Programs vs. Curricula

Introduction

The introduction of the programs feature in May 2014 (preview release) has been received with a great deal of interest and excitement by our customers and spawned a lot of questions and suggestions as to how programs could be used to deliver training. A common trend among the types of questions being asked is how programs relate to curricula and whether one can be used to replace the other. In order to answer these questions we will explain their intended use, highlight their core differences, and provide our recommendations.

Curricula Overview

Curricula were created to support the assignment and tracking of certifications/qualifications within highly regulated industries. A curriculum generally consists of a series of courses whose completions are required within a set timeframe. Some curricula may also have retraining periods that must be adhered to in order for a user to remain certified for a particular task or job.

In order to support the regulatory requirements of customers in such industries, curricula are considered to be a standardized certification delivery system – this means that everyone who is assigned a curriculum must follow the same rules without exception.

Programs Overview

Programs were created to deliver learning activities of various sources and types in a structured manner, similar to academic-style courses and/or MOOCs. A program typically consists of activities grouped in time-based or topic-based blocks and contains settings to control the flow of consumption by the end users.

Programs are adoptive to the training needs of the program participants. This means that rules and requirements may vary among participants that attended the same program at different times.

Comparing Programs and Curricula

Curricula	Programs
All logic is driven by individual item settings within curricula (e.g. prerequisites, approvals, due dates)	Logic is driven at the program level. Approvals, prerequisites, due dates at the item level do not apply
Dynamic completion status that may change over time; "compliant vs. complete"	Finite events – completion is final
N/A	Certificate of completion (program level)
Can only contain LMS-based activities (items, sub-curricula)	Can contain internal as well as external (non-LMS) activities (links to any web address / files, custom activities)
Retraining support	N/A (Finite events – completion is final)
Automatically grant credit based on past completions	Credit is granted only for post-program assignment completions
Compliance-focused – getting list of all required	User-focused – structure groups of activities in the

activities done by a certain time	order they are meant to be consumed
All activities displayed to the end user as a list	Progressive display of activities that require attention
Requirement pools – provide different ways to meet compliance criteria	Program completion achieved only by completing specific activities (can be down to specific scheduled offerings)
N/A	Can easily control flow of consumption (progress- and schedule-based restrictions)
Changes to requirements affect all assigned users	Changes affect only future assignments
N/A	Auto-registration into all scheduled offerings upon program enrollment (scheduled programs)
Commerce support	No commerce support (yet)

Table 1. Programs vs. Curricula

I should use Curricula when…

- the training requirements are driven by regulatory policies
- users must recertify
- users can be decertified based on later failure
- changes in training requirements impact certification status
- certification requirements must be consistent for all users
- certification is required for a user, and compliance status must be maintained

Curricula are ideal for training that is regulated, compliance-driven, and auditable.

I should use Programs when…

- I want to deliver a group of learning activities
- the intent is to deliver content in structured/meaningful blocks
- users must complete the training blocks in sequence
- my content includes external content, personal interactions, and custom activities that do not need to be validated by the system
- my content must be presented in a visual agenda layout

Programs are ideal for MOOCs, leadership and onboarding programs, and academic-style courses.