2019 State of the Field:
Postsecondary CBE in the US

In 2019, American Institutes for Research surveyed colleges and universities across the United States to better understand their interest in and adoption of competency-based education (CBE).[1] This survey – the second in a series of three – indicates that CBE is experiencing slow but steady growth nationally, and institutions remain optimistic about future growth despite reporting persistent barriers to adoption.

Of the 602 institutions that responded ...

Have full CBE programs	11%
Are in the process of adopting	51%
Are interested in adopting	23%
Have no interest	15%

Institutions with full CBE programs reported a total of:

492 Undergraduate programs

96 Graduate programs

This represents an increase: last year, institutions reported 427 undergraduate programs and 85 graduate programs.

Equity: How do students in CBE programs compare to students in traditional programs?

CBE student populations similar to those in traditional programs in terms of race/ethnicity and Pell status, but CBE programs had larger shares of students with prior credit and adult students.

In the last academic year ...

53% had fewer than 50 students enrolled

12% had more than 1000 students enrolled

The Most Common Undergraduate Disciplines

1. Nursing/Health Professions
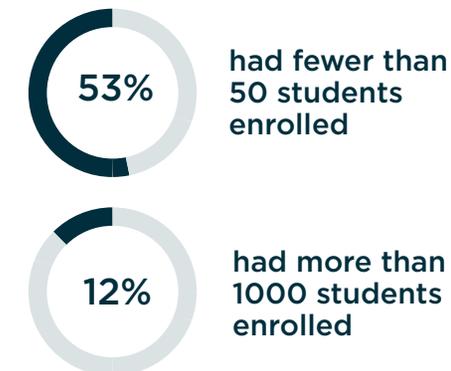2. Computer and Information Science
3. Business Administration

[1] To capture the diversity of CBE programs, we defined these as entire programs of study typified by at least one of the following: learning is measured in competencies; students advance between courses or complete the program based on mastering all required competencies; or courses or programs offer students flexible pacing.

This survey builds on 2016 and 2017 Deconstructing CBE reports, based on research conducted by Eduventures® Research.

What do students pay for CBE programs?

76%
of CBE students are **eligible for federal financial aid**

56%
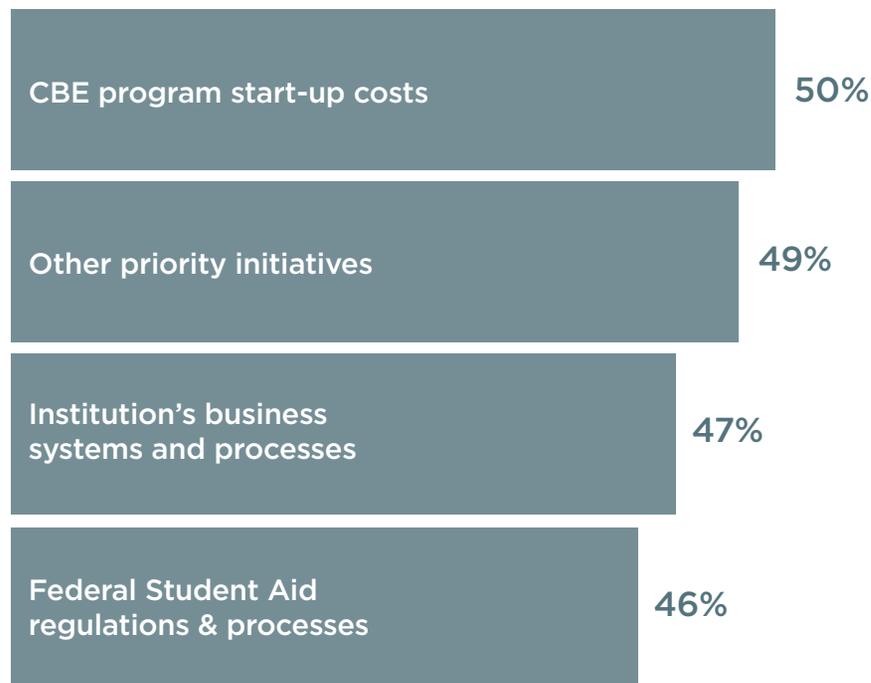of CBE programs cost **"about the same"** as traditional programs

39%
of CBE programs were **"less expensive"** than their traditional programs

Note: If students can adjust their pace, the price they experience may vary.

Institutions perceive substantial internal and external barriers to CBE implementation.

For institutions with existing programs or those that are in the process of implementing programs, **perceived barriers** included:

Barrier	Percentage
CBE program start-up costs	50%
Other priority initiatives	49%
Institution's business systems and processes	47%
Federal Student Aid regulations & processes	46%

What are institutions' most common motivations for adopting CBE?

For institutions in the process of adopting CBE, their most common motivations include viewing CBE as a/an:

- **opportunity to serve nontraditional students** (57%)
- **response to workforce needs** (53%)
- **desire to improve learning outcomes** (54%)

Future of CBE

Despite barriers, institutions are optimistic about the future of CBE.

76% said they expect the number of CBE programs nationally to grow in the next 5 years.

Note: This figure remains consistent with the 2018 survey.

Of those with CBE programs:

61% said they plan to **increase** the number of CBE programs at their institution.

37% expected the number **will stay the same.**