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U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION

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Introduction



A stark imbalance exists between what employers need and what prospective employees are prepared to bring to the workforce. Companies in major industries report that they are unable to grow and compete: 49% have unfilled job openings,¹ and 37% can't take on new business.² In contrast, 96% of chief academic officers believe that college graduates are well prepared. Only 11% of business leaders agree.³

It's not just businesses that say there is a disconnect between what companies need and what students know. Only 35% of students say they are prepared for a job, and 50% of young people are unemployed or underemployed.⁴ Among the general public, just 16% think that a four-year degree prepares students for a well-paying job in today's economy.⁵ Americans are surprised when they learn that 40% of students don't complete their college degrees. And while the value of a college degree has increasingly been called into question, college enrollment rates at public higher education institutions have fallen by less than 2% each year since 2013.⁶

These statistics beg the question: How do we set students up for success so that they can complete degree programs that lead to promising career pathways?

The business community has a vested interest in providing meaningful experiences for students that better connect their education with the workforce. Although corporate social responsibility has its place, companies with unfilled job openings, turnover and retention issues, and high costs of hiring are motivated

by the bottom line to make young people aware of opportunities in their companies or industries. Employers are more likely to sustain engagement with institutions of higher education and expand opportunities to more students once a return on investment (ROI) has been realized.

“The business community has a vested interest in providing meaningful experiences for students that better connect their education with the workforce.”

What does meaningful engagement look like? How can employers and institutions of higher education overcome language and translation barriers to serve the needs of both the employers providing the experiences and the students using the experiences as a step along their career pathways? As Jeff McCord, vice president of economic and workforce development at Northeast State Community College in Kingsport, Tennessee, says, “The education and business communities speak different languages in a sense. You have to be OK with asking people, ‘What do you mean by that?’”

Employers have historically interacted with higher education in advisory board capacities. In some reported cases, this engagement has led to tweaks in curriculum here and there or perhaps a new customary partnership between a college and an employer. But the business community must realize that their stake in higher education needs to be greater—they need

¹ “The Skills Gap and the State of the Economy,” Adecco, October 2013, <http://blog.adeccousa.com/theskills-gap-and-the-state-of-the-economy>

² Chartered Global Management Accountant, 2012, *Talent Pipeline Draining Growth: Connecting Human Capital to the Growth Agenda*, New York, NY: American Institute of CPAs and Chartered Institute of Management Accountants.

³ “The 2013 Lumina Study of the American Public's Opinion on Higher Education and U.S. Business Leaders poll on Higher Education: What American Needs to Know about Higher Education Redesign.” Gallup and Lumina, February 25, 2014, <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/2013-gallup-lumina-foundation-report.pdf>

⁴ McGraw-Hill Education 2015 *Workforce Readiness Survey*. <https://www.mheducation.com/news-media/press-releases/mcgraw-hill-education-2015-workforce-readiness-survey.html>

⁵ <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/10/06/the-state-of-american-jobs/>

⁶ <https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CurrentTermEnrollment-Fall2016.pdf>

to be the drivers of the conversation rather than the participants.

If employers take their engagement to the next level and contribute to creating career pathways, all involved parties benefit. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's (USCCF's) Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) initiative encourages employers to think of themselves as the end-customers of the talent pipeline. The onus is on employers to provide clear-cut information on what jobs are most critical for their businesses, what competencies are needed to fulfill those jobs, and what pathways provide them with their best talent. Through TPM, business leaders are tasked with creating a process based on outcomes data for maximizing their partnerships with these provider partners and the programs they offer students. TPM's ultimate goal is shared value for employers, students, and institutions of higher education.

There are numerous kinds of partnerships that can be built between employer and educator partners in K–12 and higher education. One common thread is integrating work-based learning experiences into in-classroom and out-of-classroom experiences. But often these partnerships are limited to too few students. To positively impact more students, a greater number of options and touchpoints are needed over the course of a student's education. As USCCF's publication *Career Readiness: A Business-Led Approach for Supporting K–12 Schools* says, "In many cases, these experiences are place-based and include internships, cooperatives, and—more recently—youth apprenticeships. However, they can also be project-based or simulated experiences that take place on the school premises."⁷

What we have seen on the higher education front commonly involves partnering with an institution's career development office. Interviews with leaders from career development offices for this publication resulted in two themes rooted in campus culture shifts.

The first theme is how career development must be embedded into the entire student experience. From the moment students step foot on the college campus, there are opportunities to link their education to their eventual career pathways. And institutional leaders are responsible for making career preparation integral.

