



# **Planning Competencies, Learning Objectives, Activities and Rubrics**

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## **Introduction**

Assessment is an important component of academic programs. It is necessary to determine what you want students to achieve and then to develop ways to assess this achievement. Many accrediting bodies require assessment data. Competencies in Desire2Learn® eLearning Suite allows for data collection in a structured way. Planning, however, is the key to a successful assessment system.

## **Steps in the Planning Process**

### **STEP 1—DETERMINE THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL AT WHICH YOU WANT TO ASSESS**

There are many ways to use assessment within an educational institution. The first step necessary in the planning process is to determine at what level(s) within the institution you want to gather assessment data.

Some assessments may be completed for all students in an institution. This might include areas such as writing-across-the-curriculum or parts of a general studies program. Assessment at this level might also include several different campuses. At the institutional level you are looking at data for all students.

Another level at which you might assess competencies is at the department level. There may be achievements you want to assess for all students within a department even if there are several different majors in that department. For example, a business department might include several different majors such as accounting, business administration, management and marketing. At the department level you would be assessing competencies for all students in that department, no matter which particular majors they have chosen.

You might also want to assess competencies within specific majors. For example, you might want to look at competencies for only the accounting majors.

The competency function within Desire2Learn can also be used for competencies within or across specific courses. Individual instructors might determine competencies for specific courses. Using the competency function in Desire2Learn that instructor can compare students over several semesters or years. You can also compare competencies across several sections of the same course.

An example of assessment at the department level might be a Business Department which has four majors: accounting, business administration, human resource management and marketing. Each of these four majors requires a common core of courses in addition to upper-level courses required for each individual major. Our example shows how assessment for all majors in a department can be done using this common core of courses.

This common core of courses includes:

- BU 121 Principles of Accounting I
- BU 122 Principles of Accounting II
- BU 232 Microeconomics
- BU 241 Principles of Management
- BU 251 Principles of Marketing
- BU 281 Managerial Communications
- BU 371 Business Law
- BU 381 Business Finance
- BU 481 International Business

#### STEP 2—DETERMINE COMPETENCIES

After you have determined the level within the institution, determine specific competencies that each graduate should meet. Write these in the form of actions students will do so they are measurable statements. When determining these competencies, try to limit the number. Remember, these are competencies for all students in the level you have chosen and you have to determine ways to measure them.

In our example we are going to use the following statements as our competencies:

- Ability to Communicate Well
- Ability to Think Critically
- Ability to Work as a Member of a Team
- Ability to Solve Problems and Make Decisions
- Display Professional Attitude and Ethical Awareness
- Aware of Domestic and International Business Environments
- Aware of and Empathy with Diversity in the Workplace

The first competency involves communication. This is a general competency. However, there are many different aspects to communication. We can develop sub-competencies that will be combined to form the general competency. In our example, let's assume the following sub-competencies will help us determine the ability to communicate well using:

- Writing
- Speaking
- Power-Point
- Integration of Excel and Word

In our example, our list of competencies then will include:

Competency 1 Ability to Communicate Well

1a Writing

1b Speaking

1c Power-Point

1d Integration of Excel and Word

Competency 2 Ability to Think Critically

Competency 3 Ability to Work as a Member of a Team

Competency 4 Ability to Solve Problems and Make Decisions

Competency 5 Display Professional Attitude and Ethical Awareness

5a Professional Attitude

5b Ethical Awareness

Competency 6 Aware of Domestic and International Business Environments

Competency 7 Aware of and Empathy with Diversity in the Workplace

### STEP 3—DETERMINE WHERE YOU WILL ASSESS EACH COMPETENCY

In looking at the level chosen, where in that level will you do assessment activities? If you are assessing at the institution level, will you use specific courses? Will you have assessments that are in addition to course work? Will there be tests, writing assignments, or other activities that all students complete which are not required as part of specific courses? If you are looking at the department level, which courses will include which assessments?

In our example of assessment within a business department that involves a common core of courses, each competency is assessed in at least two different courses in that common core of courses. It isn't necessary to assess twice. Assessment might only occur one time. Where you will assess is determined by the institution.

The following grid reflects the competencies to be assessed and the courses in which each competency will be assessed.

Business Core Courses	C1a	C1b	C1c	C1d	C2	C3	C4	C5a	C5b	C6	C7
BU 121—Principles of Accounting I				A				C	A		
BU 122—Principles of Accounting II							A			A	
BU 232—Microeconomics					A					A	
BU 241—Principles of Management	A	C	A				A				
BU 251—Principles of Marketing											A
BU 281—Managerial Communications					A	A					
BU371—Business Law						A		C	A		
BU 381—Business Finance				A							
BU 481—International Business	A	C	A								A

A = all students, campus and distance

C = only campus students

#### STEP 4—DETERMINE THE LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT FOR EACH COMPETENCY

Once you have determined competencies, you must determine the learning objectives for each competency. For each learning objective, establish the levels of achievement to use to determine successful accomplishment of the competency.

