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Linking Learning and Work

MORE THAN JUST A JOB SEARCH
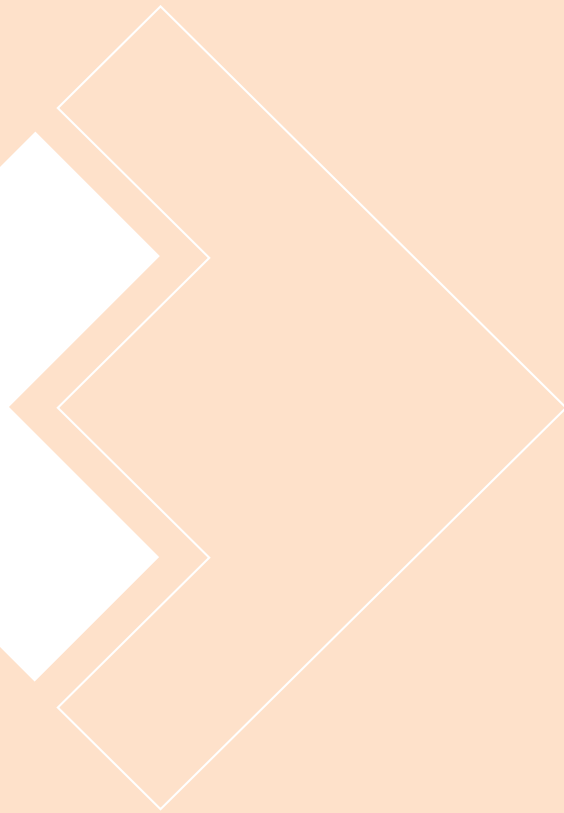
Relevant, Intentional, and Accessible Career Services for Today's Student (and Returning Adults)

July 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Colleges and universities are recognizing the need to reimagine their approach to career services support. The old career services model is a reactive one, with career centers that students can seek out if they want to and with services typically including assistance with job searches, resume review, and interview preparation. But today, students face a challenging labor market: new occupations are appearing that did not exist five years ago, other job categories are disappearing, and college graduates require strategies to communicate their skills and competencies to prospective employers. In addition, relevant, intentional, and accessible career services and programs are important for assisting students with career exploration and preparing them for their postgraduation employment.

This report explores how colleges and universities are redesigning services to help students with career exploration and preparation. The approaches they are using fall within six overarching themes:

Creating a career services culture to support early, proactive, and continuous student engagement in career exploration and preparation. Colleges are integrating career activities into the entire student experience by collaborating across the organization and aligning career services with the alumni office.

Building career activities into the curriculum. Institutions are incorporating career exploration and career preparation into the curriculum, and they are positioning career exploration and development as an intentional learning outcome. In this way, schools are ensuring that students are engaged in the career process throughout their studies.

Focusing on building "soft," transferable skills and career search skills. Colleges recognize that employers want their new employees to be prepared for the workplace in terms of practical/technical skills as well as "soft," transferable skills like communication and critical thinking. Institutions are, therefore, building this skills training into their overall career services approaches.

Incorporating data-driven career exploration. In this age of rapid change in our economy, career exploration can no longer be solely based on student interests or "dream jobs." Instead, career options need to be understood within the context of larger economic outlooks for specific industries and occupations. Some colleges are incorporating a focus on labor market data into student career exploration and planning.

Leveraging strong employer partnerships. Connections with employers expand opportunities for students in terms of professional development and experiential learning while ensuring that graduates are meeting the demands of the workplace, and some institutions are forging alliances to facilitate student-employer relationships.

Enhancing technology-driven career services tools. In an era in which technology affects so many areas of our lives, some schools are expanding the ability of career centers to provide services to online/remote students, target services according to a student's particular stage of career preparation, and connect with employers and professional networks.

These emerging practices benefit the adult learner by removing barriers to engagement with and access to ongoing career services and support and by taking into account their unique needs and previous work experience. As the labor market continues to evolve, it will become even more important for institutions to invest in new approaches to career services that facilitate the transition from learning to work.
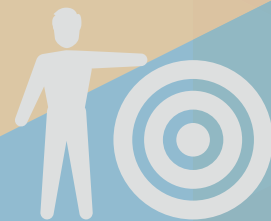
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Career services in higher education are ostensibly designed to facilitate the transition from education to work. The typical model for career services in recent decades includes helping students identify their specific career interests, providing job fairs and networking events with employers, assisting students create resumes, and preparing students for interviews with employers (Carlson, 2017). These services may have been useful for some students in the past, but recent polling suggests that students may no longer perceive their value and that students may not even be aware that these services exist. A survey by the Strada Educational Network and Gallup, for example, found that nearly 4 in 10 students have never visited their college's career office or used its resources (2017).

The non-use of career services by college students and the lack of its perceived value in the educational experience is surprising at a time when the labor market is experiencing dramatic changes. Entire job categories are disappearing, and college graduates will need new kinds of strategies to promote their skills and capabilities to prospective employers. Today's employers are on record questioning whether colleges and universities are doing enough to prepare graduates for the changing demands of the workforce. Businesses are also increasingly seeking graduates who have both hard skills (deep knowledge within a specific industry or field) and soft skills (e.g., critical thinking, communication, and cultural awareness) (Carlson, 2017).