The second theme is how career development offices recognize that students are no longer their only clients. Employer partners are just as important. They identify ways in which postsecondary training can lead to jobs that are professionally and personally satisfying. Staff who are hired for career development teams need to create opportunities for long-lasting relationships with employers to benefit the students they serve. In addition, they need to be knowledgeable about industry trends, including labor market information and what it reveals about in-demand jobs.

“... the business community must realize that their stake in higher education needs to be greater—they need to be drivers of conversation rather than participants.”

To highlight in-demand jobs available in a specific region or state and which programs provide solid pathways to those jobs, USCCF has partnered with American Institutes for Research and Gallup since 2015 on the consumer information website Launch My Career. Launch provides program-level outcomes data for first-time and full-time students, as well as working adults considering upskilling. Like TPM, employers believe in program-level data and an outcomes focus—similar to wanting to know specifically how a particular division within their company is operating. Launch presents career awareness information as well as a practical exercise for students to see for themselves how long it would take to achieve their lifestyle goals

⁷ Jason A. Tyszko, *Career Readiness: A Business-Led Approach to Supporting K–12 Schools*, Washington, DC: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2016.



based on their program of study, purposefully tied to a ROI mind-set.⁸

An important component of this website is data from the Gallup Purdue Index, which measures employee engagement signifying that ROI is not simply a quantitative calculation. There are experiences that institutions offer—like mentorships and internships linked to classroom learning—that are strongly associated with increased employee engagement, greater well-being later in life, and graduates’ feeling that their degree was worth the cost.⁹

Great Jobs. Great Lives. The Value of Career Services, Inclusive Experiences and Mentorship for College Graduates also cites that undergraduate internships have been linked to more job offers upon graduation and higher starting salaries for graduates. Yet, as mentioned earlier, we do not have nearly enough of these experiences to offer to all students. Over half (55%) of college graduates nationally say they had a job or internship as an undergraduate enabling them to apply what they learned in the classroom. And this statistic only covers those who have completed their programs. For the previously cited 40% who start but do not complete their degree program, it can be the practical application or opportunity to work that connects the dots between education and the workforce.

A college or university is the main source where students access their jobs or internships. Therefore, the relationships detailed in the accompanying case studies are important to examine. Learnings from these institutional partnerships spotlight an increasingly used method of involving representatives on the college campus familiar with the needs of business. A good example is a shared business-educator role presented in the Kingsport case study (page 8) where Jeff Frazier is on assignment from his company as nonacademic dean on the Northeast State Community College.

For employers interested in becoming more active participants in their higher education partnerships, these case studies provide a number of takeaways that lead to shared value for students, institutions, and employers:

- **Focus on ROI.** Employers are more likely to engage long term and expand the partnership if they bring clear objectives to the table. If the objective of identifying potential hires is met, company leaders will connect the experience to a positive ROI and look for more avenues to provide learning experiences for students. As exemplified by Six Bricks and its partnership with the University of Arizona (page 4), complementing traditional curriculum with career-specific know-how empowers students and employers eager to hire them.
- **Be transparent.** All parties are held accountable to their roles in the higher education-business partnership. Create transparent goals and responsibilities for each partner and return to those objectives going into and throughout the development of the students’ work-based learning experiences.
- **Be intentional about competencies and link experiences to career pathways.** To set up students for success, focus on competencies and skills that they acquire from their work-based learning experiences as seen in the DePaul University case study (page 7).
- **Involve small companies as part of the equation.** While small companies do not have the same bandwidth as large ones to offer a multitude of experiential learning activities for students, there are ways for them to engage. One example is seen in the Bates College case study where Jonathan Wyman plays a faculty role (page 5).

⁸ Launch My Career can be accessed at LaunchMyCareerTX.org, LaunchMyCareerTN.org, and LaunchMyCareerColorado.org for Texas, Tennessee, and Colorado, respectively.

⁹ Gallup, *Great Jobs. Great Lives. The Value of Career Services, Inclusive Experiences and Mentorship for College Graduates*, 2016.

Leaders at the University of Arizona in Tucson recognized in 2013 the need to prepare students more holistically for life after graduation, specifically integrating experiential learning. After assembling a task force on engaged learning in 2015, the university officially established the Office of Student Engagement and put forward its 100% Engagement Initiative to reflect the university’s commitment to provide every student with an engaged learning opportunity. As a large institution with almost 34,000 undergraduate students, reaching this goal poses a challenge, but it has led to business community engagement to identify numerous pathways for students to gain work-related experience.

The 100% Engagement Initiative provides a structured pathway for students to measure their experiential learning inside and outside the classroom. Each learning opportunity that students participate in is developed as an Engagement Activity and linked directly to an Engagement Competency. The activities are incorporated in a class or as part of a noncredit opportunity.

