



COMPETENCIES AT KAPLAN UNIVERSITY

Competencies

Design

Kaplan University competencies [including course outcomes, General Education Literacies (GELs), Professional Competencies (PCs), and program competencies] are designed to ensure that students are learning the skills they need to succeed both in the classroom and on the job. Several key sources of information are used to inform learning outcomes across the University.

Programmatic Accreditors

Competencies are designed to meet the needs of over a dozen specialized, programmatic accreditors, such as the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) and the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).

Institutional Accreditor

Several of the Kaplan University GELs are developed based on the core components specified by The Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

Employer Associations

Competencies are aligned with the priorities of employers, as communicated via organizations such as the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), Business Roundtable (BRT), and the Committee for Economic Development (CED).

Competencies undergo a rigorous, faculty-driven creation and revision process at Kaplan University. Educational principles are infused into the curriculum design and development process with learning outcomes, data analysis, and continuous improvement at its core. This process is detailed below.

Program Competency Design

For each program, the creation of its program competencies is a collaborative effort that involves academic leadership, curriculum leadership, and a program steering committee. A cognitive task or skills analysis is conducted to determine the key knowledge, skills, and behaviors for a given field. At the same time, the needs of employers and accreditors are used both for overall guidance and to help shape the substance of competencies.

Course Outcome Design

At the course level, faculty members collaborate with the curriculum team to identify the overarching learning outcomes for the course. As with program competencies, a needs analysis is conducted to determine the key knowledge, skills, and behaviors related to the course content. Course outcomes are then written to be both measurable and performance based.

GEL and PC Design

Following a similar process as for course outcomes, the University's GELs and PCs are created based on the needs of each discipline and discussions with leaders in the field. GEL and PC committees, comprising full-time and adjunct faculty, oversee the development of outcomes and methods to assess them.

Faculty Oversight and Quality Assurance

The Faculty Curriculum Committee (FCC) oversees the approval of course outcomes and the integration of GELs and PCs in a program. New or revised course outcome proposals are submitted to the FCC, then two FCC members assigned to each proposal ensure the quality of outcomes through a robust review process that includes several criteria, including whether each outcome is specific, observable, measurable, and appropriate to the course level.



Continuous Improvement

Once developed and approved, course outcomes become part of a continuous improvement process. To ensure the quality of course outcomes, course data are routinely analyzed and discussed by faculty and staff. These metric reviews are conducted both on an ongoing basis as well as at the start of course revision projects. Qualitative feedback from student and faculty surveys is also analyzed as part of this review.

Measurement

Although having appropriate competencies is vital, the efforts to develop them would be wasted if those competencies could not be measured well. Thus, Kaplan University takes a number of steps to ensure that knowledge and skills are evaluated in a reliable and valid manner.

Competency Assessments

Students at Kaplan University can earn course credit by achieving passing scores on competency assessments. Competency assessments are designed to efficiently and accurately measure the extent to which a student has mastered course outcomes. Trained subject-matter experts, with the support of a curriculum specialist, create these assessments, which are then checked against 16 best practices for assessments and reviewed by an assessment expert.

Kaplan University is currently in the process of converting all competency assessments to use performance tasks (with multiple-choice exams being acceptable for a small number of specific domains such as mathematics).^{*} Performance tasks require a performance or demonstration of knowledge and skills using novel and authentic contexts to show transfer of learning. Each performance task is paired with a corresponding checklist rubric, which details all the criteria that are necessary for a competent performance of the task. Students whose work meets all the criteria are judged as competent. In the development process, tasks and rubrics are created by subject-matter experts and reviewed by curriculum staff to ensure that they follow best practices for assessment design.



Assessment Reliability Research

Kaplan University has engaged in several research projects specifically targeted toward measuring and improving the reliability of assessments. Methods for improving the ability of faculty to reliably evaluate student work have been tested, revealing that a training exercise had a significant impact. Completion of that training is now required for all faculty.

Assessment Rubric Design

Assessment rubrics are developed as tools for assessing mastery of each course outcome. Faculty members are provided with separate rubrics for grading an assignment and evaluating mastery of a course outcome. Whereas an assignment rubric may consider whether a student completed that assignment on time or following a particular style, rubrics for course outcomes are designed only to measure the extent to which a student mastered a particular outcome. Course leaders and subject-matter experts, with the guidance and support of curriculum specialists, create outcome-specific rubrics that are used by faculty to determine each student's progress toward mastery of each course outcome. Assessment data are reviewed on a regular basis to evaluate both student progress and the efficacy of the rubrics.

* Currently, 343 Kaplan University courses do not include a midterm or final exam.

In these courses, student learning is assessed through a series of written works or a final project. A good example is our undergraduate marketing course, MT219, where students complete a multipart marketing plan as their final project. There are a total of 1,224 exams (midterm, final, or competency assessment) in all of our regular and ExcelTrack™ courses. Sixty-six percent require written responses, 23% are multiple choice (many are math, finance, or accounting, which require working a problem), and 11% are exams that include a combination of written and multiple-choice responses.