs. While some states have developed approval processes, others do not use a formalized process. More research and development is needed to create greater consistency in approval processes across states.

Conclusion

This literature review sought to answer the research question: ***What measures of quality for CCB programs are used in the field for community colleges seeking to confer baccalaureate degrees?*** Drawing on over 50 sources related to quality measures in CCBs, findings coalesced around: (1) design elements of CCB degrees; (2) the assessment of industry needs and labor market alignments of CCB programs; (3) equitable student access and outcomes; and (4) criteria for states and systems to use in approving and evaluating CCB programs.

It is clear that the field **lacks consistency across states and systems in all categories related to quality**, building the case for a unified framework that colleges can align to in the planning, design, implementation, and assessment of CCBs. CCBA is eager to use this base of knowledge to co-construct with its stakeholders a central framework for community colleges, states, and systems to use when conferring CCBs.



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