Engagement Activities	Engagement Competencies
Community Partnership	Diversity and Identity
Creative Expression	Global and Intercultural Comprehension
Discovery	Innovation and Creativity
Entrepreneurship	Civic and Community Responsibility
Intercultural Exploration	Interdisciplinary
Leadership	Professionalism
Professional Development	Sustainability

Each combination of activity and competency develops students’ collaborative, communication, teamwork, project management, reflection, and application skills. When students complete an activity with an explicit link to a core competency, they earn the Engaged Learning Notation on their transcripts. A Student Engagement Record tracks all their activities and competencies in an easy-to-use student system. The

transcript record sends a signal to employers that these students have gained the skills necessary to be successful in the workforce or in graduate school and have been taught how to incorporate those experiences into their overall career goals.

The 100% Engagement team often works with employer partners to create new opportunities for students. For example, the team has collaborated with alumnus Justin Gray, CEO of Six Bricks, to launch a fast track to digital marketing that will pilot in summer 2017. As Gray notes, modern marketing is changing constantly, and Six Bricks has created a platform “by marketers, for marketers” to meet the needs of top companies. He says, “Today’s businesses are evolving at the speed of technology, and with them, the skills necessary to succeed in modern technology-driven environments. At Six Bricks, we believe that to keep up, traditional institutions must augment their curriculum with real-world, career-specific teachings. By providing learners with access to the latest technology platforms and skills, we’re able to take abilities that are normally only learned on the job and empower students with them early on. As a result, we’re creating job-ready candidates and matching them with employers who are looking for their unique blend of hard and soft skills.”

A significant factor in the successful implementation of 100% Engagement, according to Vice President Vincent Del Casino, was building from the ground up with top-down support. This combined strategy of understanding the needs of students and employers paired with institutional support made 100% Engagement a successful campus-wide initiative, creating cultural change around career development. Del Casino says that career destinations surveys show that two-thirds of students who graduated in May 2017 have jobs or plan to attend graduate school, while 86% of all students, and 90% of Arizona residents, accepted jobs or entered graduate school 90 days out from graduation.



Bates College, located in Lewiston, Maine, is demonstrating that career development is a core focus of a traditional liberal arts education. Its Purposeful Work (PW) Initiative, a centralized campus-wide approach to finding meaning in work and building relevant career skills, incorporates career preparation with self-reflection and holistic development via numerous programs.

“Practitioner-Taught Courses ... invites professionals to teach a skills-based class related to their industry ...”

The PW Internship Program provides each student with the opportunity to have at least one meaningful paid summer experience including internships, research opportunities, or community engagement while a Bates student. The PW team engages its core employer network to find productive internships for students. The network is composed of 75 employers in industries such as health care, nonprofits, scientific research and development, and education who have agreed to make hiring a Bates student a priority. The PW team offers funding for students to have experiences both in the U.S. and abroad and plans to expand to 100 companies in 2018.

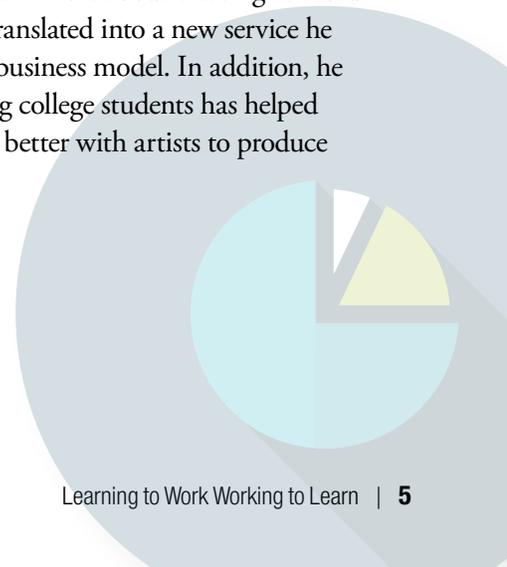
Core employers overwhelmingly agreed—at 99% of those engaged—that PW interns from summer 2016 added value to their organizations and that they would have been competitive candidates for potential openings (90%). Bates encourages supervisors to hold conversations with the students at the end of the internship as part of a performance review so that students can realize and tap into the strengths they exhibited while working—as well as what to work on to become more workforce ready.

Bates recognizes another opportunity to connect students to careers via Practitioner-Taught Courses, a PW program launched in 2014 that invites professionals to teach a skills-based class related to

their industry during Bates’ Short Term. Five courses are offered each semester covering business of the arts, digital marketing, and project management, among other topics. The PW team decides which classes to offer based on the top industries students join after graduation, student interests, and employability skills not otherwise addressed in the curriculum. Short Term enables students to become immersed in a topic for five weeks, leading to better retention and a realistic experience of working in that industry. While many of these classes are taught by Bates alumni and parents, core employer partners occasionally participate either by teaching or providing guest lectures, enabling students to gain practical skills and applied knowledge.

