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**DEVELOPING INITIATIVES TO CREATE COMPETENCY AWARENESS
IN INTERDISCIPLINARY ONLINE AND BLENDED GENERAL
EDUCATION PROGRAMS****Abstract:**

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University is ranked #2 among 344 universities offering online bachelor's degree programs in U.S. News & World Report's 2020 ranking and has been in the top 5 in the rankings for 7 straight years. The College of Arts and Sciences-Worldwide (COAS) is predominantly the provider of the interdisciplinary general education component of all degree programs. The COAS, working with representatives from other colleges and the Daytona Beach and Prescott Campuses, developed a set of interdisciplinary General Education Competencies aligned with what university graduates and employers indicated are the most important skills necessary to be successful post-graduation. The goal of the University is to graduate students who are both technically qualified and prepared to be successful post-graduation based upon demonstrating the attainment of general education competencies throughout their academic career. Despite the careful construction of a competency-based General Education program, the disciplinary diversity inherent in these requirements often prevents students from seeing these courses as a coherent program. Instead, many view them as a mere "checklist" of classes to complete before moving into their majors. To address these concerns, ERAU has developed several exciting initiatives to create an awareness both of the competencies themselves and how these skills translate into their majors, their workplaces and their lives.

First, we will discuss the creation of a University General Education Program Coordinator position, a reality that represents a culture shift at Embry-Riddle Worldwide, from the perception that interdisciplinary general education classes were a disconnected series of courses housed in truly independent departments to one where interdisciplinary collaboration is encouraged to fully demonstrate the inter-relatedness of these courses and the higher-order thinking skills that they reinforce. Next, this evolution of the University General Education Program now allows students to develop an electronic portfolio demonstrating they not only have developed competency-based skills but also have evidence to show they applied those skills within their degree program and can translate them into the workforce. Students will be able to self-select artifacts that demonstrate competency awareness and will be able to discuss their relevance in self-reflection pieces. Finally, we have developed an exciting interdisciplinary program called Humanistic STEM to encourage students to integrate ideas and issues from diverse academic disciplines in order to expand their capacity for analysis and critical thinking. They will learn the language and methodologies commonly associated with these various disciplines, both to understand their commonalities and also to appreciate their differences.

Keywords:

interdisciplinary, general education, online and blended, competency-based