COMPETENCY EDUCATION AT PURDUE UNIVERSITY GLOBAL

Purdue University Global 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. These competencies are the building blocks of every course and degree at Purdue Global.

Foundation

Learning outcomes are informed by key external experts:

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

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).

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).

Design

Competencies undergo a rigorous, faculty-driven creation and revision process at Purdue Global. 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 involving 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.

Quality

Purdue Global is committed to quality in every area, but we are especially proud of our ability to measure, analyze, and respond to results in student learning, and to do so at a very granular level.

*Faculty Oversight and Quality Assurance***:** The Faculty Curriculum Committee (FCC) oversees course outcomes approvals 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, we take a number of steps to ensure that knowledge and skills are evaluated in a reliable and valid manner.

Assessment

At the center of Purdue Global's competency system is a robust assessment model, proven and refined over a decade of use.

*Competency Assessments***:** Students at Purdue Global can earn course credit by achieving passing scores on competency assessments. These 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.

Purdue Global is 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 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***:** Purdue Global 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.

ExcelTrack™ Modality

In early 2017, Purdue Global began offering some of its programs in a competency-based format, "ExcelTrack." In accordance with the principles of competency-based education or "CBE," the ExcelTrack modality is designed to enable students to:

- acquire real-life, career-oriented skills
- acquire and demonstrate skills at their own pace without "seat time" requirements
- save time and money if they can accelerate their path to degree

Because our traditional online modality delivers programs with curricula already built upon competency-based learning outcomes, the ExcelTrack modality uses the same curricula to help students acquire real-life, career-oriented skills. It also uses the same grading scale and CLAs. However, the ExcelTrack modality differs from the traditional online modality in important ways.

While the traditional online modality offers students highly structured learning, the ExcelTrack modality offers them highly flexible, personalized learning. There are no required weekly assignments or class time per course in the ExcelTrack modality — just one grade on a final comprehensive project. While students access the same online classroom containing the same readings and kinds of learning activities as offered in the traditional online modality, students in the ExcelTrack modality decide which and how much of them to complete to master course concepts. Indeed, they are able to skip material they already know to focus on what they do not know.

Likewise, students in the ExcelTrack modality decide how much and when to work with their instructor and classmates. While students can collaborate with their instructor and classmates in discussion boards and the online seminar, attendance in neither is required. The role of the instructor therefore shifts to a coach who teaches each student according to what they need. In the ExcelTrack modality, courses are divided into small one-credit pieces of courses, "competency modules," of which students can decide how many to take each term. Students can even add more competency modules to their courseload as they progress through a term if they choose.

The flexibility in the ExcelTrack modality offers students opportunities to accelerate the pace of their learning toward their degree. Without the seat time and course registration constraints of the structured traditional online modality, students in the ExcelTrack modality can complete more credits per term than they normally could in the traditional one. Because the tuition model for the ExcelTrack modality is a flat rate, students stand to achieve significant savings it they can accelerate their pace toward degree completion. As in the traditional online modality, students in the ExcelTrack modality can also reduce the cost of their degree if they earn transfer credit from completed coursework from an accredited college or university.

Successful students have some professional experience and are required to have previous college experience to draw upon. They should be extremely self-reliant, driven, and able to closely manage their study schedule. The traditional online modality is a better fit for students who do not fit this profile.

Currently, the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, Bachelor of Science in Information Technology, Master of Business Administration, and Master of Science in Nursing are offered as ExcelTrack options. We continue to develop more ExcelTrack programs.