Developing Mastery: Building a Tool for Tracking Progress on Professional Competencies in the MLS Program

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ABSTRACT

Over the course of their grant-funded program (**Transforming Libraries into Community Anchors in Rural Texas, or TLCART**), 20 students in small, rural Texas communities will earn library degrees at the TWU School of Library and Information Studies (TWU SLIS) while learning to become **facilitators and partners of community change**.

To encourage individual ownership of career growth, we created a professional competencies tracker based on the American Library Association Competencies, with competencies unique to the TLCART Program.

Students self-evaluate, identifying areas of desired growth at the end of each semester in the two-year program. In the process, each will take responsibility for their future as lifelong learners, identifying specific needs and methods for development.

This pilot effort is being tested with the TLCART cohort to assess its usability for the overall Master's program in Library Science.

OBJECTIVES

Develop a tool that would allow students in the TLCART scholarship program to track their mastery of the competencies as they make their way through the MLS program. This tool would enable the students to

- Learn how to accurately assess their growing skills
- Track progress toward goals in the MLS/TLCART program
- Determine skills critical for their chosen field
- Create a plan for continuing education once finished with the MLS program
- Accurately represent their skills and knowledge when applying for jobs

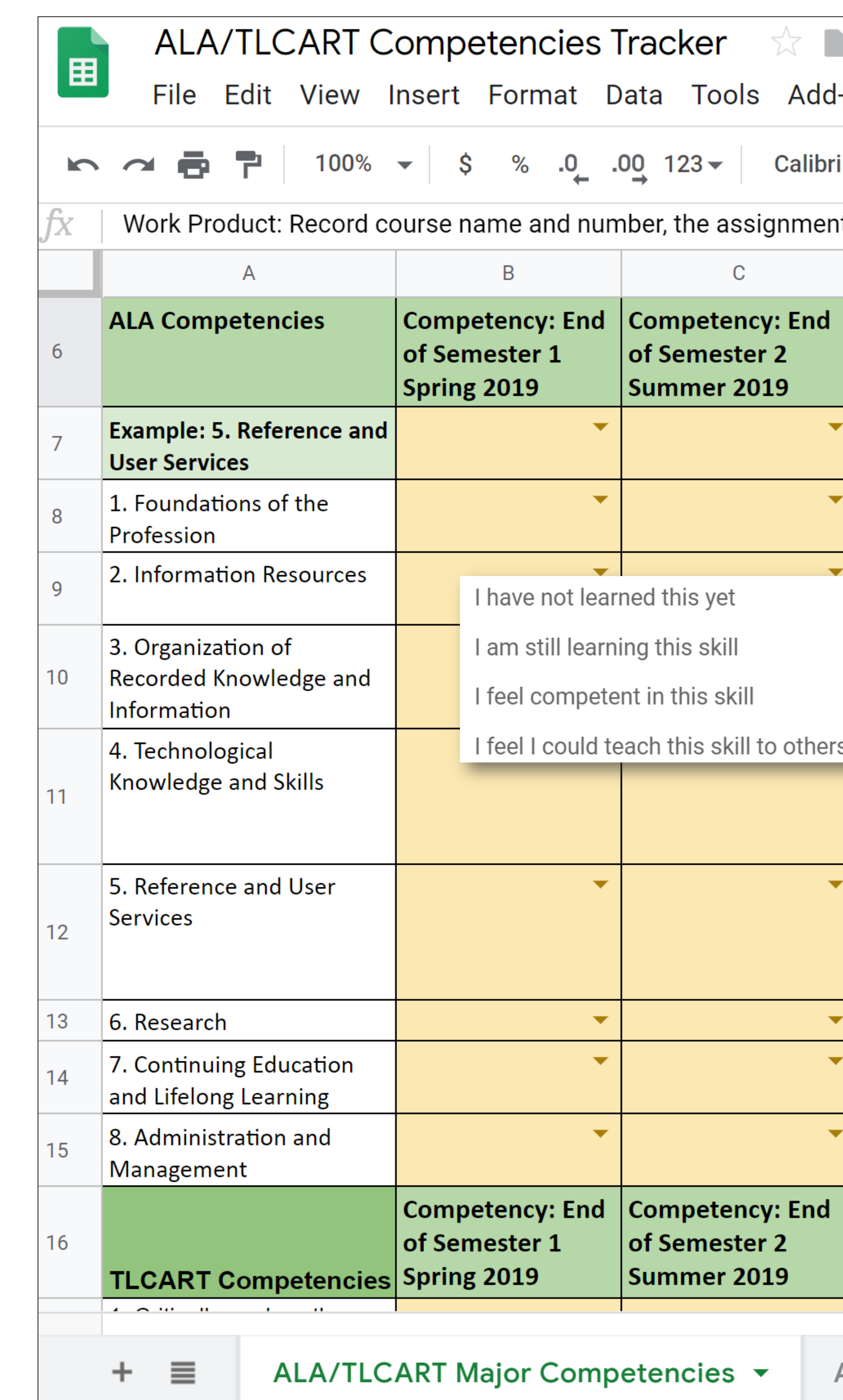**Team goal:** develop a way of tracking progress that is

- **Grounded in professional competencies** as established by the ALA, but pared down to measurable goals
- **Focused on strengths rather than deficiencies**
- Trackable for grant reporting purposes
- **Flexible** enough that all TLCART students would be able to find value in using it
- **Shareable** between students and faculty

METHODS

1. Determine the best format to present this competency tracker to the students. **Google Sheets** was decided upon since the spreadsheet format is readily understandable by most students and Google Drive provides an easy way for students to share real-time information with faculty.

2. Write the competencies in a way that felt **understandable and manageable** to a new MLS student. This required several months of reviewing how competencies have been used effectively by other institutions and then working together to revise and refine the language to be used in the MLS program tracker.

3. Ensure that the competencies included would be meaningful both academically and professionally.

4. Determine the best way to have students assess their skills, ultimately deciding on a method where the students rate the competencies using a drop-down menu:

   - I have not learned this skill yet
   - I am still learning this skill
   - I feel competent in this skill
   - I could teach this skill to others

CONCLUSIONS

ALA / TLCART Competencies Tracker

Elements of the Tracker:

- Link to ALA Competencies Statement
- Explanations and examples for use
- Tabs for Sub-competencies
- Drop-down menu for setting priorities
- Section for methods of continuing education, a required component of the TWU SLIS Final Exam Portfolio.