<u>HigherEd.org - A New Learning Ecosystem and Portal for Personalized Competency-Based Education</u>
Finalist for the 2017 IMS Global Learning Consortium Learning Impact Awards

HigherEd.org is a new, learning ecosystem and portal that lets users "curate their own learning." It was created by Lord Fairfax Community College (LFCC) as part of a U.S. Department of Labor TAACCCT grant called "Knowledge to Work" (K2W) awarded in 2014. K2W offers personalized learning plans tied to competencies using OER in several career pathways, including information technology, health information management, administrative support technology, and supervision. Competency-based education (CBE) associate degree, certificate, and adult basic education programs are offered.

The college is a proud member of the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN) and K2W's Executive Director John Milam serves on the C-BEN board of directors. LFCC is a partner with the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA), the International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP), Microsoft, Concentric Sky Inc., Saylor Academy, regional employers, and others in this effort to promote personalized learning tied to competencies and using OER.

As part of its TAACCCT grant, LFCC took the competencies, personalized learning plans, and OER used for K2W and made them available to everyone to use. Enrollment in HigherEd.org is free. The portal lets learners document competencies they have already attained and monitor progress towards new ones. Once users register and set up a profile of preferences, a custom dashboard is generated called MyHigherEd and a personalized learning plan can be created. Learners identify and track new educational activities to gain competencies and work towards nationally-recognized occupational credentials. Learner notes, saved searches, and preferred resources are stored and new materials of interest are highlighted. Users can also contribute their own resources.

Users can access competency-based learning materials anytime/anywhere, from their work desktop to their smartphone. English and Spanish versions of the portal are offered. The continuum of learner needs is addressed specifically to improve access and convenience, including employability skills.

Basic and advanced search features let users find free and low-cost educational resources curated by faculty and digital librarians. Search filters include cost, publication date, provider, language, delivery mode, and alignment with competency frameworks. A myriad of instructional materials are included and mapped to competencies, culled from repositories such as MERLOT, Skills Commons, and Learning Registry. Additional resources include OER with Creative Commons licensing to traditional and online courses and training from AHIMA and IAAP, print and e-books, YouTube and Khan Academy videos, Saylor Academy courses, audio lectures and podcasts, and MOOCs.

While focused on several high wage/high growth industries for now, LFCC is seeking funding to expand the portal to other pathways and national competency frameworks. If learners want additional support and services, they're encouraged to enroll in one of LFCC's eight CBE programs. This gives them access to career coaches and program faculty, help with financial aid, library services, and regionally accredited associate's degrees and certificates. LFCC is also working with AHIMA on a new national competency framework and certification for information technology in healthcare. The portal promotes AHIMA's apprenticeship program to help graduates and career-changers take on healthcare information careers.

Organizations and individuals can become part of the portal in a number of ways, from sharing OER, courses, and other instructional materials to promoting services such as tutoring and internships to opportunities for co-branding, sponsorship, and advertising. For more information, contact John Milam, PhD, Executive Director of LFCC's Knowledge to Work TAACCCT grant, at jmilam@lfcc.edu and (540) 868-7249.