



NACE COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT TOOL

User Manual for Higher Education Professionals



INTRODUCTION

The history of the NACE Career Readiness Competencies

NACE launched its Career Readiness Initiative in 2015 to address a fundamental need for new college graduates and the professionals who serve their career development needs and recruit them into the workforce: a shared understanding of what is needed to launch and develop a successful career, a common vocabulary by which to discuss needs and expectations, and a basic set of competencies upon which a successful career is launched. An initial task force—made up of NACE members from both career services and university relations and recruiting—developed the career readiness definition and associated competencies.

These were subsequently reviewed and updated by a task force of members in 2017 to reflect feedback from members who were using the competencies with students, and the competencies have undergone updates since that time to reflect feedback.

In addition, after the initial launch, NACE undertook work to identify behaviors that could be associated with the competencies, partnering with SkillSurvey to validate those behaviors. In 2020, a member task force reviewed and revised the competencies as needed, while NACE and SkillSurvey completed a key phase of its validation effort to identify sample behaviors. As part of its process, the task force drafted its recommendations for revisions and presented them to the NACE membership for comment. More than 300 members provided recommendations and comments. The resulting revised competencies reflect those member insights.



Why the NACE Competency Assessment Tool?

The call to action regarding more explicit focus on career readiness in higher education has continued to gather momentum. In 2021, NACE saw increased demand for tangible materials, activities, and curriculum that helped students gain awareness of, assess, and continue to develop their proficiency in the NACE competencies. That led NACE to develop, test, and validate a full set of assessments to do just that.

NACE has created this guide for using the NACE Competency Assessment Tool, which comprises eight assessments—one for each of the career readiness competencies, to activate its vision of a diverse and inclusive community of professionals collaborating to achieve equitable employment outcomes for all.

NACE's mission is to empower and connect the community of professionals who support, develop, and employ the college-educated workforce. This guide offers advice and examples to accomplish this mission. Whether you are in career services, student life, or administration or are a faculty member, this guide will help you find out how to engage students in meaningful conversations around their career readiness that will have a positive impact on their future.

In this guide, you will find a wealth of ideas for using the NACE Competency Assessment Tool from a variety of perspectives so you can choose the best way to engage your students to help them grow and develop into the career ready workforce of the future.

USE BY LEADERSHIP

You hear it again and again: If you want to create change at an institution of higher education, you need champions in the leadership team. This is certainly the case when aiming to move the needle on career outcomes in higher education. There are many demands and expectations of higher education to engage with industry, align curriculum with industry needs, and help students become more career ready. Using the NACE Competency Assessment Tool can offer a hands-on means for addressing and assessing movement in this area.

Leadership Use Case: Align NACE competencies with institutional learning outcomes

If you are aiming to create an ethos of career thinking for students from the start, it is critical to support the integration of this focus on all levels of the student experience. Integrating the NACE career readiness competencies from start to finish is an excellent way to create a cohesive focus around career learning in all areas of your college. The NACE Competency Assessment Tool is an excellent opportunity to make this focus more tangible for students, staff, and faculty.

One of the best ways to integrate career learning into the curriculum is to create an alignment between the NACE career readiness competencies and the institutional learning outcomes. Accreditation is often tied to ongoing and comprehensive teaching and assessment of institutional learning outcomes throughout the student journey. Therefore, aligning the NACE competencies to general education outcomes and using the NACE Competency Assessment Tool for assessment keeps career learning central to the educational journey. This approach facilitates the clear and sustained messaging of career competencies to students, as well as the communication of these competencies to staff and faculty. In this way, the NACE competencies help establish a common language around career messaging campus-wide.

For an example of this alignment, see Table 1 below.

Table 1: Alignment of NACE career readiness competencies and Middle States Commission on Higher Education general education requirements

NACE Competency		Middle States Gen Ed
 Communication	Clearly and effectively exchange information, ideas, facts, and perspectives with persons inside and outside of an organization.	Oral and written communication. Information literacy. Scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning. Information literacy.* Expand cultural and global awareness and cultural sensitivity. Study of values, ethics, and diverse perspectives.
 Critical Thinking	Identify and respond to needs based upon an understanding of situational context and logical analysis of relevant information.	
 Equity & Inclusion	Demonstrate the awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills required to equitably engage and include people from different local and global cultures. Engage in anti-racist practices that actively challenge the systems, structures, and policies of racism.	
 Professionalism	Knowing work environments differ greatly, understand and demonstrate effective work habits, and act in the interest of the larger community and workplace.	
 Leadership	Recognize and capitalize on personal and team strengths to achieve organizational goals.	
 Technology	Understand and leverage technologies ethically to enhance efficiencies, complete tasks, and accomplish goals.	Technological competency
 Career & Self Development	Proactively develop oneself and one's career through continual personal and professional learning, awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, navigation of career opportunities, and networking to build relationships within and without one's organization.	Note: Career & Self Development and Teamwork were aligned at program and course level.
 Teamwork	Build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities.	

