

From “[A Delphi Study of Effective Practices for Developing Competency-Based Learning Models in Higher Education](#),” by [Lisa McIntyre-Hite, PhD](#)

What do experts identify as important to the development of competencies in a competency-based learning model for higher education degree programs?

The Process

- Use external experts (including subject matter experts, employers and/or those with CBE experience) as needed.
- Identify stakeholders before beginning to write competencies. Get the right people at the table early on in the development of competencies.
- Train the team working to develop the competencies on the philosophy and unique characteristics of competency-based programs. Ensure an understanding of why and how the program will implement CBE.
- Ensure the competency-development team has a thorough understanding of competency language and how competencies differ from program learning outcomes and student learning outcomes.
- Strong leadership and collaboration are important team characteristics in the competency-development process.
- Define competencies first. This should be done at the outset of program development. The competencies are revised and modified as needed throughout the development process.
- Use a backwards design process; begin with what students need to know and be able to do to be successful. While informed by what is needed in the workplace, it is not limited by the workplace (may include skills necessary for success in various life activities).
- Engage in an iterative review process with faculty and employers when writing competencies.
- Be open to feedback, criticism, and oversight as you develop competencies.
- Establish a timeline so everyone is working toward an end goal.

The Competency Statement

- Competencies, including liberal learning or general education competencies, should reflect what is needed in the workplace today and necessary competencies for success after graduation.
- Competencies should be written in a way that makes sense to potential employers and is measurable.
- Ask how you will support the claim of the competency statement in an assessment. This will help ensure the statement is measurable.
- Use a clear and deliberate structure for competency statements.
- Competency statements should be specific, actionable, and measurable.
- Competencies should indicate the knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions an individual will need to be successful within the degree field.

Employer Needs

- Gather information from multiple employers within the degree field and different market verticals to ensure the competencies capture the variety of potential expectations, positions, and roles within the field and use that information to write competencies. Employers should be active participants during CBE design.

Use of Data & Standards

- Use industry and professional standards, competency frameworks, and/or national accrediting and disciplinary body standards and align to them when applicable. Competencies should simultaneously make clear what students can do with what they know and align with any standards or credentialing needs.

What do experts identify as important to the development of assessments and rubrics in a competency-based learning model for higher education degree programs?

Types of Competency Assessments

- Create authentic assessments that exemplify what a student will do in the field upon degree completion.
- Performance based assessments are critical in measuring higher order cognitive skills.

Competency Assessment Strategies

- Engage in standard setting exercises and test pilots prior to releasing assessments en masse.
- Assessments should be clearly aligned to the competency and provide strong and relevant evidence of a student's competency.
- Engage in an iterative review process with subject matter experts, psychometricians, instructional designers, and employers to ensure an authentic, valid, and reliable assessment.
- Use the assessment type most appropriate for supporting the competency statement.
- Use faculty to develop assessments in partnership with assessment development experts.
- Ensure you are measuring the correct competencies at the correct levels and the measurement instruments reflect the actual skill level being measured.

Formative Assessments

- Formative assessments are learning activities, a way to practice the skills for the competency assessment.

Rubrics

- Rubrics should be clear and transparent for students. This will also allow for inter-rater reliability.
- Rubrics include specific, qualifiable and quantifiable information (quantifiable, if applicable).
- Rubrics should be well aligned to the assessment task. Students know ahead of time how they will be scored and what to do to achieve the competency, without being given the answers.
- Students should achieve or meet the desired standard on every part of the rubric in order to achieve competency.
- Rubrics are consistent for the competency, regardless of who is assessing the student work.
- Develop an intentional rubric design for writing each cell of a rubric and use that approach consistently.

What do experts identify as important to the development and implementation of learning resources in a competency-based learning model for higher education degree programs?

Identifying Learning Resources

- Review resources based on student feedback. Remove, adjust, add resources as needed based on student data.
- Resources should provide students with all the information they need to successfully achieve the competency.
- Resources are tightly aligned to the competency and the assessment.
- Resources should include various modalities (i.e., articles and videos) to accommodate different learner preferences.
- Faculty curate, review, and approve the list of identified resources.
- Leverage open educational resources.
- Do not begin development with resources. Begin development by developing the competency and assessment. Then identify the resources that will assist students in achieving the competency.
- Quality, not quantity, should guide resource development.
- The learning assets should complement and align closely with the competencies being measured.
- Explore content repositories and vendor partnerships to leverage as appropriate (i.e., Creative Commons, publishing partners).
- Consider copyright clearance issues at the start of selecting resources.

Providing Guidance to Students

- Learning resources provide students the opportunity for choice; however, that choice is guided by faculty who is familiar with the students' strengths and areas in need of improvement.
- Faculty guide students to and through specific resources based on available data analytics and/or assessment attempt results.
- If resources are well-aligned to the assessment, students are more likely to engage with them. It is likely students will not be able to achieve competency without understanding the resources that are provided.
- May provide students with a suggested path through learning resources. Even highly independent learners can get lost.
- It is important for the learning platform to provide clarity and guidance in working through learning activities, using resources.