



INCORPORATING COMPETENCIES

Career readiness competencies are the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that prepare students to successfully navigate academic experiences and enter the workforce. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) identifies key competencies that reflect employer expectations and provide a shared framework for student learning and development.

The NACE Career Readiness Competencies include:

- Career & Self-Development
- Communication

Critical Thinking

- Leadership
- Professionalism
- Teamwork
- Technology

A single experience does not need to address all competencies. Instead, focus on those most relevant to the intended learning outcomes.

Guidelines for Effective Practice

Competencies can be used as a framework to:

- Develop programs or courses
- Infuse meaningful learning activities
- Assess student learning and development
- Support reflection and application across academic, co-curricular, and professional contexts

Integrating competencies into your work is not about creating new programs or services, it is about using a shared framework to align what is already happening across the University of Iowa.

The following guidelines outline effective practices for integrating competencies into student experiences:

Map It

Faculty and staff across campus already help students develop skills that contribute to career readiness. Mapping experiences to competencies helps clarify what students are learning and supports intentional design.

Utilizing a shared language, such as the NACE competencies, helps students recognize connections across academic, co-curricular, and professional contexts.

Mapping allows you to:

- Identify which competencies are developed through an experience



- Make learning outcomes explicit
- Create opportunities for integrative learning and reflection

Name It

Research shows that explicitly identifying (“cueing”) learning opportunities is critical. Students often move through experiences on “autopilot,” and naming competencies helps them become more intentional learners.

Introduce competency language early and consistently. For example: “Through this experience, you will develop skills related to communication, teamwork, and critical thinking—competencies that are highly valued by employers.”

Naming competencies helps students:

- Recognize skill development
- Build awareness of transferable skills
- Begin articulating competencies in professional contexts

Focus on Integrative Learning

Integrative learning is the ability to connect knowledge and skills across multiple contexts. Students develop stronger competencies when they can apply what they have learned in one setting to another.

Support integrative learning by:

- Encouraging connections between coursework, employment, and involvement
- Using portfolios or capstone experiences
- Providing prompts that guide students to connect learning across experiences

This process helps students become effective problem-solvers who can apply prior knowledge to new situations, an essential component of career readiness.

Effective Reflection Is Critical

Reflection is the process of thinking about oneself as a learner, considering what has been learned and how experiences contributed to growth. It is a metacognitive skill that requires practice and structure.

Reflection is more likely to occur when intentionally built into experiences through:

- Guided prompts
- Group discussions or debriefs
- Written reflections or evaluations

Providing meaningful experiences is important, but supporting students in making meaning of those experiences leads to deeper learning and stronger competency development.

Sample Reflection Questions

What competencies do you think you will develop as a result of participating in this experience?

Write about a competency that you have developed as a result of this experience.

- What does it look like to effectively utilize [competency]?
- When have you used [competency] inside and outside the classroom?
- What have you learned here [in this experience] about [competency] that you think might be helpful in your [academic courses, co-curricular involvement, job, future career]?
- How might you continue to develop [competency] in the future?
- What challenges have you experienced developing [competency]?
- How would you describe your skills in [competency] on your resume or during a job interview?

Take-Home Points

Competencies are knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that support students for success in their workplaces and lifelong careers.

- Use shared language: Introduce and reinforce NACE competency terms
- Cue learning: Help students recognize and reflect on skill development
- Structure reflection: Integrate reflection into experiences or evaluations
- Focus on transfer: Help students apply competencies across contexts

Incorporating Competencies into Programs and Courses

When incorporating competencies into a class, workshop, training, or program, consider the following approach:

Developing a New Program

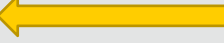
- Identify program goals and desired student outcomes

Select relevant NACE competencies

- Design curriculum and activities that support competency development
- Create assessment strategies to evaluate learning

Enhancing an Existing Program

- Map current learning outcomes to competencies
- Identify gaps or opportunities to strengthen competency development
- Revise activities or curriculum as needed
- Incorporate assessment and reflection opportunities

I Am Developing a New Program				I Have an Existing Program
Consider your program and/or institutional values, goals, outcomes, and needs in determining appropriate competencies.		Refer to NACE's Career Readiness Competencies for a description of each competency and select applicable competencies.		Match existing learning outcomes with competencies.
Will this program be based on a leadership model? If yes:		Add appropriate competencies from the NACE's Career Readiness Competencies .		Is this program based on a leadership model? If yes:
Will this program be targeting toward students in a specific academic program? If yes:		Add appropriate competencies from the NACE's Career Readiness Competencies .		Ensure the existing curriculum is appropriate to develop the intended competencies, and develop curriculum for any newly added competencies. Do you need ideas for curriculum? If yes:
Develop a curriculum based on selected competencies. Do you need ideas for curriculum? If yes:		Refer to NACE's Career Readiness Competencies for a description of each competency and select applicable competencies.		Create evaluations of competencies you intend to measure.