Once there is an alignment between NACE competencies and institutional learning outcomes, a number of layers of implementation support the college-wide engagement of career development. As a result of this alignment, the institution must account for how the NACE competencies are being taught with increasing depth throughout the curriculum, from general education through major/program. NACE competencies must then be present on syllabi to show where and how students are acquiring these skills and knowledge.

Using this alignment as the support structure and impetus for change, leaders can build in some of the best practices incorporating NACE competency awareness and learning across the curriculum. NACE competencies will become a common language for career learning across the student journey.

In an ideal world, here are some of the places students would use and encounter NACE competency learning and assessment:

- **Orientation**—Here’s where you set the tone that your institution will support the academic and career development journey of every student.
- **First-year Seminar**—In the first-year seminar, as students begin to explore and select their major, they start to understand that their academic journey as a whole will help them develop the competencies that employers value.
- **General Education Courses**—Different general education courses focus on different competencies at the early development phase of the tool. They build the foundation for deeper learning of the competencies in the major.
- **Advisement**—Advisers check in on skill development as part of course selection to make sure students are on the road to degree completion and gaining confidence in their competency development for the workplace.
- **Career Services**—Career services staff offer one-on-one assessments to help students set NACE competency development goals that align with their academic and career goals. They also ground resume review and mock interview feedback in the NACE competencies by using the tool. (*More in Section 2 of this manual.*)
- **Major Courses**—Across the program curriculum, students experience more in-depth development per competency divided across required major courses with more disciplinary focus and work-based experiences and projects.
- **Internship Support**—The faculty or staff supporting internships ensure that internship supervision and student check-ins are grounded by setting NACE competency development goals using the tool.



Additional leadership use case suggestions:

- Use the NACE Competency Assessment Tool to engage with industry partners, perhaps at advisory board meetings, to gauge particular competency importance for high-demand jobs. Include assessment of NACE competencies in the program review processes.
- Create incentives for faculty engagement in career in the curriculum and support a learning community to develop, present, and publish on the scholarship of teaching and learning using the NACE Competency Assessment Tool as an assessment tool for student development.
- Incorporate activities that improve students' NACE competency development into the tenure process.
- Offer an award to faculty who include innovation around NACE competency development within their course(s).
- Offer awards/scholarships/honors to students with high achievement of the NACE competencies.
- Develop a series of videos to share on social media in which students model how they would speak about each competency in an interview to create a sense of common understanding around the NACE competencies.

USE BY FACULTY

More and more, faculty are finding innovative ways to incorporate career learning into their courses. Many have used the NACE competency framework to develop a common language around career readiness and to support student learning in these critical areas of development for their long-term career success. The NACE Competency Assessment Tools adds a new layer of clarity for both faculty and students around what the competencies are and how to gauge level of proficiency. The use cases here were developed in collaboration with faculty at various City University of New York (CUNY) campuses.

FACULTY USE CASE 1:

NACE competency integration in strategic human resource management course

Carles Sola Belda, Ph.D., associate professor of management, chair, Department of Management, Lucille and Jay Chazanoff School of Business, College of Staten Island, CUNY, aligned the course learning objectives for his Strategic Human Resource Management course with the NACE competencies as represented in this table:

Learning Objective	NACE Competency
Recall and apply the concepts, theories, and frameworks of HRM	Critical Thinking
Understand the legal, global, and competitive environment in which human resource management operates	Critical Thinking
Evaluate and apply HR policies in real cases	Critical Thinking
Incorporate ethical considerations into HRM	Critical Thinking, Equity and Inclusion
Plan, lead, and implement an HR project in a group project	Teamwork, Leadership, Professionalism, Equity and Inclusion
Communicate the results of an HR project	Communication, Professionalism
Communicate your career growth	Career and Self Development

Each course learning objective/NACE competency was aligned to a particular assignment so students knew where that competency was being developed. One assignment was to create and submit an initial resume and a revised resume after meeting with career services, as well as a reflection using the STAR method to practice for how to represent their career readiness competencies in an interview.

In this case, the NACE Competency Assessment Tool should be introduced up front, enabling students to use it regularly for self-assessment and peer assessment and for feedback for each of the assignments aligned to the outcomes. Having the tool incorporated from the start helps create a common language around the NACE competencies that can be used to guide students toward gradual improvement in particular areas. Using the tool throughout a course also helps students practice the articulation of NACE competencies in a way that prepares them for job interviews in the future.