In the *Music, Production, Recording and Mixing* course, students learn all aspects of producing records through hands-on technical exercises, budget making, and communications training. Course instructor Jonathan Wyman brings students to his recording studio so that they can practice techniques on professional tools and create products that they can provide to potential employers. The music industry is growing so rapidly that there are more people interested in the field than there are employers. Wyman hopes that the class acts as a catalyst for students to receive insiders’ knowledge about what the industry offers and explore new opportunities.

Wyman also discovered new opportunities for his own business as a result of teaching. He now offers practical beginners’ workshops on the weekends for those looking to learn more about creating a record. His teaching has translated into a new service he can include in his business model. In addition, he found that teaching college students has helped him communicate better with artists to produce better work.





Bentley University, a small, private business-focused university just outside Boston, ranked No. 1 in 2017 by the Princeton Review for internship opportunities and career services. By strategically integrating career development throughout each student's college experience, Bentley provides job preparation and direct connections to employers.

Although Bentley students have historically been successful in finding jobs postgraduation in all business sectors, with emphasis on the professional services, the university's HIRE Education program is constantly evolving. The program, designed with student input, has four stages—Explore, Experiment, Experience, and Excel—that correspond to each year of school. Students receive a structured career development pathway that begins broadly by identifying their talents and strengths and over time narrows to internships and job applications. The ultimate goal is an engaged and positive experience for students that prepares them to succeed in career pathways aligning with their talents and interests.

“Students learn ... directly from alumni or industry partners ... which helps students break the habit of translating their majors to their careers so literally.”

An important part of the career education process is connecting with students early. More than 95% of first-year students take a Career Development Introduction (CDI 101) course. The course, which was created in 2013, is taught by members of the career services team who collectively teach 34 sections of the class to nearly 1,000 students. CDI 101 focuses on understanding each student's strengths, building written and verbal communications skills through career tool box development, and leveraging career services resources for professional success. CDI 101's

popularity led to the development of a course for sophomores. In CDI 201, students take a deeper dive into self-assessment, customized career action planning, career research, and interview skills. The curriculum in both classes reflects employer feedback so that students are educated based on real-world recruiting practices. In CDI 201, employers join students in the classroom to conduct mock interviews and provide individualized feedback.

Career Communities is another successful program that helps students make connections between their majors and the kind of job function, industry, and career pathway they may want to explore. The program connects students with alumni, employers, and professionals who offer a candid glimpse into their workdays and careers. Students learn about the roles and job functions directly from alumni or industry partners in those positions, which helps students break the habit of translating their majors to their careers so literally. Bentley experiences high employer interest, and Career Communities' informality creates an environment conducive for employers to form lasting relationships with students. Bentley now has about a dozen communities in areas such as human resources, sustainability, entrepreneurship, and consulting.

An important factor in the overall success of Bentley's innovative career education approach is collaboration between career services and university faculty. As Susan Brennan, Bentley's associate vice president of University Career Services, says, “There is a mutual relationship between Career Services and the faculty; we view it as a true partnership.” This relationship is key to implementing a career education program that is seamlessly integrated into the student experience, as is the case at Bentley. “Employer engagement is everyone's job,” Brennan adds.



DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois, created the University Internship Program (UIP) during the late 1990s in response to an experiential learning requirement for all undergraduate students. The program started with 18 students and reached a high of 957 in 2015. All internship proposals from students are reviewed by the DePaul career services team to ensure that they meet university guidelines, which include a minimum of 10 hours of work per week, no more than 25% clerical work, and mentorship or supervision by a professional staff member.

“Students learn how to articulate to future employers what they hope to accomplish, as well as the skills they have gained ...”

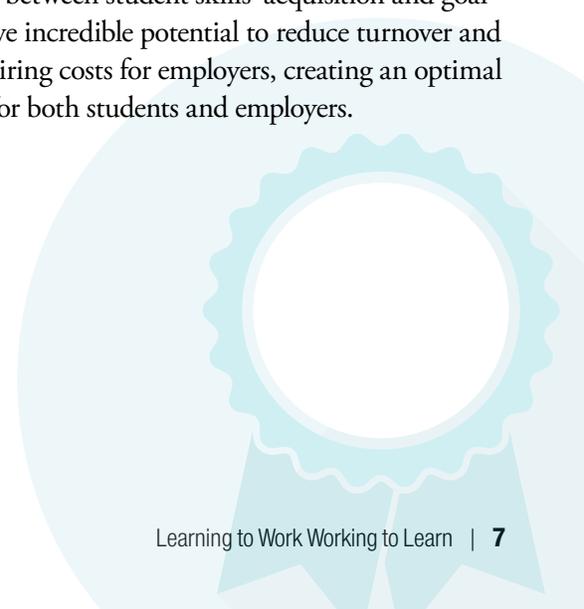
Once students receive approval for their internships, they are required to enroll in a UIP course in order to receive their experiential learning credit. UIP courses are taught by adjunct professors from industry and cover topics such as leadership potential and corporate social responsibility. These four-credit classes enable students to immediately apply classroom lessons to their workplace experiences. The goal of UIP classes is for students to think beyond simply obtaining an internship. The classes are meant to inform students’ career goals, requiring them to reflect on why they chose that internship, where they want to go, and how to get there.