More than ever, college students would benefit from having a more robust set of experiences, services, and supports to help them navigate the labor market and prepare for the changing world of work. Additionally, today's undergraduate population includes many adults who already have a lot of work experience and, therefore, may require a different kind of approach to career guidance and assistance.

This reimagining of career services is particularly necessary at a time when one survey found that nearly 6 in 10 postsecondary students say that their main reason for choosing to go to college is to obtain a good job or career (Strada Education Network and Gallup, 2018), and another survey found that 71% of adults who are planning to pursue a degree or certificate are doing so to change their careers (44%) or get ahead in their current careers (27%) (Silliman & Schleifer, 2018). The cost of getting a college degree is high in terms of both time and money, and these students, understandably, expect a return on their investment when they graduate in the form of a well-paying job in the field for which their education has prepared them.

Colleges and universities, meanwhile, are under great pressure to ensure their students' success, with the definition of *success* increasingly including well-paying employment in the student's field. Recent research indicates that such outcomes are important not just in the short term but also in the long term: students who are underemployed right after graduation are much more likely to remain underemployed even after 10 or more years (Burning Glass Technologies & Strada Institute for the Future of Work, 2018).

The good news is that many postsecondary institutions are taking steps to ensure that their degree and credential programs are preparing students for the world of work — building in content that focuses on the competencies demanded by industries and employers. In addition, relevant, intentional, and accessible career services and programs are also important in assisting students with career exploration and preparing them for their postgraduation employment.

This report examines the need for a new approach to career services and presents several ways in which colleges are redesigning these services to help students with career exploration and preparation. The examples described, identified through interviews with experts and from existing literature on this topic, are snapshots of some of the new thinking that is emerging at these institutions. Whenever possible, the report addresses how or whether these new approaches take into account the specific needs and circumstances of the adult learner.

Career services centers can trace their roots back to "placement offices" in higher education, particularly following the Great Depression when graduates required help accessing employment in specific industries (Carlson, 2017). Following the end of World War II, the booming economy created a high demand for workers that was met, in part, by the surge in college enrollment from returning veterans taking advantage of the GI Bill. Career services offices started to emerge on campuses with the goal of matching veterans to jobs based on their skills and interests (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Pope, 2000).

By the 1970s and 1980s, career services shifted to a different model that provided career counseling and job search assistance but assumed that students would own the process and their overall career development (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Pope, 2000). The 1990s and 2000s, meanwhile, saw greater engagement with employers through recruiting and networking activities as well as transformation in the kinds of tools available like the Internet and recruiting software (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Pope, 2000).

Today, the necessity for a different approach to career services is decidedly shaped by our times. Because of the changing workplace, changing employer demands, and the changing demographics of the student population, career services programs must be relevant, intentional, and accessible.

Relevant. Career services programs should be designed around the needs of both employers and students. Students require guidance to understand today's labor market, its changing career pathways, and the skills that employers expect. Also, career services must be able to respond to the requirements of different types of students. Some students will need assistance accessing entry-level employment for the first time, some will come to college as adults wanting to advance in their careers, and other returning adults will aspire to reposition themselves in a new career.

Intentional. Career services staff should seek out and bring in students, rather than waiting for students to ask for help. Career services should be integrated throughout the institution to ensure that professional development and job placement are not afterthoughts or left to the last minute, and students must start engaging with career-related activities early in their studies. Students cannot afford to wait until right before graduation to start thinking about postcollege employment.

Accessible. Career services should be designed to fit the needs of today's students who work full-time, have care-giving responsibilities, or who otherwise cannot participate in on-campus events and programs. Someone working full time while pursuing a degree, or participating in an online program, may not be able to come to office hours or recruitment events scheduled during the day. These types of students may also not be able to participate in a traditional internship, even though they would benefit from experiential learning opportunities.

KEEPING THE ADULT LEARNER'S NEEDS IN MIND

Undergraduate students today are not all 18- to 22-year-olds attending class full time and living on campus. According to Lumina Foundation, that vision of a college student pertains to only one-third of the college population. The reality is that 38% of undergraduates are adults age 25 or older, 40% attend part time, and 75% are commuting to class while juggling family and work responsibilities (Lumina Foundation, 2015).

Given the reality of today's student, most institutions have not done enough to address the needs of adult students and other working learners in terms of their academic experience. Some of the basic changes required include expanded course scheduling, messaging and outreach that acknowledge the challenges of the working adult learner, and accessibility of prior learning assessment (PLA). In addition, career services must to be designed in a way to serve this new learner better.

Working learners need expanded service availability. Career centers will not serve this student population if the centers are primarily physical, place-based spaces (on-campus offices) that are only available to students during daytime hours Monday through Friday. Adult students and other working learners are not likely to be on campus during traditional office hours, and they may find it difficult to utilize services on campus at all. Career services for the adult learner need to be available after hours and virtually.