Beyond the student communication, using the NACE Competency Assessment Tool offers the faculty member a ready-to-use assessment for the course assignments that can be used on their own or incorporated/aligned with other assignments or course-level assessments.



FACULTY USE CASE 2:**Increasing impact through a required first-year course**

Sonali Hazarika, Ph.D., associate professor of finance in the Bert W. Wasserman Department of Economics and Finance, had a broad impact on student learning and career readiness because of her position as the executive director of undergraduate programs in the Zicklin School of Business at Baruch College, CUNY.

In this role, she has oversight of an entry-level course for the program, which is required for all of Zicklin School's approximately 1,200 students. Involving faculty with this kind of course leadership in a career-integrated curriculum has a very broad impact. In this case, Dr. Hazarika was able to revise the course in the following ways:

- Link course learning goals to the NACE competencies;
- Share the STAR methodology as a framework for students to use in interviews; and
- Create a three-minute video providing one concrete way to use the concepts taught in the class to manage personal finances using the STAR methodology.

The incorporation of the NACE Competency Assessment Tool for such a widely required course has great potential for the college's assessment of student learning at an early point. As with the first case, using the tool creates a common language from the start of the student experience in the Zicklin School of Business. The tool also can be used for peer evaluation of the student video assignment in this course, and it offers the students a clear way to assess current skills and make a plan for how to improve their competencies in any areas that are challenging.



FACULTY USE CASE 3:

NACE competency development in a career development course

The third case is the integration of NACE competencies into a career development course taught by Ruth Lewis, adjunct faculty, Business Department - Office Technology Unit, Hostos Community College, CUNY. She developed and refined the COOP 101: Introduction to Career Practices course to accomplish the following:

- Incorporate the NACE competencies from start to finish;
- Give students experiences that they can add to their resume and make them more marketable to potential employers;
- Provide students with opportunities to solve real-world problems and troubleshoot;
- Give students more of an opportunity to practice articulating their experiences and explaining projects; and
- Partner directly with career services and create more opportunities for students to reach out to career services.

In this course, students set personal and career goals. They also develop effective resumes and cover letters, practice interviewing, and learn job-search skills and strategies. They learn what it takes to become marketable for future employment by being aware of the skills employers are looking for in their potential employees and gaining comfort in explaining how they have demonstrated these skills in projects and experiences.

Grounding the course in the NACE competencies meant students were asked to focus on the communication of NACE competencies as they created and refined their resumes, developed their LinkedIn profiles, practiced their elevator pitches, and participated in mock interviews. The NACE Competency Assessment Tool offers a consistent assessment for each of these assignments and helps to demonstrate to students how their skill development can be consistently represented on all of their materials and in their employer interactions.

USE BY CAREER SERVICES

Career services can use the NACE Competency Assessment Tool to become the nexus for deep engagement in NACE competency development on campus.

Most career services offices already have a nuanced understanding of each NACE competency and some of the experiences needed to further develop each competency. They can serve as a hub for leadership, faculty, and staff questions regarding the competencies. They can also offer sustained professional development around NACE competency development for students, as well as work in collaboration with leadership, department chairs, and faculty on how to best build the learning experiences needed to build expertise and confidence per the NACE competency. Additionally, career services can continue to be a landing spot for students who hope to deepen their NACE competency knowledge and confidence.

Below are three use cases for NACE Competency Assessment Tool in career services.



Career Services Use Case 1: Direct student support

Incorporating the NACE Competency Assessment Tool into one-on-one student support and career development can be an effective way to guide and assess students' progress toward their professional goals. These rubrics provide a structured framework for evaluating key competencies essential for career success. You can leverage the tool in your work with students in a variety of ways.

The NACE tool covers critical areas such as self-awareness, professional development, and networking skills. When working with students individually, you can use the tool's individual assessments as a starting point for self-assessment and goal-setting. For instance, the "Awareness of Strengths & Challenges" assessment can help students identify their unique strengths and areas for improvement, enabling them to better understand their career paths and set meaningful goals. Similarly, the "Professional Development" assessment can encourage students to actively seek out opportunities for growth, such as attending workshops, pursuing certifications, or engaging in mentorship programs.

Furthermore, the "Networking" assessment can be instrumental in helping students develop essential networking skills. You can guide them through the process of building professional connections, learning how to leverage their networks effectively, and understanding the importance of maintaining and nurturing these relationships. By regularly referring to the tool during one-on-one sessions, you can track students' progress, celebrate their achievements, and identify areas where additional support or resources may be needed. Ultimately, the NACE Competency Assessment Tool provides a comprehensive framework for fostering students' career readiness, enabling them to develop the skills and mindset necessary for success in their chosen fields.

