



# LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

## Pathways Project Implementation Memorandum

**TO:** Laura Rittner, Executive Director, Success Center – OACC  
**FROM:** Tina Diggs, Monica Durham, Terry Finefrock, and Mario Pettiti  
**RE:** Career Passport: Helping Students Arrive at a Best-Fit Major  
**DATE:** June 14, 2022

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION

Research shows up to 40% of community college students struggle to find their footing in the first year and 50% leave by the second year (Lahr and Klempin, 2021). To significantly improve student outcomes, colleges must rethink its approach to helping students explore their career options and arrive at a Best-Fit major.

Deciding on a program of study and line of work is a major decision and can be very overwhelming. Although this is the case, most colleges require students to choose their major during the application process, and more often without assistance. The CCRC (Community College Research Center) have created the “Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan” framework to connect with students. This seamless onboarding process helps to ensure students have the tools and resources needed to establish a solid foundation in their first year.

We believe the “Ask-Connect-Inspire-Plan” is a move in the right direction. Shifting from conventional practices, leaving it up to the student in most cases to visit websites and manage their own search regarding their program of study and career direction, to a more inclusive onboarding process that fosters stronger engagement and helping students to align their interests and strengths with their program of study. With that said, this framework only addresses the first year with students, does not identify a point of contact at the college, or outline a process to monitor and evaluate outcomes.

Based on the results from our survey and other literature, this project outlines a Career Coaching Program to help students with self and career-exploration, and engagement activities to maximize their job search skills. In addition, lays out expectations regarding student participation, proposed modality to address student learning styles and schedule availability, and topics covered over the 2-year Career Passport program. Lastly, recommendations for department implementation and tools to track student success.

## RELEVANT LITERATURE REVIEWED

To better understand the importance of providing early access to career exploration, choosing a program of study, and developing a full program plan as soon as possible in a student's enrollment, a broad range of resources addressing the first-year experience in two-year and four-years postsecondary institutions, and the impact of student onboarding, and career development in students' success were referenced.

Findings from the CCRC- Community College Research Center from *Progress Implementing Guided Pathways in Ohio Community Colleges* authored by Lahr & Jenkins provided a broad understanding of the experiences gained and lessons learned from other institutions implementing guided pathways. Using this frame of reference for creating a successful pathway, our review of literature tackled gaining a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of approaches to student onboarding and the impact of early career exploration on student outcomes.

The CCRC *Ask-Connect-Inspire Plan: How to Reimagine Onboarding into a Program of Study*, demonstrated the value of an onboarding process that begins with pre-enrollment and continues throughout a student's first year.

Lahr and Jenkins (2021), affirmed that to best serve each unique student, this method – providing a seamless onboarding process to ensure students have the tools and resources needed to establish a solid foundation in the first year, sustain them in their second year, to completion, and employment - must be customized.

Further review of related research established that to significantly improve student outcomes, colleges must rethink its approach to helping students explore their career options and arrive at a Best-Fit major. The data tells us that up to 40% of community college students struggle to find their footing in the first year and 50% leave by the second year (Lahr and Klempin, 2021).

Reimagining approaches to 1) onboarding – helping students develop vocational preferences, 2) choosing a program of study – after foundation is set with onboarding, 3) career coaching – throughout the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 4) college initiative – requiring the college to fully embrace, imbed in courses, assign coaching and engagement to a specific team, and improve students' outcomes.

The review of literature makes the case for our *Career Passport* model as a comprehensive redesign to a college onboarding process for new students that would support successful transition to college, college completion, and employment beyond college.

## **DATA EXAMINED**

The value and importance of a college education have ebbed and flowed over the past fifty plus years. In 1973, less than 28% of the workforce had a college degree (Symonds, Schwartz, and Ferguson, 2011). Several jobs were in manufacturing, employees were trained on the job, and workers earned an income that allowed them to take care of themselves and their family (Symonds et al., 2011).