A sample rubric for our example might be:

Competency 2—Ability to think critically

Learning Objective	Levels of Achievement			
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Identifies and Explains Issues	Clearly identifies and summarizes main issues and successfully explains why/how they are problems	Successfully identifies and summarizes the main issues, but does not explain why/how they are problems or create questions	Identifies main issues but does not summarize or explain them clearly or sufficiently	Fails to identify, summarize, or explain the main problem or question. Represents the issues inaccurately or inappropriately
Distinguishes Types of Claims	Clearly and accurately labels not only all the factual, conceptual and values claims, but also those implicit in the assumptions and the implications of positions and arguments	Successfully separates and labels all the factual, conceptual and value claims	Successfully identifies some, but not all of the factual, conceptual and value aspects of the questions and answers	Fails to label correctly any of the factual, conceptual and value dimensions
Evaluates Information and Assumptions	Evaluates material with insight. Not only identifies and evaluates all the important assumptions, but also some of the more hidden, more abstract ones	Evaluates material competently. Identifies and evaluates all the important assumptions, but not the ones deeper in the background—the more abstract ones	Evaluates material inconsistently. Identifies some of the most important assumptions, but does not evaluate them for plausibility or clarity	Is unable to evaluate material or does so superficially. Fails to identify and evaluate any of the important assumptions behind the claims and fails to evaluate its credibility

Evaluates Inferences	Not only identifies and avoids all mistakes of reasoning but gives clear explanations of why they are mistakes	Identifies and avoids all mistakes of reasoning and explains some of them	Successfully identifies and avoids some common mistakes of reasoning but misses less common ones, and does not explain why or how they are mistakes	Fails to identify and explain mistakes in the reasoning of others and fails to avoid them in their own reasoning
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This rubric shows learning objectives in the left column. These are specific items to look at when assessing a student’s ability to think critically. You can determine any number of learning objectives you feel are appropriate. Remember, however, that you have to assess each one of them for every student. Therefore, try to determine what is most important for you to assess.

This rubric shows four levels of achievement for each learning objective. These levels are written as action statements; things students will do. In order to be able to assess you must know what students will do. The number of levels for each learning objective does not have to be four. One option is to have just one level and a student either meets that level or doesn’t meet it. The more levels involved, the more difficult it sometimes becomes to distinguish characteristics between the different levels.

The levels of achievement in each learning objective are listed in our example as Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor. There are other labels that could be used as well. Another option might be: Meets Competency, Somewhat Meets Competency, Does Not Meet Competency. Instead of Poor in our example this might say Inadequate.

Our example does not have an “average”. Sometimes when there is an “average” we might have a tendency to use it more than we should. There is no “middle-of-the-road” assessment available in our example.

**STEP 5—DETERMINE ACHIEVEMENT THRESHOLD**

In assessing these competencies, what level must a student attain in order to have met the competency? If assessing a competency more than once, is it acceptable for a student to improve? Is it acceptable if a student was initially at the Poor level and then improved to the Fair level? Or, is there a minimum level of achievement each student should meet? Do you expect each student to reach the “Excellent” level or the “Good” level? This is determined by the goals of the institution, department, major, or course in which the competency is being assessed. Each assessment program will determine the required level of competency.



## STEP 6—DETERMINE ACTIVITIES USED FOR ASSESSMENT OF EACH COMPETENCY

Once you have determined the competencies, where they will be assessed, and the learning objectives, you must determine the activities you will use for assessment of each competency. Desire2Learn offers a range of tools that can be used. For example, you could assess using actual assignments in courses that are submitted into the Dropbox.

In our example, the activities might be assignments such as:

Competency 2—Ability to think critically.

BU 232—Read **The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools** from the Foundation for Critical Thinking. Using the template for “Analyzing the Logic of an Article” on page 13, analyze the Management focus on two articles in your Annual Editions case packet. You may select any two of the following articles: Art. 3, Art 5, Art 8, Art 13, Art 15, Art 22, Art 23, Art 28.

BU 281—Read **The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools** from the Foundation for Critical Thinking. Find an article about intercultural communication on the internet. Using the Template for Analyzing the Logic of an Article on page 13 of **The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools**, analyze this article. Be sure to submit the URL of the article with your analysis.

Not all competencies must be assessed through Dropbox activities. Desire2Learn allows for competency assessment in discussion boards, through specific grades (if a student receives a particular grade then the competency is met), through quizzes and surveys, as well as manual assessments. When using manual assessments, students do not complete any activity in Desire2Learn. The instructor manually completes an assessment of the competency of a student. This might be used if you are looking at things like attendance, classroom discussions, preparedness for class and other activities that are not reflected in Desire2Learn tools.

### Conclusion

As indicated in the introduction, completing the planning prior to entering the competency information into Desire2Learn is extremely important. Once the plan is developed, put it into writing. This becomes a valuable tool when actually entering competency information into Desire2Learn. When the information is entered into Desire2Learn, links are formed to enable Desire2Learn to gather the data. Because of the links involved, it

is not easy to change the system once it has been set up in Desire2Learn. Therefore, a written plan will help ensure appropriate links are created.

For information on the process used to enter competencies into Desire2Learn, please refer to the How-To Guide “**Entering Rubrics and Competencies into Desire2Learn—A Step by Step Guide**” by Dr. Joanne Golding, S.P. Professor Emerita, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College.

## **About Desire2Learn**

Desire2Learn helps improve our world by pioneering innovative methods and environments to engage and inspire learners throughout their lives. Making education more accessible helps learners reach their full potential by reflecting the unique needs of organizations, instructors, and students.

A global leader in cloud-based (SaaS) learning solutions, Desire2Learn provides an open and extensible platform to more than 700 clients and 10 million learners in higher education, K–12, healthcare, government and the corporate sector, including Fortune 100 companies. Desire2Learn has personnel in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, Brazil and Singapore.

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