Students who work full time (both adults and younger students) may not be good candidates for traditional internship opportunities. Reforms of career services that emphasize the importance of experiential learning are welcome ones, but they won't benefit the working adult student if experiential learning is available primarily through internships. Many adult students enrolling in college are already working full time and cannot afford to cut back their hours or quit their jobs to take advantage of internship opportunities. Other strategies for incorporating experiential and work-based learning are critical for serving this population.

The adult learner may — or may not — be looking for entry-level employment. Finally, career services for 18- to 22-year-olds presume that the student is relatively inexperienced and will be seeking entry-level employment. Some older students may also be seeking entry-level employment, but many others will have a lot of work experience and are returning to undergraduate study for career advancement or for a career change. The types of services that this more experienced student may need will be very different compared to entry-level job placement. Career services at postsecondary institutions must be able to serve this kind of student as well, which requires establishing very different kinds of relationships with prospective employers.

EMERGING THEMES IN THE REIMAGINING OF CAREER SERVICES

To be more relevant, intentional, and accessible, institutions have started to reinvent career services to better assist their students. The various emerging approaches can be organized into six overarching themes:

- Creating a career services culture to support early, proactive, and continuous student engagement in career exploration and preparation;
- Building career activities into the curriculum;
- Focusing on building "soft," transferable skills and career search skills;
- Incorporating data-driven career exploration;
- Leveraging strong employer partnerships; and
- Enhancing use of technology-driven career services tools.

With these various approaches, colleges are creating a customized experience that connects students to resources and support based on their career needs and expectations.

Creating a Career Services Culture to Support Early, Proactive, and Continuous Student Engagement for Career Exploration and Preparation

One of the biggest changes in career services has resulted from recognizing that career exploration and preparation should not be optional for the student, and those activities should also not be left to the last minute. Key strategies for building this culture include starting career exploration early, collaborating across the institution, and aligning career services with alumni services. As part of all of these strategies, the institution engages intensely with employers.

- **Starting an extended process of career exploration and planning activities early**

in students' academic journeys. Colleges wanting to help students prepare for postcollege employment are taking steps to start the process early, with additional touchpoints throughout their studies. An early start allows students sufficient time to learn about various career options and work on developing important professional skills (Selingo, 2017). Colleges can incorporate outreach strategies so students learn about these opportunities and are encouraged to engage with them well before their final semester.

At **Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU)**, the online career services department has developed two distinct programs to address student needs at different stages. The first program, Career Connections, targets students referred to them by academic advisors at the start of their academic studies. The university uses an early intervention strategy that emphasizes providing ongoing career-specific programming, including professional workshops,

"This is not a passive approach. We don't wait for students to come to us. We pick up the phone."

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skills-training webinars, career exploration, and other career services. The second program, Ready 2 Refer, targets students nearing the completion of their studies to help them start the job search process. The program includes career exploration as well as assistance with resume preparation and other activities in the job search and interviewing processes. When students have found employment, the career advisors log the information into their customer relationship management system, which aids in interpreting appropriate strategies that can assist the next student. The SNHU career services approach is focused on how to recruit more students to engage with the programs. One staff member noted, "This is not a passive approach. We don't wait for students to come to us. We pick up the phone." The goal is to have the career services staff dedicated to outreach, and the strategy seems to be working. According to SNHU, the percentage of students who did not know the career services center existed dropped from 75% to 25% in just a few years.

Sinclair Community College has created "Career Communities" for six different career clusters, including business and information technology, creative arts, health sciences, law and public safety, liberal arts and social sciences, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). Through various Career Community sponsored events, students can explore career options, identify strengths and weaknesses, meet with career and academic advisors, learn about various programs, and research career fields within their respective communities.

- **Collaborating across the institution so that career-related activities are everyone's responsibility.** Institutions that have developed a culture around career exploration and preparation are places where everyone who engages with students has an important role to play. As one staff member notes, "Faculty and staff play a crucial part in career development and ensuring that the student is confident entering the workplace." At some institutions, institutional leadership has given high status to career services

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by assigning the directors senior-level titles and having them report directly to the president, vice president, or provost (Carlson, 2017; Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). At other institutions, faculty, admissions counselors, and the registrar's office are responsible for identifying students who need assistance with their career planning. Faculty and staff can be trained to have initial discussions with students to articulate their career goals and then refer them to career services staff for additional support. Career services can also work with student organizations to host career events and partner with other departments to create targeted engagement programming for special populations, such as veterans and students with disabilities (Gray, 2016b).

At **Florida State University**, a liaison from the career services center is assigned to — and often embedded in — each academic college to work closely with faculty and staff. Together, they develop career-related programming, including classroom presentations, professional networking and developments events, and industry panels. Career liaisons guest lecture in classes and also teach a Career Development and Planning course that helps students with resume writing, interview techniques, and career exploration research. The course has actually been taught for more than 40 years and was designed using cognitive information processing theory. Institutional representatives report that student outcomes from taking the course include greater college satisfaction, retention, and confidence in career decision-making.

Brandman University, meanwhile, has integrated career-related discussions into the academic advising process. Students can expect to have conversations about possible careers and start

mapping out a plan to reach milestones the moment they first engage with an academic advisor. In this way, the institution's many online students have a single point of contact rather than having to seek out two sets of services. For students who are undecided or need more attention, academic advisors can refer them to the career services team.