Amy Newendorp, talent acquisition manager for campus and military recruiting at US Foods, one of the nation’s leading foodservice distributors, has been a UIP instructor for the past seven years. Her relationship with DePaul began well before her teaching role as a member of the university’s employer advisory board. Newendorp was intent on advancing the two-way partnership between employers and the university and eager to bring her best practices

philosophy and company-based experiences into the classroom. Newendorp also leads US Foods corporate intern program, which provides her with a useful vantage point and a firsthand understanding of the skills gap, level of preparation, and areas of opportunity.

Newendorp uses this context to refine the curriculum to address trends and gaps to support the students as she teaches two classes, *UIP 250: You, Your Work, and the World* and *UIP 252: Creativity as a Change Agent in the Workplace*. *UIP 250* focuses on the lifelong process of integrating work and learning. The class provides a forum for students to reflect on their internships and apply their experiences to their broader career goals. Students learn how to articulate to future employers what they hope to accomplish, as well as the skills they have gained via a career ePortfolio. *UIP 252* is more theoretical, focusing on how innovation has changed various careers. Students read works like *The Tipping Point* by Malcom Gladwell and apply sociological theories to current trends. One assignment requires students to forecast the next trend using business models and theories, thereby gaining a better understanding of industry changes.

As a result of the self-assessment and classroom-to-internship application integral to the UIP courses, students can more easily translate their experiences into skills that will help them succeed postgraduation. The UIP experience at DePaul and the resulting alignment between student skills’ acquisition and goal setting have incredible potential to reduce turnover and decrease hiring costs for employers, creating an optimal outcome for both students and employers.



Kingsport, Tennessee

Less than 20 years ago, Kingsport, Tennessee, was faced with a catastrophic dilemma: Long-standing companies were facing severe cutbacks that resulted in many residents fleeing the manufacturing-focused city. Economic prosperity seemed hopeless. In response to the call to action to save the Rust Belt town, the community banded together to revitalize workforce development and its linkages to education. Kingsport started “Educate and Grow,” which offered scholarships to any city high school graduate meeting entrance requirements to attend Northeast State Community College (NeSCC) and created a downtown Academic Village to make education more accessible. Focusing on opportunity awareness and return on investment (ROI), Kingsport has reframed the higher education-employer partnership to create shared value for employers and students. Demonstrable success includes a rise in median incomes for residents of more than 20% and growing degree attainment (a 27.5% increase for those with an associate degree and a 19.2% increase for those with a bachelor’s degree).

While Kingsport’s turnaround story has been covered nationally—including earning the Harvard Innovations in American Government Award in 2009—the story is far from over. Its Advanced Manufacturing Partnership’s (AMP’s) emphasis on workforce development makes it a page-turner. The Regional Center for Advanced Manufacturing (RCAM) program at NeSCC received approval to start an apprenticeship program to create a tailored curriculum for small and midsize employers who commonly get left out of the equation.

With the help of Jeff Frazier, on assignment from company partner Eastman as nonacademic dean of the RCAM program at NeSCC, solutions to meet workforce needs have been shaped by a ROI mind-set. “Small companies don’t have time to react to needed changes in workforce development strategy, so we want to have more of a return for that company. We develop the strategy and the training and then facilitate the training to make sure they get their ROI.” In pilot mode in spring 2017, Silgan Closures, a world leader in

food and beverage closures, selected four employees to begin the NeSCC apprenticeship program to combine theoretical education with practical job application. Silgan has committed a structured wage progression for those employees who complete the program. Frazier believes that as smaller companies invest in workforce development and receive highly capable skilled workers, they’re more likely to continue that investment.

“The difference from other partnerships is the balance between collaboration and ownership ...”

The apprenticeship program follows RCAM pathway’s accomplishments. In 2014–2015, completions for students taking at least 12 credit hours at RCAM have increased 550%. Job placement rates for RCAM-related programs are consistently around 98%.

Overcoming barriers such as translation between business leaders and educators, transparency has been key to AMP’s success. As Vice President of Economic and Workforce Development at NeSCC Jeff McCord says, “You have to be OK with asking people, ‘What do you mean by that?’ The difference from other partnerships is the balance between collaboration and ownership, and we’ve been clear with one another about what we’re trying to do and our expectations.”