Whereas, in 2007, things began to shift when jobs started to require postsecondary education (Symonds et al., 2011) and the Labor force went from 23 million to 91 million positions requiring more than a secondary education (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Due to this change, one could correlate the 19 percent increase in college enrollment from 2006 - 2010, and according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NACES), enrollment remained strong 2010 - 2016, only dropping about 7% from that original growth spurt.

This trend continues today, where state and national law makers stress the importance of students continuing their education after high school to obtain a degree to have a competitive edge in finding a job and earning a living (Gewertz, 2009). Brokemier (2002), combined them both and simply stated, students attend postsecondary education to obtain a "good" job.

Often, students are choosing college to have a higher wage, perks such as health insurance and other benefits, less unemployment, and access to a broader network to name a few. Yet many colleges still treat the degree as the end point, rather than viewing it as a credential that will land students a good first job (Hoffman, 2020). According to Donald Super, understanding who we are and being authentic is an extension of our career when we truly embrace our true-self, or what he referred to as self-concept. Therefore, colleges have an obligation to help students develop vocational preferences, understand the connection between career and major, how to navigate and recover from changes. Colleges incorporating such a system will expand the student's knowledge and skills to make career choices while in school and as they progress in life (McLeod, 2014).

## **PROPOSED CHANGES/REFORMS TO BE ADOPTED**

New students are entering college without clear goals, and 50% of new students leave by the second year (Lahr and Klempin, 2021). Oftentimes, new students display a range of uncertainty when completing their admission application and are frequently forced to select their major and degree path to meet federal financial aid eligibility requirements. Students struggle to make decisions and are overwhelmed with the complexities of degree pathways, credential, labor/job market, wages, and benefits.

A redesign to college onboarding processes for new students may prove to be beneficial. Such redesign should provide a stronger focus to assist students identify their career interests, choose a major, and complete *reflection points* throughout their first two years in college. One proposed structure is titled, *Career Passport*, which is a customized one-on-one career coaching program delivered in a hybrid format. The program will also focus on the key components of a coaching program which include: engaging in active learning, deploying motivational interviewing techniques, asking powerful questions, and creating action plans.

*Career Passport...*

- ✓ **Ensures** students have access to various resources and tools
- ✓ **Engages** student in self-discovery and self-development activities
- ✓ **Exposes** students to people and experiences that “light their fire”
- ✓ **Equips** students with social capital
- ✓ **Empowers** students to take ownership of their career aspirations

*Reflection points* throughout the process provide students with opportunities to pause, reflect, and act upon their experiences and any changes in their personal lives. In addition to job search topics such as writing a resume, it is equally important to begin teaching our students how to think critically about careers. With how fast the world shifts, it is most beneficial to learn how to be creative, reflect, challenge, question, communicate, and be flexible to build skills for modern career readiness and career maturity.

<b>Who</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New, Incoming students</li> </ul>
<b>What – First Year</b>	
<i>First 6 months</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand how personal characteristics (interests, values, skills) impact career development</li> <li>• Students have access to various resources and tools - discuss with instructor</li> <li>• Self-discovery and self-development activities</li> </ul>
<i>Second 6 months</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equip students with social capital</li> <li>• Expose students to people and experiences through group interactions, networking, etc.</li> <li>• Empower students to take ownership regarding career (choose a program, path, and plan)</li> <li>• Embed career-related reflection points through this first year</li> </ul>
<b>What – Second Year</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly modules to reinforce the first-year activities and learning</li> <li>• Increase 1:1 Coaching sessions with Career Navigator</li> <li>• Checkpoints to evaluate program interest, whether on track, make needed updates</li> <li>• Resume, cover letter, interview skills, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Where</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hybrid format – asynchronous content delivery and in-person coaching sessions</li> <li>• Learning Management System used to deliver modules with content</li> </ul>
<b>How</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full-time Career Navigators who provide 1:1 coaching</li> <li>• Caseload up to 50 students</li> <li>• Career Navigators are certified in coaching techniques</li> <li>• Career Navigators take a strengths-based approach during sessions</li> <li>• Apply Advising model knowledge and interaction</li> </ul>

Community colleges offer low cost, high value opportunities to assist new students with career exploration, degree selection, and attainment. Providing personalized coaching and a scripted playbook, such as *Career Passport*, community colleges are in a tremendous position to help all students develop a more detailed understanding of careers, gain a greater confidence in selecting their educational degree paths, and teaching them skills needed to be successful in the ever-changing workplace, ultimately contributing to greater connections on campus along with persistence and retention.