Unique to the Career Community structure at **Sinclair Community College** is cross-functional representation on the steering committees from both academic and student-facing departments, including faculty, advisors, librarians, and student support personnel. The structure of these committees fosters a sense of shared responsibility among staff and faculty to assist students in solidifying career goals as early as possible.

At **University of North Carolina Charlotte** (UNC Charlotte), every experience is viewed as an opportunity for students to grow and develop their skills and competencies. The career center has developed and launched the My Success Story online portal, which gives students the ability to describe the competencies and skills that they acquired through various academic experiences — not just coursework but also clubs and other extra-curricular activities. The portal utilizes a competency framework developed by the National Association of Colleges and Employers

(NACE) so that students and faculty can start to translate the academic experience into language that employers understand and value. The center staff is working closely with faculty, employers, and leaders from student organizations to define the competencies underlying the platform. The career center is also working with faculty to consider ways of incorporating assignments into their coursework that encourage student engagement in the portal.

- **Aligning career services with the alumni office.** Another strategy to promote a career services culture is to create close collaboration between career services and alumni offices. This integration can support three distinct goals: emphasizing career services as a lifelong service to alumni, and encouraging alumni to help connect newer graduates to the labor market, and engaging alumni for fundraising purposes (Carlson, 2017). Institutions recognize that graduates will need ongoing career support and have implemented lifelong-learning platforms and opportunities that alumni can gain access to throughout their careers. In addition, the work with students on their career planning can be seen as the first step in (future) alumni engagement (Selingo, 2017).

University of Maryland University College (UMUC) merged its career services unit with alumni relations to "leverage the synergy between the two groups" (Prineas, Blume, &

Sandoval, 2017, p. 25). The merger combined key resources, including communications, the website, and special events. At UMUC, alumni and students have unlimited access to professional development webinars, career tools designed for experienced professionals, and access to artificial intelligence (AI) tools that provide immediate assistance with resumes and interview performance feedback. The career services staff also see the alumni as a way to expand students' network of employed professionals.

Building Career Activities into the Curriculum

Another approach to improving college career services is to build career activities into the curriculum so that it is fully integrated into the student's academic experience rather than being an add-on service. For example, career centers have trained faculty and staff to include career exploration through course discussions, assignments, one-on-one meetings, and the use of an exclusive online page within the course shell highlighting different career-related resources. Other institutions have focused on career planning and development through the use of career maps and establishing professional competency requirements (Gray, 2016c).

SUNY-Empire State College, for example, is primarily focused on the adult learner, and its model includes student-designed degrees. There is, however, an educational planning course that is required of all students. This course includes career exploration, for which students must research the field around which they will be designing their degrees, including an examination of labor market data and interviews with professionals in the field.

At **Brandman University**, the career services staff works closely with curriculum committees to redesign graduation requirements to include career-related activities and milestones. Faculty have designed a career-management course specifically designed to help students with career navigation and advancement. Faculty also use resources from the career services office for their course material ensuring consistent messaging. In addition, several of Brandman's degree programs now require students to build a professional career portfolio using their online CareerLink platform. The portfolio ensures students are able to articulate what they are learning in the classroom, link it to their career goals, and provide evidence of their skills and knowledge.

California Baptist University's career services center works closely with faculty curriculum committees to incorporate career center services and career-based learning activities into course learning objectives specifically for the institution's online students. These activities and services have included an instructor having students meet with a career advisor as a course requirement, career and skills assessments, development of a career portfolio to provide employers details about skills and experiences, and other career-focused assignments. In this way, career services are integrated into the entire academic experience for online students.

Southern New Hampshire University's Career Connections is also working to incorporate career planning into the curriculum. For example, career resources are embedded into at least three human resources courses: one is focused on career exploration, one is on building experience in human resources, and one is designed to help students showcase their experience.

Focusing on Building "Soft," Transferrable Skills and Career Search Skills

Colleges and universities are also shifting towards approaches that focus on career services centers serving as hubs for talent development. Institutions are providing workshops and training to develop students' skills and abilities. One area of focus is on job search skills, such as having students develop elevator pitches to describe their abilities and talents, conveying confidence during networking and professional events, and drafting resumes and cover letters letters (Carlson, 2017; Hanover Research, 2014). Other areas of focus

> *"If a recent graduate can't articulate their skills, then the likelihood of them getting that job is low."*

have included the articulation of existing skills. "If a recent graduate can't articulate their skills," one career services staff member notes, "then the likelihood of them getting that job is low." There is also an emphasis on developing the "soft," transferrable skills — like critical thinking and communication — that employers say are of critical importance.

Sinclair Community College offers services that focus on developing skills in areas like interpersonal communication, customer service, and cultural awareness. This skill development is in addition to the technical skills training that is acquired in other courses (such as technical writing proficiency taught in a business and information technology course).

Southern New Hampshire University hosts regional and virtual professional development workshops that help students build competencies like conflict management, presentation skills, and project management.

At the **University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) Extension**, the career services department works to provide skill building for the institution's online students through Toastmasters, which provides workshops and training on enhancing their communication and leadership abilities.

