# Transcript: IT Podcast - Ep 49 - How to be Successful with Competency Based Education with Miranda Dyer and Susannah Dobson

*The following transcript is a verbatim account of the video or audio file accompanying this transcript.*

Speaker #1 (Narrator):

WGU's IT Audio series, flexible, portable, profound.

Speaker #2 (Miranda Dyer):

Hello. Welcome to our talk today about competency-based education. Competency-based education may be new to you and even if you've been at WGU for several times, we feel we have some great advice to help you navigate around this amazing way to learn. My name is Miranda and I'm a program mentor out of the BS CS degree.

Speaker #3 (Susannah Dobson):

My name is Susannah and I'm also a program mentor in the BS CS degree and have been a student in the software development program. I'm going to share my perspective from the student view.

Speaker #2 (Miranda Dyer):

We're here to talk about some questions you may have on your journey on competency-based education. You may already know the definition of a competency-based education, but do you know how to use it to your advantage? Today we will talk about how to maneuver successfully through your degree. Let's go over what the actual definition is.

Speaker #3 (Susannah Dobson):

Miranda, as a student my definition for competency-based education is that I get to show mastery of the elements or the competencies for a course to complete as opposed to me having to just have seat time in that course.

Speaker #2 (Miranda Dyer):

Right, so seat time would be more of time that you spend in that course? That you're required to spend in that course? How does this differ from traditional learning? Well, the great thing is quizzes are learning opportunities and are grading opportunities. You have the ability to take quizzes to see where you stand in the course, but not dedicated set times that you have to create a quiz and you have to complete a quiz by a certain time. There's no set due dates, the only due dates that you're setting are the due dates that are set between you and your mentor and that'll fit your schedule and fit your desire of how fast you want to go through your program. You do not have to sit in a class for 6, 9, 12 weeks, if you know the material, you take the exam, you prove that you know the material and you can get out. This can be as quick as one day to, hey if you need 12 weeks, you can take the 12 weeks. It's also all about you, competency-based education is centered solely on your path and only your path, it is all your pace so you make that pace up with your mentor and you figure out what works best for all the hats that you wear and you feel that well, it fits your needs. Now that we know what it is, we want to start some time to review some tips to help you navigate the new way of learning from a mentor perspective and a student perspective. First thing that I think anybody will tell you with the competency-based education is to be organized, scheduled time to attend that class, your mentor is a great resource for this. You will start out with a calendar of how you use your day, that's in your orientation that every student has to complete. Take a look at the calendar again, and schedule time to attend in some of those free times. Remember, sometimes dinnertime is not the best time to study.

Speaker #3 (Susannah Dobson):

Miranda, you also have to be realistic about your schedule. I as a student, when I first started out I thought I was going to spend a ton of time every single day and I couldn't. What I ended up having to do was to be more realistic about my schedule and then I had to stick to it. You need to share with your family and get them on board with the times that you schedule. The other thing I found is from week to week, my schedule had to change in order to fit the lifestyle that I have and be able to fit enough time in for school. So you might have to change your hours from week to week.

Speaker #2 (Miranda Dyer):

Those are some great examples. Another thing when we're talking about schedules is meeting with your mentor regularly. Your mentor will help you find time each week that both of you can meet, sometimes that's going to vary depending on what changes in your life, but it's good to have that set time. Mentors are up there to help you keep on track but most importantly, they're there to make sure you have what you need to be successful for that upcoming week.

Speaker #3 (Susannah Dobson):

I found that that was one of the most important things in my time with WGU is my mentor, they are truthfully there to help. My mentor was my partner. I always felt like when I knew that I was going to be talking to her in the next week that there were things that I had said that I was going to do that I was going to try really hard to do. On those weeks that I didn't quite make those goals, she never made me feel badly about not meeting them, she just helped me to create a new goal and get me back on track to be able to finish when I wanted to be able to finish.

Speaker #2 (Miranda Dyer):

That's great advice because as a mentor, I know as your a mentor as well, we want to make sure that we help not only look at the future but what we can fix and what we can do together moving forward each and every week. The next thing that I think is important is setting those realistic expectation. Once again mentors will help you with this. Mentors will use the course planning tools, the discussions between the two of you, and other resources to help make sure the true goals that will help you achieve your goals.

Speaker #3 (Susannah Dobson):

One of the things I always like to do is to take a high level overview of my course to realistically plan out completing it. I found that if I used a journal and scheduled when it was that I wanted to complete the course and then worked backwards, I could adjust what it was that I needed to finish each week within that journal and then as I went through and was able to check those things off, that helped me to feel like I was progressing and it also made me realize that, okay, I can't read 300 pages in a week and I could see that up front and so I was more able to plan out my course of study in a much more realistic way.