As Frazier says, “The common theme of successful models I’ve benchmarked around the country is meaningful employer engagement. The token role of sitting down twice a year to talk about the program is not what employers are interested in. They want to be involved in the process throughout and part of continual improvement.” The apprenticeship program addresses challenges head-on and incorporates new technology to ensure it hits the target of aligning students with career pathways.



Leaders at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts, recognized the need to be more intentional in linking a liberal arts education to career and life goals. They developed the Lynk in the 2012–2013 academic year, institutionalizing a practical approach connecting curriculum to career. The Lynk helps students transition into the workforce by embedding career preparation into all aspects of students' experiences and enhancing the advising they receive as they progress toward postgraduation.

Building off the initial framework, Mount Holyoke leaders created the Nexus program, which incorporates preprofessional exploration directly into courses. Students can choose one of nine preprofessional tracks and work with an adviser to create an individualized plan. The tracks focus on emerging fields such as engineering, nonprofits, and data science, with the goal of supplementing the liberal arts degree, not replacing it. Each track has a combination of fixed courses and flexible courses specific to that track. Fixed courses provide students with professional development, internship preparation, and reflection on how to connect their education to their career goals.

Each track requires practical experience, including an internship or research project. All internships must be substantive, meaning that students must be challenged to think creatively and analytically, work more than 240 hours, and contribute to the organization's mission. Internships must also be relevant to the student's personal goals, and employers are required to provide guidance and mentorship.

Students seek out and identify internships on their own or with the help of career services. If a student is interested in working with an employer that does not have a formal internship, the Nexus track chair will work with that employer to create an internship that meets the requirements. Once the internship has been established, the Nexus team assesses feedback from the employer and adjustments may be made in hopes of providing the opportunity to future students.

One industry partner, FTI Consulting, has demonstrated an increasing commitment to campus hiring through the enhancement of early identification programs and the FTI Consulting internship program. Patrick Sullivan Jr., senior recruiter for strategic communications, says, "Our internship program showcases the business diversity of our segments while providing interns with a foundation for professional development. Our goal is to prepare them for a successful launch into the first phase of their professional careers." FTI has been very satisfied with its partnership with Mount Holyoke, and overall, their intern program converts about 50% of their interns to full time.

"... tracks focus on emerging fields such as engineering, nonprofits, and data science, with the goal of supplementing the liberal arts degree, not replacing it."

In addition to employers like FTI Consulting where students can experience many divisions within one company, Mount Holyoke students gain experience in a variety of fields around the globe. Internships range from filmmaking to marketing to medicine and everything in between. In summer 2015, 767 students participated in internships or research projects, 29% of which were international. Countries included South Africa, Chile, and China.

Mount Holyoke offers funding for unpaid internships through the Lynk-UAF program. In summer 2015, the Lynk-UAF supported 45% of internships and research projects. Students often use this stipend to finance their first internship, which they can then leverage to gain a paid second internship. The Nexus program helps students strategically plan their internship progression to expose them to a variety of positions in different industries. Students present what they have learned through their internships or research experiences at the Learning from Application (LEAP) Symposium, a campus-wide event held each fall.



Leaders at the University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania like to say that students have the ability to “discover their own Pitt Pathway.” In 2007, administrators recognized the need to provide students with a more structured program in order to find success upon graduation. A focus group of campus leaders and industry partners came together to create the Outside the Classroom Curriculum (OCC) in 2008. OCC is a university-wide, co-curricular program with 10 distinct goal areas: leadership development, career preparation, communication skills, service to others, global and cultural awareness, sense of self, Pitt pride, wellness, appreciation of the arts, and initiative and drive. Each goal area has an assigned learning outcome, designed to give students a competitive edge in the workforce.

“... students are better prepared and more comfortable on the job because they’ve had previous on-site experience through their OCC internship.”

To ensure that Pitt leaders were preparing students for the workforce, they met with employers in numerous industries to align employer objectives with the goal areas. Given that needs differ by industry, OCC is intended to provide students with skills that would be beneficial to any career. Employers have offered insight as the program has evolved. For example, the initiative and drive goal area was added as a direct result of employer input.

Students enrolled in all majors can participate in programs and activities to earn the 68 required credits to complete OCC. For example, students can take on a leadership role in a student organization to earn leadership credit or participate in community service to earn credit in the service to others category. Students do not receive academic credit for the completion of OCC. They are eligible for induction into the OCC Honorary Society and can apply for

an OCC PittAdvantage Grant, a stipend provided for experiential learning opportunities such as unpaid internships, study abroad, or service learning projects. During the spring 2017 semester, more than 300 students were inducted, bringing the total of students who have completed OCC to more than 4,000 in the last nine years. Students receive an OCC transcript detailing the activities they have completed, which helps them better articulate these experiences to employers and graduate school admissions officers.

