

Competency Report

TOOL: Competency report

GOAL: Transcripts that are meaningful to potential employers and help nontraditional graduates stand out in the job market

BREAK THROUGH

MODEL: Northern Arizona University

Why was this tool developed?

Northern Arizona University's (NAU) Personalized Learning (PL) program is a nontraditional approach to a postsecondary degree—rather than progress through defined semester or quarter terms, students progress at their own pace by demonstrating proficiency and/or mastery of competencies. The competencies are mapped to traditional NAU courses, so that PL students earn traditional postsecondary credits as they work towards bachelor's degrees in Liberal Arts, Computer Information Technology, and Small Business Administration.

Since most NAU PL students are adult and nontraditional learners, the university envisioned a unique report for graduates that would outperform a traditional transcript in demonstrating how a student can apply multiple approaches to solve a real-world problem. **To help its nontraditional graduates stand out in the job market, NAU developed a competency report that identifies specific skills and abilities of its graduates, giving employers a clearer picture of the academic projects that prepare a student for the workplace.** The competency report is intended to supplement a traditional transcript, which lists

courses, grades, and information that is critical for employers, but generally offers less information to measure a student's experience.

How is it different?

With their course listings and grades, traditional transcripts infer a student's command of certain broad proficiencies, such as time management, commitment, and a passing degree of understanding of course content. NAU's competency report goes deeper into the student's learning experience by demonstrating the student's mastery of content and proficiency in skills that employers are increasingly demanding from today's college graduates: written and oral communication, managing multiple priorities, solving problems, and collaborating with others. These skills are evident in the descriptions that populate a competency report. For example, a competency report for a Small Business Administration student would list a competency titled "Informed Decision Making." On the report, an employer would see that a student's lessons taught him/her how to "break down the concepts, systems, and tools needed to access, process, maintain, evaluate, and disseminate information for business decision-making." The employer would also see which traditional

course the competency is mapped to, and a description of the lessons the student completed to demonstrate proficiency of the competency. For the Informed Decision Making competency, a student would have completed one lesson in Record Management (Examine everyday record management functions in a small business) and another lesson in Technology Applications (Understand the technology concepts and systems used in small business management).



While traditional transcripts tend to be paper-based reports, NAU's competency report can be printed or sent to potential employers as a link. The next iteration of the competency reports will become multidimensional and interactive in an electronic form, through which a potential employer can pull up evidence and artifacts, such as reports or presentations, to demonstrate a student's achievements and abilities.

“The competency report provides students, their future educational affiliations, and employers insight into the competencies the students encountered, as well as the learning objectives underlying those competencies.”

Cori Gordon, NAU Faculty

What is the advantage for students?

The competency report was designed to enhance the employability of the adult and nontraditional learners who enroll in NAU's Personalized Learning program which launched in Fall 2013 (see NAU's [profile](#) to learn more about the degree program's model).

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Adult and nontraditional learners are typically enrolled in the PL program because they are seeking career promotions or transitions, and a competency report is a useful map of the enhanced skills and knowledge they gain through the PL program. Adult learners—who are perhaps mid-career—will benefit more from a transcript that reads like a CV than a transcript that lists “Economics 101.” The competency report helps adults outline their enhanced skills in terms that are useful to employers. When linked to an online portfolio, the multidimensional report could make a PL graduate a more attractive job candidate than one with a traditional transcript or résumé in hand.

“The competency report provides students, their future educational affiliations, and employers insight into the competencies the students encountered, as well as the learning objectives underlying those competencies,” said Professor Cori Gordon. “The competency report is a more authentic representation of the students’ baccalaureate program of study.”

How does it improve learning?

As NAU continues to solicit feedback from industry partners on the usefulness of the competency report, their feedback will ultimately inform improvements to the PL curriculum. Students will benefit from a program tailored to provide the competencies and information that employers value most. Industry feedback could also help students tailor their reports for specific employers, which could help them stand out among job candidates.

What is the advantage for instructors and administrators?

Because PL graduates will be among the first to utilize a competency report, their employment outcomes will be of interest to NAU staff. Those outcomes, along with feedback from industry partners, will help inform administrative efforts to improve the PL program and the content of the report itself.

What are the challenges?

Traditional transcripts tend to be the coin of the realm in higher education. They hold value because administrators, faculty, and employers are familiar with the format of course titles, grades, and credits. An on-going challenge for NAU and its graduates will be in demonstrating the value of competency reports to potential employers and industry partners.

What's next?

The competency report will continue to be improved based upon feedback from industry partners and employers of NAU PL graduates. NAU wants the competency map to be sufficiently simple to be meaningful to employers, but detailed enough that it outlines the skills that employers are demanding of graduates.

In addition, NAU will continue to counsel graduates on how to use this report to their advantage when applying for jobs.



ARTIFACT:

Sample information on a competency report

Degree Program:
Small Business Administration

Competency:
Informed Decision-Making
Break down the concepts, systems, and tools needed to access, process, maintain, evaluate, and disseminate information for business decision-making.

Lessons Completed:



Record Management

Examine everyday record management functions in a small business.



Technology Applications

Understand the technology concepts and systems used in small business management.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Northern Arizona University's Personalized Learning

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Press: [Competency-Based Transcripts](#), Inside HigherEd