



LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Pathways Project Implementation Memorandum

TO: Laura Rittner, Executive Director, Success Center – OACC
FROM: Michelle Callender, Ashley Pere, Brittany Ross
RE: Crucial Alignment of Career Guidance Resource
DATE: May 31, 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION

This project was driven by Pillar 1 of the Guided Pathways framework: Clarify the Paths. Specifically, the project is a response to the topic: “Every program is well-designed to guide and prepare students to enter employment and further education in fields of importance to the college’s service area”.

To develop a project that aims to address this pillar, it was first necessary to define the problems or barriers to achieving the objective outlined in the topic statement. Our team identified two interrelated problems. First, not all graduates are fully aware of the job opportunities and labor shortages in the college’s service area. Secondly, students are often not aware of the various types of jobs they can pursue through a particular program of study. The project that we developed focuses primarily on the role of career services and advising early in students’ higher education journey. There are three key components to the reforms that we are proposing. They include: assessing the institution’s career service website with a carefully designed checklist; administering career assessments early in a student’s college experience and reviewing the assessment results along with up-to-date regional labor market data; and ensuring that students are aware and have access to career exposure opportunities during the course of their respective programs.

RELEVANT LITERATURE REVIEWED

Seeking a better understanding of the root causes and potential reforms, our team consulted a subset of literature that focused on the realms of workforce development in higher education and emerging trends in career services. The Aspen Institute’s Workforce Playbook is a key resource for colleges to evaluate and improve their existing workforce programs. It provides a strategic outline that implores colleges to critically examine the regional labor market and establish a comprehensive understanding of the population and demographics of the institution’s service area. The authors contend that this work is essential to adequately assess whether programs are aligned to the regional workforce needs and to make adjustments as

necessary. They further emphasize the importance of providing meaningful work-based learning opportunities and ensuring that the personnel engaged in workforce programs have the appropriate knowledge, skills, and relevant industry experience. Developing an effective system for career coaching and guidance that supports students from onboarding through graduation is another key element of the Workforce Playbook outline.

Domain four of the Workforce Playbook focused on developing responsive mutually beneficial partnerships with employers that are centered on honest feedback and reciprocal support. Part one is to select and engage employers based on honest, data-informed conversations. To follow with part two, we need to create easy on-ramps to partnerships. This could be simply encouraging employers to provide matching scholarship donations for students. Part three is self-explanatory with establishing a business-friendly system to manage partners. Finally, part four suggests convening industries and other critical partners for scaled, regional impact. We need to identify a mission that meets everyone's needs, set goals, metrics, and responsibilities, and develop a system for communication and support. The concluding statement that needs to really be focused on is partnering students with employers. We should be trying to guarantee that students have the credentials they need and align that with the expectations of employers.

Our team also consulted Briefs 5 and 6 from the Rural Community College Leader Series in the literature review. Changing enrollment driven advising to a relational model that supports not only educational but also career goals would be a step towards student success during and after college. Finding the resources for this may seem to be a challenge. Colleges are struggling with technology as well as staffing. Remember, colleges are not alone with these struggles. Employers are also struggling. Now would be the time to revisit the connections we have with businesses. Tapping into mutual benefits by developing a shared responsibility framework will help colleges prepare the students to be able to fill the void that employers notice their employees are lacking. Using a platform such as Handshake, and/or College Central, will allow students to build resumes, connect with internships, and employers. Also, working with local public resources and community partners will allow a stronger community bond and a desirable workforce.

Leadership Academy fellow Marc Dewitt's paper on redesigning student services model provided us with an insight into today's higher education model; specifically focusing on career services. Innovation is needing to be identified with a reinvention of career services and career centers within our community colleges. The strategic core of our foundation is to help students obtain that higher education and be in a position to fully launch their career. He has identified that the Handshake platform helps those in smaller colleges compete with higher name schools for job opportunities and is successful.

DATA EXAMINED

Each team member randomly selected five Ohio community colleges to evaluate the effectiveness of their career services websites. A composition of five key items was developed into a checklist that is necessary for a successful and engaging career services website. To evaluate the selected colleges, a navigation of their websites were completed to find the career services page. The checklist asks whether or not the websites include following aspects:

- 1) Job posting link?
- 2) Career assessment?
- 3) Contact information and location disclosed?
- 4) Resume Assistance available?
- 5) Helpful links/resources listed?

The table below shows the results for the 15 community colleges that were selected for review and how they fit into the evaluation. Contact information was available on all college sites with the lowest availability being in having career assessments available as well as resume assistance online. Job postings were listed on all but one college's website with the same amount listed for helpful links and resources. Most meet the criteria for a great career services webpage but placement, availability, and ease of access are areas that need to be focused on to be the most beneficial to students. Students need these services to help throughout their time from beginning to end. Having the assistance to help choose what career best fits what they want and contact information available for those to be evaluated with an advisor is key. Towards the end of the student's time, resume assistance and job posting links will help ensure their readiness to go out into the workforce.