The University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC), a longtime Pitt partner, noticed a significant difference in student preparedness following the implementation of OCC. Pam Arroyo, the former program director for campus programs at UPMC, says, “OCC helped students develop the communications and soft skills needed for the workforce.” She points to OCC’s goal of educating the whole student as a driver of student success. Employers look for employees who meet job requirements and can contribute to the workplace environment. Employees who fit into the company culture create a stronger workforce of more engaged employees. The OCC program provides students with the professional skills needed, making them more aware of their individual needs and contributions.

As with many employers today, UPMC aims to place its interns into full-time positions upon graduation. With the help of OCC, it has seen great success in hiring OCC interns to fill specialized roles. UPMC hires about 350 students into their formal programs each year, and Pitt provides their biggest pipeline of students. Arroyo says that OCC students are better prepared and more comfortable on the job because they’ve had previous on-site experience through their OCC internships or other experiential engagement. These experiences help decrease onboarding time and first-year turnover rates. The formal structure of OCC aligns with what employers are looking for and enables students to better transition from the university into the workforce.



The University of Texas (UT) at Austin set a goal in 2012 of increasing the four-year graduation rate to 70% by 2017. To help accomplish this, the Student Success Initiatives team created the University Leadership Network (ULN) program in 2013. Every year 500 students, representing each of the 13 colleges and schools at UT Austin, are invited to participate in the program, which combines an incentive-based scholarship with leadership development. The ULN program uses predictive models to identify students with the highest risks of not graduating in four years who have also demonstrated financial need. These students are typically first-generation college students or are from underrepresented groups.

Over the course of their four years at UT Austin, ULN students receive \$20,000 in financial aid for completing specific academic and leadership development requirements. The students receive monthly installments instead of a lump-sum distribution. This helps alleviate the need for them to work while attending school, allowing them to focus on coursework. To ensure that the students receive the necessary academic support, they are placed in an academic success program or learning community in their freshman year. The communities are run by the individual college in coordination with the Student Success Initiatives team. These programs are designed to increase academic performance and create a sense of community within the large UT Austin campus.

During the first year of the ULN program, students are required to attend weekly speaker series and small group application sessions centered on leadership development and career education. Examples of topics covered are resume writing, interview skills, professional communication, and making the most of a new position.

In year two, ULN students participate in an on-campus internship through Campus Partners, which is made up of more than 260 campus units such as Business and Financial Services, the Cockrell School of Engineering, and Information Technology Services.

The ULN internship program offers a wide range of options where students are placed based on their career goals, indicating how on-campus jobs align with career pathways. Positions include project management intern with UT Project Management and Construction Services, data management assistant with UT Libraries, communications and marketing intern with Dell Medical School, and accounting intern with UT Business and Financial Services.

“The structured program of leadership training and on-campus mentorship prepares students well for ... off-campus opportunities.”

Following the completion of an on-campus internship, ULN students are then able to pursue off-campus opportunities in their third and fourth years. Students currently have positions in various industries at a range of companies and nonprofits in the Austin area, including internships in Quality Assurance with General Motors, Corporate Management with KPMG, Business Analyst with Idea Labs Consulting, Quality with St. David’s Hospital, and Fundraising and Events with the Susan G. Komen Austin Foundation. The structured program of leadership training and on-campus mentorship prepare students well for these off-campus opportunities.

The ULN Program at UT Austin has proven to be extremely effective. Even though most ULN students enter college underprepared, after three years in the program the gap between ULN students and the average UT student is narrowing. The class of 2017 ULN cohort, as of 2016, had an 86.3% persistence rate returning for their junior year. This is only 4.2% from the UT Austin average of 90.5%, an encouraging sign for on-time degree completion.



As the economy continued to change and the job market adjusted accordingly, Wellesley College—based in Wellesley, Massachusetts, recognized an opportunity to make career education a core component of the student experience and created a new model to better prepare women for the 21st century. Wellesley Career Education leaders started with a listening tour, identifying key stakeholders—students, alumnae, and employers—to understand the students’ needs. From there, the leaders began developing a customized model for Wellesley students.

An essential element of Wellesley’s model is its outreach to 100% of the students at the start of their education. At orientation, students are introduced to their college career mentor, the first person on each student’s personal advisory board. Each mentor is a trained professional who helps students understand their talents and interests as they relate to their career search. Advising continues throughout their time in college.

“Career services professionals ... need to be industry experts capable of convening students and employers and facilitating connections.”

