

FROM THE CCL DIRECTOR

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Career Connected Learning

Transformative Learning Commons (TLC)

I recently read a Riipen research brief that disclosed these eye-opening statistics:

- 84% of learners identify employment outcomes as a primary reason for enrolling in college or a credential program.
- More than half of four-year graduates are underemployed one year after graduation.
- A decade later, 45% still do not hold a position that requires a degree.
- Only 44% of employers report confidence that graduates have the skills required to succeed in entry-level work.



While these statistics are part of a marketing campaign for the Riipen platform, their statistics are real. They reflect the key findings from a qualitative study based on interviews with senior academic leaders across 12 U.S. institutions. Participants included provosts, vice provosts, associate deans, career-center directors, experiential-learning leaders, and innovation leaders.

Most significantly, the statistics also reflect that there is a clear disconnect with students and preparing them for the workplace. As Director of Career Connected Learning (CCL), the statistics have also become the impetus to my “why.”

My Why

I believe students deserve the chance to discover how what they love to learn can connect to what they may choose to do. That belief is why I stepped into this role, and it is why I am excited about where this work is headed.

In May 2026, I was named Director of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). I inherited strong work. Under the leadership of former QEP Director Dr. Eric Branscome and Assistant Director Dr. Deborah Scaggs, our university developed and launched Foundations for Your Future. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), our institutional accreditor, accepted the plan in December 2024. As many of you know, the plan was both audacious and timely. It focused on career preparedness from a student's first semester through a capstone experience in the major.

In December 2025, Dr. Branscome moved to a new institution. By then, SACSCOC had launched a formal study of the QEP standard as part of a broader review of its accreditation principles. Given the strong work already underway and the importance of career-connected learning, we chose to continue, and the initiative began to take a new shape.

That shift has gained momentum in the months since. SACSCOC, now known as The Commission on Colleges and Universities, has released draft accreditation standards that no longer include the QEP. The draft adds a new standard on alignment with workforce needs, which asks institutions to review their programs and career competencies against workforce needs and to use what they learn to shape the curriculum. Member institutions will vote on the revised standards in December 2026.

Texas is moving in the same direction. House Bill 8 (2023) tied community college funding to student outcomes. Senate Bill 1786 (2025) defined “credentials of value.” Building on both, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has proposed a performance-based funding model for public universities that rewards career-ready outcomes. The Legislature will take up that proposal in January 2027.



My Why (Continued)

Rather than slowing us down, these signals give us a chance to reimagine how we prepare students for life after graduation. They also add weight to our purpose.

You may have noticed one visible result of these changes. My office has been renamed **Career Connected Learning (CCL)** to reflect our emphasis on course-embedded, career-relevant learning. Foundations for Your Future remains the student-facing name. I believe this name says what we do more clearly than the QEP acronym alone: we help students connect their academic experiences, interests, and passions to meaningful careers.

For those who know me as a Professor in Curriculum & Instruction, you know that my passion is reading and literacy. For several years I have shared with students the impact that reading has on one's knowledge, self-identity development, empathy building, and the development of a life-long love of learning. However, I recognize that I have not shared with learners how reading and literacy is featured in careers outside of teaching. I could have mentioned career possibilities such as a curriculum and literacy program developer; public, school, or academic librarian; children's literature specialist; or even careers within communication and creative industries. If I had shared all this information, my previous students would have been better prepared to look for a career outside of teaching that would connect with their personal passions.

So Now What?

As director of Career Connected Learning (CCL), my vision is reminding instructors that they are pivotal in helping learners identify employment outcomes in the fields of their expertise. Our university instructors provide the link to all students, and career connected learning should be an intentional and meaningful part of that connection.