Incorporating Data-driven Career Exploration

At a time when the economy is rapidly changing and entire job categories are transformed or becoming obsolete, career exploration needs to go beyond *What Color Is My Parachute?* and present students with some hard truths about future career pathways. Institutions are wise to take labor market trends and outlooks into

account in the design and offering of degree programs. In addition, some career services programs are making sure that student career exploration includes research on labor market data that provides insight into which career pathways are promising — versus which pathways may entail some financial or employment struggles. Career services programs can also leverage labor market data to understand how best to connect graduates with local employment opportunities.

- **Data-driven career exploration.** Career exploration is more than just determining a student's interest in a particular career path. Colleges are also encouraging students to understand what the economic outlook is for various career options. **Kirkwood Community College** in Iowa, for example, leads students through five career exploration steps. After an examination of their of strengths, skills, and interests, students are instructed to do career research using labor market information, informational interviews, and other resources (*http://www.kirkwood.edu/site/index.php?p=37421*). In Ohio, **Miami University's** Center for Career Exploration and Success invites students to research current labor market trends using data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Georgetown University's Center for Education and the Workforce, The Conference Board, and other organizations (*http://miamioh.edu/emss/offices/career-services/faculty-staff/career-services-research/index.html*).

- **Data analysis to identify immediate employment opportunities. UMUC** has focused on new ways to use data to identify alternative employment pathways as well as job openings in specific geographic areas of the country. For example, for a new cybersecurity program, career services staff used data from EMSI and Burning Glass to understand the range of entry-level and mid-level jobs in cybersecurity and which employers were hiring. Then, career services can match employers to students and alumni with the requisite skills (and security clearances, where applicable) by geographic location. (EMSI and CAEL are both part of the Strada Education Network.)

Leveraging strong *Employer Partnerships*

A reimagined and revitalized approach to career services also involves strengthening employer partnerships and engaging employers beyond recruitment events and job postings. Strong partnerships can lead to employers being involved in meaningful ways, such as identifying critical industry competencies, curriculum development, assessment design, serving as adjunct faculty, and providing equipment or other materials. Colleges and universities can further leverage those partnerships to create opportunities for experiential learning options or to give students access to employers to gain additional insights about their target occupations and careers. Institutions that serve online students may need to think strategically about how to maximize their efforts to connect their students with employers in the students' own communities.

- **Expanding opportunities for experiential learning.** Putting learning into practice through experiential learning opportunities can be an important way to learn about a target occupation while also developing some skills that can

> *Institutions with a high proportion of adult, working, or online students have implemented alternatives to the traditional internship models to build in experiential learning in other ways.*

make a student more attractive to prospective employers. That is why apprenticeship models have great appeal and are being developed for occupations beyond just the trades. There are also "work-colleges," such as Berea College (KY) and College of the Ozarks (MO), where students are expected to balance their studies with work experiences and service. Other types

THE CO-LOCATION MODEL: A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS

Community colleges can play an important role in local workforce development and may offer a wide array of programs and services to prepare adults for jobs. Some have formed partnerships with their local workforce development boards in a co-location model.

For example, in Seattle, the state workforce agency **WorkSource** has an affiliate office located onsite at **South Seattle Community College**. There, the WorkSource affiliate serves as the career center for students as well as for jobseekers from the community. WorkSource affiliate staff engages with students during their orientation, during the first semesters, or through referrals from faculty or staff. Affiliates use labor market data to assist students in exploring careers in the local community; there is also an online tutorial video on how to use and interpret labor market data when exploring career options.

Students can also participate in a range of workshops on topics including soft skills development, financial planning, and industry-specific discussions. The WorkSource affiliates also work closely with faculty and staff to support the development of curricula that are based on industry standards and include career-related discussions, and they connect students and jobseekers from the community to paid internships.

The WorkSource affiliate at South Seattle also offers other supports, such as helping students find childcare, apply for public benefits, and do financial planning. As one staff member notes, "We understand that an adult student cannot focus on career development or finding a job if they don't know who is going to watch their children or if they are worried about paying bills."

of experiential learning opportunities can also be deployed. Some institutions have focused on developing experiential learning opportunities in the curriculum, while others provide opportunities for internships and job shadowing in target industries. Institutions with a high proportion of adult, working, or online students have implemented alternatives to the traditional internship models to incorporate experiential learning in other ways.

Florida State University promotes a wide range of activities for students to gain real-world experience to boost professional contacts, build their career portfolios, refine their career goals, acquire industry-specific language, and discover new industry trends. The experiential learning activities include part-time jobs, internships, job shadowing, service learning, research, co-ops, clinical experience, projects, and field work. Students participating in a semester-long experience have the option of participating in the Experiential Certificate Program in which they set intentional learning goals and participate in a structured process for reflection and feedback on workplace learning, performance, and accomplishments. Students also have the option of having their experiential learning

recognized on their transcript if they engaged in these activities to articulate and document what they have learned from their experience. These programs are particularly useful for working adult students since they are permitted to use their current workplaces as the experiential learning activity provided that their current work is in their career field of interest.