	Job Postings	Career Assessment	Contact Information	Resume Assistance	Helpful Links/Resources
Community College 1	X	X	X		X
Community College 2	X	X	X	X	X
Community College 3	X	X	X		X
Community College 4	X	X	X	X	X
Community College 5	X		X	X	X
Community College 6	X		X	X	X
Community College 7	X	X	X	X	X
Community College 8	X		X	X	X

Community College 9	X	X	X	X	X
Community College 10		X	X		
Community College 11	X	X	X	X	X
Community College 12	X		X	X	X
Community College 13	X	X	X	X	X
Community College 14	X		X		X
Community College 15	X		X	X	X

PROPOSED CHANGES/REFORMS TO BE ADOPTED

The first reform that our team proposes is that each community college take the time, effort, and responsibility to evaluate their career services website using **the checklist** that we have developed. Ease of access to finding this information is an added critical step for students. An honest evaluation will allow the college to determine what areas are lacking and which areas they excel in. The purpose of this is to provide readily available information and opportunities to students that will prepare them for their future career success no matter what stage they are currently in. The implementation period for this checklist can be almost immediate once the challenges have been addressed.

Many institutions offer **career assessments** through their career services offices. However, these types of assessments are typically only presented to students who are undecided about the field of study that they want to pursue. We believe that incorporating a career assessment early in each student’s college experience could open the door to deeper, more intentional reflection about one’s skills and ambitions. A career assessment is only one piece of the puzzle, however. The lack of knowledge that most students have about the regional labor market and job opportunities presents a blind spot that can be easily addressed. Combining a thorough review of the career assessment results with the presentation of accurate **regional labor market information** has the potential to significantly impact students’ decisions as they select a program focus. Likewise, equipping students with this crucial information early in their college experience could prevent misguided program selections, as well as wasted time and resources. Labor market tools, such as the Burning Glass/EMSI platform can also provide students with a fuller picture of the range of occupations for which a specific credential is valuable. We estimate the implementation timeline for this component of the project would be two to four

months, once the challenges of determining who will be responsible for these initiatives are addressed.

Students will gain much when seeing a true connection between classes, careers, and salary while realizing their goals are attainable by building **relational minded career advising**. Revitalizing partnerships and exploring new ones will give our students the opportunity to explore career paths and job opportunities while completing college course work. This will also make students aware that there are more opportunities than just the basics. Proper assessments (such as Future Plans) along with internships and job shadowing will allow students to strive for their goals while being better prepared for the job market. A better suited phrase for what students need, may be an **Academic Career Plan**.

The timeline for implementing all components of the proposed reforms will vary for each institution, especially given the challenges outlined in the next section, but with deliberate planning and swift action, we believe it is possible to implement all reforms in a four month period. It is our expectation that these reforms will improve student success by encouraging an intentional reflection on potential career paths early in the students' college experience. Reviewing the career assessment results along with current labor market data will allow the students to consider the employment prospects that are aligned with their field of study. It is our hope that having this information will prevent students from pursuing fields that do not have a clear employment outcome. The labor market data can also provide a more comprehensive view of the variety of professions related to a particular program of study. Ensuring awareness and access to career exposure opportunities will additionally allow the students to gain greater insight to the expectations and workplace environments of their prospective career fields. Career exposure opportunities, such as job shadowing and internships, also allow students to network with potential employers and develop relationships that can speed the transition to workforce upon graduation. Career exposure opportunities may strengthen the graduates' resumes as well.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

As with any new intervention or initiative, there will be challenges that must be addressed. The key implementation challenges associated with the career services website checklist revolve around who will review the layout of the current website including an evaluation of the information already listed and who can be appointed to modify the career services website. An honest evaluation as mentioned earlier needs to be completed as a first step. Community colleges need to look at what information is listed that is helpful and what is not helpful or can have a stronger presence placed elsewhere. This will add a challenge of availability for an employee to take on this added job duty or if additional wages need to be considered. This ties directly in to having someone appointed to modify the career services website as updates and changes will need to be made continually. Job postings need to be researched and

identified while keeping up to date. Helpful links and resources may change as time goes on with feedback of some being more beneficial than others.

The major challenges surrounding the implementation of administering career assessments and reviewing labor market data are in determining which personnel will be responsible for these actions. Colleges will need to decide which office will be tasked with reviewing the career assessment results and labor market data with students. For this reform to be successful, the labor market data that students review must also be current. A timeline should be established for how frequently the data is updated and specific personnel must be assigned to ensure the updates occur according to schedule.

Internships as well as apprenticeships need to be available to all students regardless of the program. Each college should have a **“Moving Forward Team”** that ensures each graduating student has a career to start or a college to transfer to. Strengthening and expanding our relationships with employers and four-year institutions will ensure all students have a positive next step. Economic mobility will gain momentum when community colleges grow and strengthen its partnership with employers.

CONCLUSION

Our world has forever changed since the pandemic. Things will continue to progress. Community colleges in Ohio are being noticed now more than ever. There are grant opportunities at the state and federal level to help rebuild our workforce. We need to seize these opportunities and get things moving quickly to implement the necessary changes to ensure our students know that college is the right path for longevity in their career path. The reforms that we have proposed in this project have the potential to effectively clarify the paths for each student early in their college experience. When students ‘begin with the end in mind’ they are less likely to waste their time and resources taking courses and starting programs only to find that there are either few local job opportunities in their selected field or that the expectations and work environment of the career they had intended to pursue is far different from what they had hoped. There will be challenges to implementing the proposed reforms, but the potential to improve students’ success and clarify their path to employment is worth the effort.

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