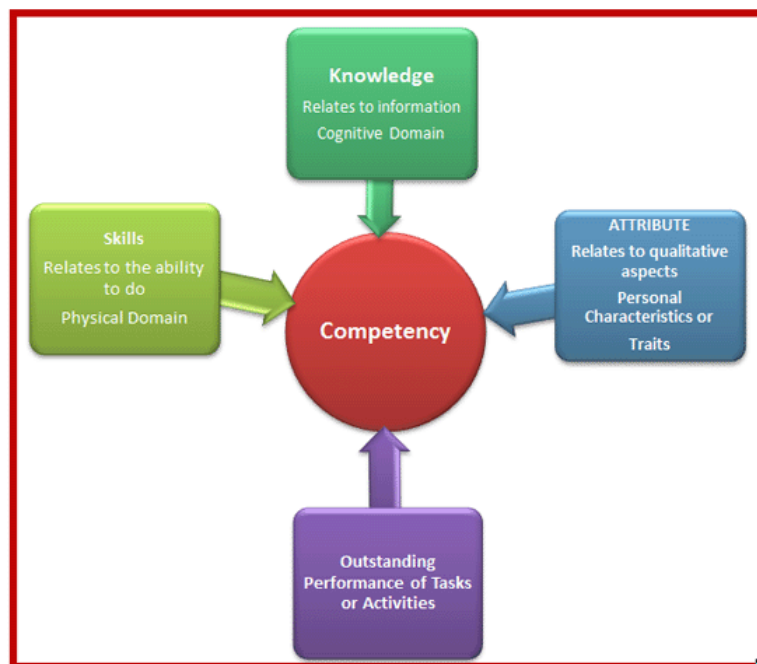
(Continued on Page 4).

So Now What? (Continued)

The most effective way for instructors to provide a link is to not consider it a one-time task. It is a series of engagements, experiential learning opportunities, and internships possibilities in various fields. As students are participating in these many experiences, they are also gaining a perspective of the competencies that have been found to be instrumental to employers in the workforce.

What is a competency?

In higher education, terminology transforms into various meanings. Words and phrases like “ecosystem”, “bandwidth”, and “connecting all the way through” are being included more often in conversations. One other term that I use, and will continue to say, is competency or competencies. **A competency is the combination of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that allows a person to perform a specific task or job role successfully and efficiently.** Reading comprehension is a competency. Problem solving is a competency.



Source: <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/what-are-competencies.htm>



What is a competency? (Continued)

Competencies are much more than skills that students must understand. Students need to establish agency with these terms as part of their mastery of the domains of knowledge and action they signify.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) have compiled a list of essential competencies based on research and studies looking specifically at skills employers want their new employees to have knowledge of on day one in the workplace: Career and self-development, Professionalism, Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, Teamwork, and Technology.

Career and Self-
Development

Professionalism

Critical Thinking

Communication

Collaboration

Teamwork

Technology



What is a competency? (Continued)

My goal is for every student at East Texas A&M University to develop proficiency in the NACE Career Readiness Competencies through integrated coursework, experiential learning opportunities, and meaningful internship experiences. Strategic Progress Report.

How: The Freshman Year Challenge

At ETAMU, all students at the freshman level must complete one of two core classes: CID 1300, The Student and the University, or HUM 2301, The Human Experience. These courses provide introductory information for full-time first-year students and showcase the necessary information about being a good citizen at the university. One objective of both courses is to initiate student career preparedness as an integrated path of their academic preparedness. Due to the importance of this objective, beginning this Fall, all first-year students are exposed to three NACE competencies (career and self-development, professionalism, and critical thinking). Very few learners can become proficient in their understanding of competencies with one introduction, which is why I will be working with departments to translate and reinforce these competencies within coursework beyond the first of the year.

Establishing a BASELINE Assessment

One of the challenges is understanding how to test ways to fulfill our promise to prepare students not just for careers but for their lives as citizens, neighbors, and partners. The goal is for them thrive not just survive because of their ETAMU degree. The best place to begin is through data collection and analysis of where they are situated. The two freshman introductory courses are the best option in obtaining data about the first three NACE competencies (career and self-development, professionalism, and critical thinking). Students are asked to provide a reflection for all three of these competencies, at the beginning of the semester (Pre Assessment), and then again at the end of the semester (Post Assessment). The data collected from these reflections, will help determine what actions and interventions are needed moving forward.