Another member of the student’s personal advisory board is her career community adviser. Career community advisers serve as liaisons between the business community and Wellesley students. They provide students with up-to-date information and trends in a particular industry. Advisers also facilitate career communities centered on a specific industry. This structure enables students to engage with alumnae, employers, and faculty informally to build meaningful connections and explore a variety of roles and opportunities in an industry.

Wellesley uses a tiered employer engagement plan that relies heavily on alumnae and parent networks. When looking to engage with new employers, career

community advisers reach out to alumnae or parents working at those companies or ask their networks for introductions to others. When they want to increase engagement with existing employee partners, advisers reach out to individual employers. Advisers work with employers to understand their needs and provide them with opportunities to become more involved with Wellesley students, such as serving as career educators or offering on-site visits to students.

The right technology to enhance Wellesley’s model was critical. The institution selected Handshake, an online job posting platform that connects students, employers, and career service staff. In particular, Wellesley found its employer network to be most effective in connecting students with employment opportunities. Employers tend to vote with their feet, and many are tapping into platforms like Handshake to gain access to scores of institutions in one place. This enables them to post opportunities to the schools of their choice without having to create different accounts. In addition, access to this network allows employers to connect with institutions where they do not have previous relationships. For Wellesley, this software led to a 223% increase in job postings in the fall 2016 semester.

Leaders also point to structural changes as key to the program’s success. Instead of falling under student life, the leaders of Career Education at Wellesley report directly to the president, and its associate provost is a voting member of the academic council, indicating how integral career services is to campus-wide discussions and academic decisions.

As the career education office becomes more embedded in the fabric of the college, its staff is facing changes as well. Career education professionals are now expected to do much more than merely provide counsel for students approaching graduation. They need to be industry experts capable of convening students and employers and facilitating connections. Associate Provost Christine Cruzvergara says, “Hiring and staffing are of the utmost importance to the success of a career services team, so hiring for attitude is critical.”

Western Governors University (WGU), with a founding principle of leveraging technology to expand access to higher education, creates pathways to in-demand industries. As an online program, WGU recognizes students' previous experience and baseline skills to complete programs faster—without sacrificing quality. Now serving more than 80,000 students, with approximately 85% of them working either full time or part time, WGU offers flexible bachelor's and master's degree programs in business, information technology, nursing and health professionals, and K–12 teaching. WGU has maintained its commitment to making higher education affordable by charging students a flat rate every term and allowing them to complete the program as quickly as they can.

WGU's competency-based model has left its mark in higher education. The curriculum enables working students to take advantage of previous education and work experience to advance through familiar material so that they can spend time on what they still need to learn. Each program is designed to teach competencies identified by employers from the respective sector, and the curriculum is developed by a program advisory council that includes WGU administrators, academics, and industry leaders. These councils meet quarterly to assess current programs and discuss potential programs to ensure that the students are prepared for the evolving demands of today's workforce.

WGU is extremely adaptive, implementing curriculum changes and adding programs as needed. In implementing new programs, the university assesses industry needs based on feedback from the advisory councils and then creates a program to meet these needs.

For example, leaders in health care realized that there was great interest among individuals—whose schedules precluded them from attending a four-year college—in becoming nurses. Through its partnership with WGU, the Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) helped create a grassroots-level curriculum to enable working professionals without any nursing experience to earn

a B.S.N. and experience the same quality education offered in a traditional university. This program combined the existing curriculum at WGU with best practices identified by HCA and other employers to streamline the degree process and provide hospitals with well-educated nurses, currently in high demand. Through this program, those who were already working in the health care industry, such as nurse technicians or nurses' aides, could advance their careers without starting from scratch. Hospitals found that this program reduced orientation time, an issue that has been plaguing hospitals for years.

Today, nursing extends well beyond hospital settings. With feedback from the Nursing Program Council and a group of working nursing informatics professionals, WGU combined the curriculum from nursing and IT programs to create a nursing informatics program, a growing nursing specialty. According to Dell Oliver, assistant vice president of nursing leadership solutions at HCA, awareness of the need for nursing informatics started from an industry and organizational need and led to a change in curriculum. “WGU takes the time to reach out and seek employer opinions,” says Oliver. Once counsel from industry is provided, WGU builds the curriculum around it, which produces professionals who are exceptionally prepared for the industry upon graduation.

The data on WGU graduate success speak for itself. In a 2016 report by Gallup, Inc., studies found that 81% of WGU graduates are employed full time, compared with a national average of 74% among college graduates. Along with a high employment rate, WGU alumni also report feeling more engaged at work, 45% compared with 39% nationally. The competency-based curriculum at WGU provides an ideal model of education developed through collaboration among businesses and higher education leaders.

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Notes



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