– *Provided by Lashonna Turner, interim associate director, Center for Career Preparations & Partnerships, Guttman Community College, City University of New York*

Career Services Use Case 2: Supporting the internship experience

At Guttman Community College, we have internship courses within four programs of study. The NACE Competency Assessment Tool can be used with those courses in three ways.

One way is that students can use the tool as a self-assessment at the beginning and at the end of the internship course. This can be used to help tailor conversations between the faculty and student as well as the adviser or career coach and the student. Oftentimes, an internship is an opportunity for students to build upon their skills. We try to find internship sites that are “safe spaces” for students to learn, make mistakes, and ask questions. The tool allows students to pause, reflect, and assess themselves and their skills. It is also a great foundation for an adviser or career coach to ask specific questions to the student. For example, a career coach can ask a student, “Why did you rate yourself a 2 in Communication?” or even better, “What activities or projects can you do in your internship to move your self-assessment rating from a 2 to a 3 in oral communication?” This allows for deeper conversation and more fruitful sessions with students.

Another way to use the tool is with the student and internship supervisor as an assessment. The tool can be used to address specific skills the supervisors would like to target throughout the internship experience. The internship supervisor and student can use this as a guide to their projects and can work better and more intentionally together. Currently, we have an evaluation survey that we provide to internship supervisors midway through the program and then once again at the end of the internship experience. The NACE Competency Assessment Tool can replace that evaluation.

Another creative way we can use the tool is to assess the quality of an internship site. The internship manager within our department can review the assessments completed by the students and assess whether it was a successful internship site. With this tool, we can see whether or not the student was able to improve their skills. Did the student leave the internship feeling more confident in their skills? Did the student have adequate projects that allowed for learning and improvement? This will help our internship manager decide whether an internship site should be used again and become a true partner to the college or if we should consider not working with them again.

Overall, the tool is helpful to having a common language across all parties—students, advisers, career coaches, internship supervisors, and internship managers. It helps strengthen advising and coaching sessions. In addition, it allows the student to have a concrete plan on what they should be focusing on in regard to their skills.

– *Provided by Patricia Jean, interim director,
Center for Career Preparation & Partnerships,
Guttman Community College*

Career Services Use Case 3: Support for Federal Work-Study

At Guttman Community College, CUNY, the largest, on-campus employment option for students is through the Federal Work-Study program. Students who apply for financial aid and are eligible for work-study can work at the college within various departments. The financial aid coordinator on campus works closely with the Center for Career Preparation & Partnerships (CCPP). Working collaboratively with the director of CCPP, the financial aid coordinator posts job opportunities on the campus jobs and internships portal. The coordinator invites the CCPP to her Federal Work-Study orientations, where they discuss the importance of a work-study job and emphasize that it is a job that can offer real work experience to students. The CCPP introduces the NACE competencies to students and provides examples of how they can strengthen these skills during their work-study job. As is the case with external internships and part-time jobs, students are assigned a supervisor. This supervisor typically signs timesheets for students.

Currently, there is no formal evaluation process for students. The NACE Competency Assessment Tool is an excellent means for providing feedback for students. Having a formalized assessment tool would further emphasize to students that work-study is a real job and can provide valuable experience to them that can build their resume. In addition, it can help supervisors guide and coach students to improve their skills. Having a tool like this provides supervisors with a common language they can use. It allows supervisors to provide specific examples of how they can improve as a work-study employee. As a work-study supervisor myself, we take on one or two students every semester in CCPP. For many of our students, this is their very first job. Students need guidance and feedback. If supervisors take the time to train and mentor students, this experience could be a mutually beneficial one for both the student and supervisor.

– Provided by Patricia Jean, interim director, Center for Career Preparation & Partnerships, Guttman Community College, and Jessica Portilla, financial aid advisor, Guttman Community College



NEXT STEPS

Please think of this set of use cases as the starting point for how to use the NACE Competency Assessment Tool in your area of practice and influence. Keep in mind that a best-case scenario involves the incorporation of NACE competency focus and assessment at all levels: leadership, faculty, and career services. Once these core set of users are on board, you can consider expanding to new users, including advisement, student clubs, and others. Be creative and remember how critical this work is to supporting your students' long-term career success.

As you begin to incorporate the use of the NACE Competency Assessment Tool, consider how it can be very useful to show impact and demonstrate student learning. This can help with overall assessment practices, but it can also be useful to support faculty and staff research and publication.

Finally, the movement of embedding career development into the academic experience has begun to pick up momentum. The goal is for campuses to develop an ethos of career-aware education. To help your campus move toward this goal, it is critical to find ways to support communities of practice to share experiences and to foster the continual improvement of NACE competency learning and the related career success that comes as a result.

