

## Chapter 6

# Leveraging the Talents of Adult Learners Through Competency-Based Education and Capstone Courses

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### ABSTRACT

*Adult learners need to leverage time and money when seeking a college degree. Competency-based degree programs provide an opportunity for adult learners to save time and money by progressing through a degree at their own pace. Capstone courses connect prior learning in coursework with real-world experiences and create valuable connections between work and classroom experience. This chapter addresses competency-based degree plans and application-based capstone courses for undergraduate university students. Examples of competency-based degree plans and capstone courses will be discussed. Inclusion in the discussion will be prior learning assessment courses and ways capstone courses create professional connections for the adult learner.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-4748-9.ch006

## **INTRODUCTION**

Competency-based strategies provide flexibility in the way that credit can be earned or awarded, and provide students with personalized learning opportunities. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2020), “This type of learning leads to better student engagement because the content is relevant to each student and tailored to their unique needs. It also leads to better student outcomes because the pace of learning is customized to each student (p.1). While there is a great number of institutions of higher learning that offer competency-based education programs, this chapter will provide a case study approach to the offerings at Purdue University Global.

## **ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND**

Purdue University Global offers free online services and personalized mentoring to help learners identify and organize prior work and life experience and skills that could count toward a degree or move them closer to a new career. Purdue University Global is an excellent option for adult learners looking to enhance existing skills and/or complete a degree. Purdue University Global addresses a growing trend in competency-based education and the need to create affordable, flexible learning options for adult learners. Purdue University Global has reduced the economic barriers allowing individuals to pursue learning to enhance their academic and professional interests. The implications for institutions of higher education lie in establishing ways to improve access and reduce cost for individuals pursuing higher education with a design to meet academic and professional needs (Open College, Purdue University Global, 2020).

Featuring a monthly subscription-based tuition model, Purdue University Global extends the current open courses offered by Purdue University Global to students who are interested in seeking a degree, as well as responds to the increasing accessibility of other open learning resources. The college is geared toward adult learners interested in a highly flexible degree and who have prior learning experience or college-level credits. Students in the college may complete a Bachelor of Science in Professional Studies (BSPr) degree or an Associate of Science in Professional Studies (APSr) degree.

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