Through the Center for Teaching and Learning, **Sinclair Community College** offers service learning opportunities for students to experience learning in the real world by exploring professions, developing new skills, networking for future job opportunities, and enhancing self-confidence. Additionally, students who are already employed can sometimes use their current employer as internship placements with the requirement that they perform duties that are substantially different from their current responsibilities.

Calhoun Community College offers cooperative education (co-op) as a way for students to gain experience in a job directly related to their career goals. The co-op program combines the academic studies at the college with related work experience; students work a minimum of 20 hours per week in jobs directly related to their academic majors while attending school part time or full time (Calhoun Community College, 2018). The co-op program at Calhoun has a high success rate of students getting a job directly in their career goals post-completion, with many being employed by their co-op sponsor. However, the 20 hours per week work requirement can present a problem for students who have other financial and family obligations. The college addresses this issue by increasing the number of allowable weekly work hours, extending co-op opportunities to part-time students, and encouraging students to apply for institutional financial aid. Some co-op employers even offer tuition assistance.

Southern New Hampshire University provides online students in health care administration programs to engage in experiential learning. The Health Education and Real-world Training (HEaRT) program is a non-credit online course that gives students the opportunity to have an

internship-type work experience by serving as consultants to major healthcare groups. All of the work can be completed remotely, and students can develop and demonstrate "hard" skills (e.g., interviewing, qualitative research, and data analysis) as well as soft skills (e.g., teamwork, critical thinking, and collaboration). Similarly, **Western Governors University (WGU) Indiana** offers virtual internships in which students work remotely on a specific project identified by an employer. Employers interview internship candidates through video conferencing. Once students are hired, they follow the same framework as a traditional internship, conducting regular check-ins with a supervisor, completing project milestones, and being evaluated by the employer (WGU Indiana) (*https://indiana.wgu. edu/landing/internnet*).

- **Providing opportunities for employer — student engagement for networking and career insights.** In reimagining career services, colleges and universities are also providing ways for employers and students to engage with each other outside of standard job fairs. These innovative measures include employer-led panels and discussions, meet-and-greets, and industry-specific networking events (Gray, 2016a). Such opportunities give students additional insights about their target careers and industries. Institutions are also connecting employers to specific student-led organizations of interest. For example, for employers seeking a racially diverse set of candidates, career services will connect with relevant student organizations, or career services may host reverse career fairs where the student and pre-professional organizations showcase themselves to employers seeking alternative talent pipelines (Gray, 2016a). Other career services offices are centralizing communication, so employers with job opportunities spanning multiple industries will have a single point of contact and can easily connect with students in different degree programs.

Stevenson University's career services center hosts business breakfasts where employers engage with students through interactive activities. These events give students the opportunity to meet and talk less formally with employers while allowing employers another avenue for meeting students who might be good candidates for job opportunities. The university also has the Employer in Residence program where employers can spend several hours with students in specific academic programs to engage with them on a variety of topics, including networking and job search strategies in their industries (*http://www.stevenson.edu/career-success/choosing-your-direction/employers/get-involved-on-campus/*).

Sinclair Community College's Career Communities have hosted special events where employers have provided insights to help decrease the skills gap. For example, local hiring managers within the Supply Chain industry came to the campus to discuss required skills for the industry, employer expectations, and professional/career development opportunities with the intent that students would leave the program with highly employable skills. The Career Communities also host events that allow students to connect with experts working in careers related to their fields of study as well as build career awareness and network with area business employers.

SNHU, meanwhile, hosts TweetChats where students and employers have information question-and-answer sessions and make connections through Twitter.

- **Leveraging national employer networks for online students.** Institutions serving large numbers of online students cannot connect students with employers by bringing the employers to campus for job or career fairs. In addition, it's not possible to provide job fairs in every student's location. **Southern New Hampshire University** has found a compromise to this challenge by providing virtual job fairs as well as in-person job fairs in geographic locations where there is a significant concentration of its online students.

Job search

Enhancing Technology-Driven Career Services Tools

Finally, several of the approaches and models to reinventing career services are leveraging the advances in technology to better assist students in engaging with career-related activities and connecting with employers. Technology allows colleges to offer virtual career services and tools, target outreach to students based on their most recent engagement with career-related activities, and connect in new ways with employers. "In this way, you are able to make sure that every student — especially adult students — can access the full range of career services from the comfort of their home or office," one career services staff member said.

- **Platforms for offering virtual career services and tools.** Many career centers make use of on-line portals and platforms, such as Handshake and Switchboard, to assist with job and internship postings, resume storage, communication with students about career-related events and workshops, and connections to alumni. Some colleges are taking this kind of platform to the next level or are finding other online tools and resources to help their students with career exploration and planning. Institutions are also enlisting gamification strategies, such as online career networks where students earn badges or points for completing a series of career services activities (GradLeaders, 2017).

The **University of Maryland University College** has developed its own online platform where students and alumni have access to an array of career tools and services. Students can not only

Working adult students may need to be able to access the full range of career services from their home or office.

view the latest job openings, but they can also meet virtually with career advisors, participate in live chats and interview preparation for specific employer recruiting events, and be matched with mentors aligned with their career interests. Students and alumni receive immediate resume and interview performance feedback through the use of artificial intelligence tools.