Establishing a BASELINE Assessment (Continued)

Fall 2026 is the first semester that we have invited instructors to have freshmen students participate in establishing a baseline score of their knowledge of career and self-development, professionalism, and critical thinking. Current number of students able to participate:

Total CID 1300 Students:	369
Total HUM 2301 Students:	325

Partner Spotlights

Thank you to the two partners that have helped spread the word about Career Connected Learning—

CCL Leadership Team

Mr. Samuel Bachert, Mr. Arthur Lumzy, Dr. Mary Rosene, and Dr. Vanessa Quinn

The CCL Leadership team has helped me brainstorm and develop ways to spread the word about our new name (used to be QEP) as well as develop more meaningful ways to collect data.

CCL Committee

Dr. Beth Bailey, Ms. Jacinta Dyck, Dr. Michael Holderer, Dr. Whitney Figland, Dr. Mack Hines, Mr. Noah Kramer, Mr. Arthur Lumzy, Dr. Mark Moreno, Dr. Mary Rosene, Dr. Vanessa Quinn, and Dr. Josh Thompson

The CCL Committee has been instrumental in doing the actual work of analyzing data and engaging both faculty and students in considering career preparedness.



Upcoming Events



Professor for a Day | October 19–30

I'm excited to visit your classroom as part of Professor for a Day!

Please let me know if you would like me to join your class and help students complete Competency Pre-Reflections. While I am most eager to support CID 1300 and HUM 2301 professors, I can also help implement this starting piece in your class.

During the visit, I'll lead a brief, engaging discussion on the importance of reflection and guide students through three key competency areas.

- **Career and Self-Development** – Recognizing strengths, setting goals, and planning for future growth.
- **Professionalism** – Reflecting on workplace expectations, responsibility, and professional behaviors.
- **Critical Thinking** – Exploring how to analyze information, solve problems, and make thoughtful decisions.

These pre-reflections give students an opportunity to assess where they are today and begin thinking about how they can continue to grow personally, academically, and professionally. I look forward to visiting your class and helping students get started on their reflection journey!



Upcoming Events (Continued)

Faculty Readers Initiative | Join Us!

Help us support first-year student success by becoming a **Faculty Reader**!

Faculty Readers will play an important role in evaluating more than **4,100 reflections written by first-year students**, helping us better understand students' growth and development across key competencies.

What's involved?

- **1-Hour Introduction Meeting:** Learn about the initiative, expectations, and evaluation process.
- **1-Hour Norming Meeting:** Collaborate with fellow faculty readers to ensure consistency in evaluating reflections.
- **10 Hours of Evaluation & Reporting:** Review student reflections and submit evaluation results.

Compensation: \$500 (per semester)

The number of Faculty Readers selected will depend on the number of reflections available for evaluation. Preference will be given to instructors teaching the associated courses, but **all interested faculty are encouraged to apply!**

Ready to make an impact on student learning and development?

Apply here by November 20:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/01a141a6565d7087807bfcc5fc6f21c>

Thank you for helping us support our students' growth, learning, and future success!



**CAREER
CONNECTED
LEARNING**

Thank You & Call to Action

The emphasis of this newsletter has been about the freshman class and creating their baseline of three competencies. However, my goal is having all levels of students (sophomores, juniors, and seniors too) engage in coursework that integrates the NACE competencies, participate in experiential learning, and have more opportunities to engage in internships and co-ops!

Please take some focused time to view your syllabi and assignments. Are you already engaging in any of these experiences? Let me know, and I will make sure they are recognized and capitalized on.

Happy Exploring!

Tami