Speaker #2 (Miranda Dyer):

Great examples. One of the other things that I have found that most valuable for my students is to schedule that OA so that you have a time point to finish the course. It's very easy to get lost in, oh, I'll take it next week. When you start to get involved in the course, you have a better understanding of those time commitments. If you feel you're getting closer to the end and you've taken the pre-assessment and you just have a little bit more to study, it's valuable to go ahead and schedule that OA that gives you a set time to attain that goal and you'll more likely reach that goal. In traditional learning, you have tests that go along the way, so you're going to study a little bit more to make sure that you're ready for that exam. If you have that exam already scheduled, it'll entice you to get some more studying done because you know it's upcoming.

Speaker #3 (Susannah Dobson):

I agree Miranda, that's a great bit of advice. I really liked to take the pre-assessment after I had finished all the learning material because the learning material was new to me. In my overall plan for completing the course, I would set a date at the beginning of when I wanted to be able to take that pre-assessment, get to that point and then based on that result, determine how much additional time I needed to review before I could take the objective assessment. But you're right, I was one that I could procrastinate and say, oh, I'll take it the next week or the next week and pretty soon a month would go by and I still hadn't taken it. I think once I set it, I found that I was much more likely to do the studying I needed to do and be able to take that objective assessment on time.

Speaker #2 (Miranda Dyer):

It's a great example. I challenge my students all the time to make sure that they're setting those realistic goals on when they can take the exam and they tend to always meet that goal that they set for themselves. Speaking of the goals, the next thing that we suggest is to make smart goals. You're going to make these smart goals with your mentor each week. They're goals to help you stay focused during the week. Remember, we did not land on the moon in a week, there's always a goal phase before that success. Even if these are little goals where you complete a module a week or they're taking the pre-assessment and the OA that week, it is all about what fits you and what goals fit your week that week.

Speaker #3 (Susannah Dobson):

I agree. You do have to look at individual weeks because all of our lives change from week to week and so one week I may end up having a lot of extra time to be able to work on studying and the next week might not have as much time. I know that a lot of our students are in that same boat. If you take a look at the week where you're beginning that week or you're on your weekly call with your mentor and say, okay, I know what this next week is going to look like and I know that I'll be able to study on this day and this day and this day and then be sure that you're making those realistic smart goals. If you write those down, then they become measurable which is part of having a smart goal. You can check those off and know that you really are on the way to meeting that goal.

Speaker #2 (Miranda Dyer):

Perfect. Now that we have communicated with our mentor all this time, most of these goals that we have talked about, the expectations we've talked about, they're involving your mentors, so how does a course instructor go into this? It's all about communicating with your course instructor. Those course instructors are there to help you succeed and nothing more. You will have a different course instructor in each course and maybe sometimes you'll see the same course instructor if they're teaching another class. But these course instructors are there for you to schedule time with them, you are not bothering them, you do not have a question that is too silly, they are there as your main primary resource for the content in a course. The best way to get out of a course is to help them give you the golden road-map to help you see how do I navigate this class the most efficiently as possible and they will help you see that. Scheduling with the course and instructor in each course at the beginning and just getting that road-map is critical.

Speaker #3 (Susannah Dobson):

I agree with that as well, Miranda. I know that my program mentor suggested to me that I email my course instructor at the very beginning of a course just to introduce myself. That breaks the ice and would make me feel a little more comfortable if I was scheduling with them. I have to say I never had one course instructor who blew me off, I never had any of them telling me that question was silly, they were all there truly wanting to help me and they gave me such a valuable information. I know that a lot of times when we're reading through some of that course material it can seem like it's a foreign language and all it takes more times than not is to just connect with the course instructor and have them explain it in it's slightly different way and that light bulb will go on and you can move on through your course.

Speaker #2 (Miranda Dyer):

A lot of students forget that competency-based education does not mean alone education. You are not alone in competency-based education. Even though your course instructor is not sitting up in front of you with a whiteboard and they're writing on it, they are on that journey with you and they are there to help you just like your mentor. I really appreciate you guys taking the time to listen to some key points on how to navigate and be successful in competency-based education through the eyes of a mentor and a previous student. You can see how this learning style is such a wonderful way to learn and it'll get you to where you need with your degree. Thank you.

Speaker #1 (Narrator):

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