Online students at **SNHU** can attend virtual hiring fairs (as well as the regional ones mentioned above), view video recorded employer information sessions, participate in interactive webinars, and hold virtual mock interviews.

At the **University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) Extension**, career services is making efforts to ensure that their online students have access to career guidance and support through the services of InsideTrack, a company that provides individual student coaching (InsideTrack and CAEL are both part of the Strada Education Network).

The My Success Story portal at **UNC Charlotte** provides students the opportunity to search through university activities, student organizations

and courses to see which competencies and skills they can gain or learn. Also, by understanding the different competencies and skills they learn (or can learn), students can articulate this information in their resumes, cover letters, and interviews with employers.

- **Use of technology and data for student recruitment, activity tracking, and targeted messaging.** Technology tools are not only helpful for providing resources to students, they can also be useful for drawing students in and keeping them engaged. **UMUC**, for example, constantly uses data to understand and respond to students' needs. The technology provides systems for customized outreach to students to get them to start participating with career services. Once the student is engaged, the system keeps track of what services students are using so targeted messages can be sent based on their activity. For example, UMUC can follow up with students who have attended employer recruitment events. The institution also pilots an app for in-person and virtual career fairs. When students approach an employer, the employer can scan the student's QR code and obtain their resume and other information, and the student can also make notes about the visit with that employer. Through the app, the university immediately learns which students are short listed for interviews and which are not; follow up messages to the student can then be customized to offer assistance with interview prep or with fine-tuning the student's elevator pitch.

- Use of social media. Institutions are using social media in new ways to connect students with career services as well as with employers. For example, **SNHU** has a special career advising group on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Through Facebook, the school hosts live events like Employer Spotlights in which employers take an hour of their time to speak to students about their companies. And, as noted earlier, the institution hosts TweetChats where students and employers answer questions and make connections through Twitter.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN JOB SEARCHES?

Right now, searching for jobs online is mostly a variant of how it's always been. Employers list job postings, the jobseeker fills out an application or submits a resume, and then the employer reviews applicants and selects candidates for interviews. To be sure, employers use technology to filter out candidates who don't have the right credentials or experience, but the process is still more of an art than a science. This could change. Imagine, instead, a world in which jobseekers have online profiles listing their formally certified skills and competencies. Employers could search for job candidates with precisely the skills and competencies needed for a specific role, and the jobseeker profiles could be made available to a wide range of employers. What's more, the initial skills profiles could be anonymized to mitigate biases in the initial jobseeker screenings. This is, in part, what **UNC-Charlotte** is moving toward with its My Success Story portal. A similar vision is currently being explored by **IMS Global** in partnership with the **University of Wisconsin Extension**. It is a vision that reflects many of the emerging trends discussed in this report — a focus on skills valued by employers, innovative use of data and technology, and enterprising methods to connect with employers.

The above approaches and models are valuable steps towards providing students with the guidance they need to transition from education to work. As some of the literature notes, making these kinds of changes requires a lot of institutional support in the form of dedicated leadership, participation of all academic and administrative units, faculty engagement, and possible technology investments (Selingo, 2017; Gray, 2016a; Carlson, 2017). In fact, one career services staff member noted, "The support I received from the institution's leadership was crucial to implement my vision of career services."

A big challenge for institutions is knowing whether these investments are making a difference. Most of the institutions we talked with indicated that they do not have a clear picture of how to collect information about students' post-graduation employment and careers. Alumni surveys are a typical approach to

Support from institution leadership may be critical to implement a new vision for career services.

get this data, but response rates for those kinds of surveys are typically very low. What can be measured, however, is whether students are using career services and how active they are in career-related activities throughout their academic careers. At **UMUC**, only 6,000 students engaged with career services in 2015. After UMUC implemented sweeping changes to the way they offer career services in 2016, the university saw an increase to over 30,000 in 2017 and was able to know what proportion of those students are highly

active. A high level of student engagement is one metric that can tell you if students are finding the services helpful as they navigate their future world of work.

For institutions who recognize the need to provide a different kind of career program, it may be challenging to know where and how to start. The first step can be to look at current program offerings and student engagement to identify some ways forward. Some questions to guide an institutional self-assessment include the following:

1. Who currently uses career services at our institution? Who does not? How do we need to redesign our programs to intentionally engage more of our students?

2. Are our programs and services accessible to students who are working full time or who have other off-campus obligations?

3. When do students typically engage with career services? Are there ways that we can engage them earlier?

4. Does career exploration at our institution include a close look at labor market data and economic trends so that students are making informed decisions about their career goals?

5. Does our curriculum incorporate training for broad employability (soft) skills that employers say are needed in the workplace? How do we know that our graduates are prepared for today's workplace?

6. Are we providing enough opportunities for experiential learning? Do our students have opportunities for experiential learning, even if their current employment situations prevent them from taking advantage of things like internships?

7. Are there ways that we could be using technology more effectively? Could technology make more programs and events accessible to working students? Could technology tools help us target specific messages and services to students based on where they are in their exploration or search?

8. Does every faculty member and every student support services staff member understand the importance of career planning? Do they have roles to play in supporting students plans for careers, and are they trained to do those roles well?

9. What are our current relationships with employers? Can we leverage those to inform the design of our career services and programs, provide mentoring or networking opportunities, and develop workplace-based projects for the curriculum?

10. How involved is senior leadership in our career services? What additional support will be needed to elevate the role of career services at the institution?

11. What data is being tracked to measure engagement with career services? What opportunities can be explored to track post-completion employment?

CONCLUSION

Students enroll in colleges and universities to access education with the additional expectation that a degree or other postsecondary credential will help them access desirable career opportunities. This is a reasonable and justifiable expectation, especially considering that higher education demands significant investments of time and money. Given students' expectations, and the reality of today's labor market, colleges and universities have an obligation to support students in making informed decisions about career paths, acquire the skills they need for the world of work, and make effective connections with prospective employers. Some institutions are leading the way in reimagining career services for today's student and creating a more customized experience based on career needs and expectations. And, in many cases, these strategies have focused on how to better engage working students and returning adults.

The emerging practices described in this report provide a roadmap for other institutions to follow or build on to ensure that career services are relevant, intentional, and accessible. Higher education must continue to reimagine and elevate career services to prepare students for the ever evolving demands of the workplace.

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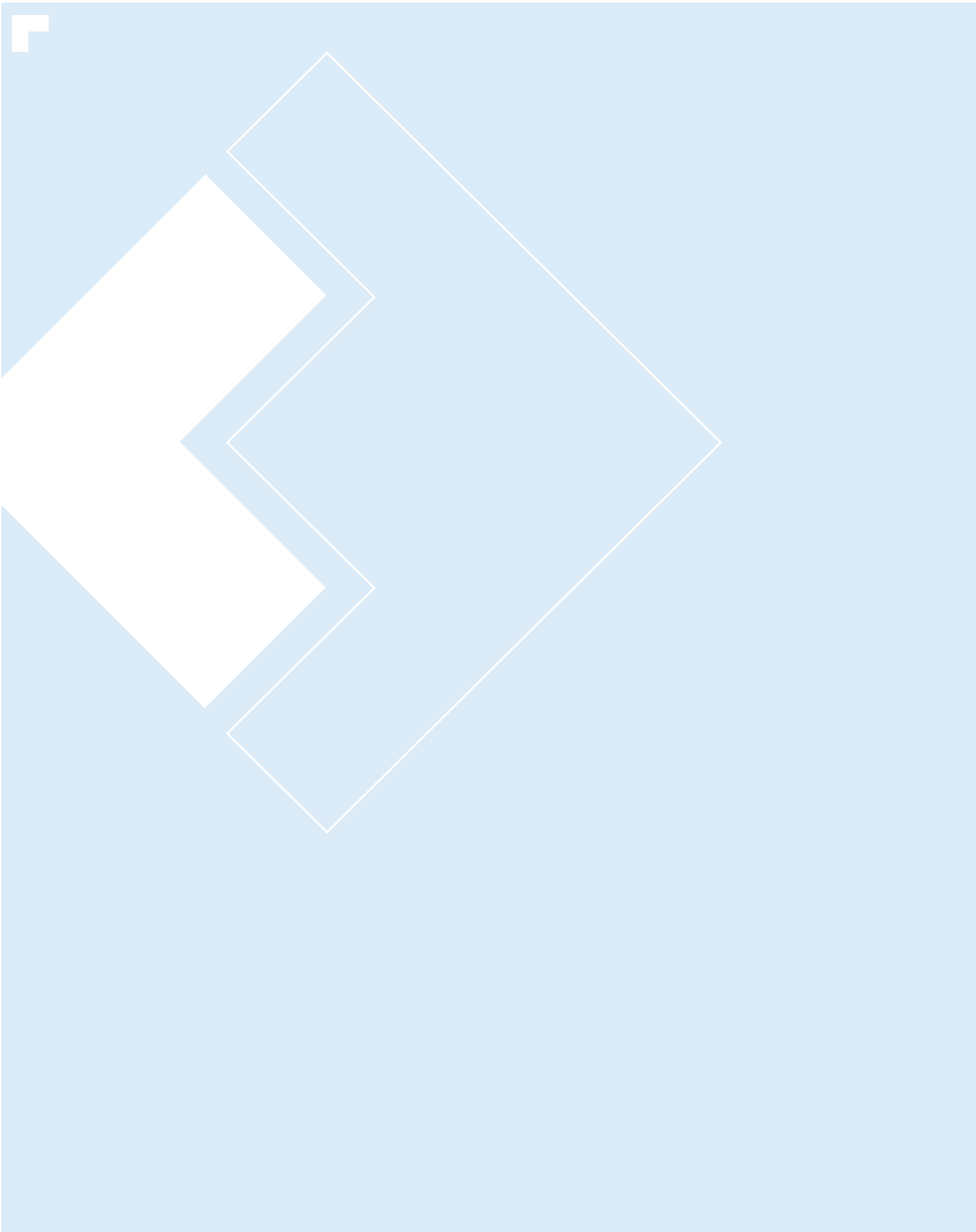
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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