## **IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES**

There are several key challenges that arise when considering implementing a career coaching program. While the proposed program offers a generalized framework, it is recognized that within the twenty-three colleges that make up the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, there are twenty-three unique cultures, structures, student demographics, and resources (people and financial). This in turn poses the first challenge for a more widespread adoption of the proposed program.

There are other primary challenges that would need to be addressed by institutions who embark on change initiatives such as implementing a career coaching program. These include:

### *Financial Concerns*

With declining enrollments and reduced budgets being faced by more and more colleges, allocating financial resources to new endeavors is met with hesitancy and even resistance. The lack of funding to support the purchase of career assessments, hire additional staff such as coaches and instructors, and potentially redesign office space within an existing building or create new space within a new building poses a significant barrier. By leveraging grants and cultivating community partners, these costs could potentially be mitigated.

### *Buy-In and Support*

When implementing new initiatives or changes, it is vital to ensure that attention and time is spent on creating buy-in and soliciting support from stakeholders. However, this is one element that is oftentimes overlooked. Creating buy-in depends largely on shifting attitudes. Many change initiatives are often abandoned or are difficult to get off the ground due to not spending sufficient time helping individuals understand the “why” behind the change or new initiative and how it is connected it to a larger vision. By creating a communication plan and ensuring that all key stakeholders are engaged and informed of the change, wide-spread buy-in and support can be achieved.

## *Organizational Alignment and Priorities*

Launching new initiatives or implementing changes need to be done within the context of the existing organizational structure. This means that any new initiative or change needs to be viewed as a compliment to existing programming and not in conflict. For example, if a college has an existing first year experience (FYE) course in place, how could a career coaching program such as the one proposed compliment or conflict with the FYE course. Additionally, the proposed career coaching program could be viewed as a lower priority for institutions and as a result adoption could be slow or not implemented at all. Not taking into consideration other projects and initiatives that may be underway at an institution can hinder the adoption of the program. By working with senior leadership to ensure that the program is in alignment with other organizational priorities and strategic goals will help to ensure scalability and sustainability.

## *Student Engagement and Involvement*

It is often said that students do not do optional. Also, students who may be most need in need of or could benefit the most from programs, supports, and services, oftentimes do not seek them out. For the proposed career coaching program to be effective students need to participate and be engaged throughout the program. However, not all students will want to participate. They may fail to see the value in the program and its benefits. Many community college students work as well as attend classes and therefore may not have the time to dedicate to a career coaching program that may require more time than a typical FYE course. By making the career coaching program a graduation requirement or embedding it as a part of a required course, more students would benefit from the program. (Based on the results of an informal survey administered as part of this project, these were the top two responses to the question: What is the best way to offer a career coaching program.)

## **CONCLUSION**

Now more than ever, college and universities (regardless of sector) are prioritizing strategies to retain students and ensure their success. Recently, the value of an education has come under fire. This shift in the perception of value of a degree/credential along with the “great resignation”, has many new students entering their higher education experience wanting help with answering the question, “What do I want to do with my life?”. Many of these students feel lost and confused, struggle throughout their first year and eventually do not return for their second year.

To significantly improve these student outcomes, community colleges must rethink their approach in helping students identify their best fit major and how students begin to craft a future vision for themselves. This approach should be rooted in the student's strengths, interests, values and lived experience. It is also an active and developmental process that spans beyond the student's first year. By adopting a personalized career coaching

approach, community colleges can improve retention and completion outcomes for their institution as more new students will remain enrolled and persist. However, beyond these institutional goals, community colleges have an opportunity to provide students with a transformational experience that helps them arrive at a purpose-driven career leading to a happy and full-filling life.

## REFERENCES and ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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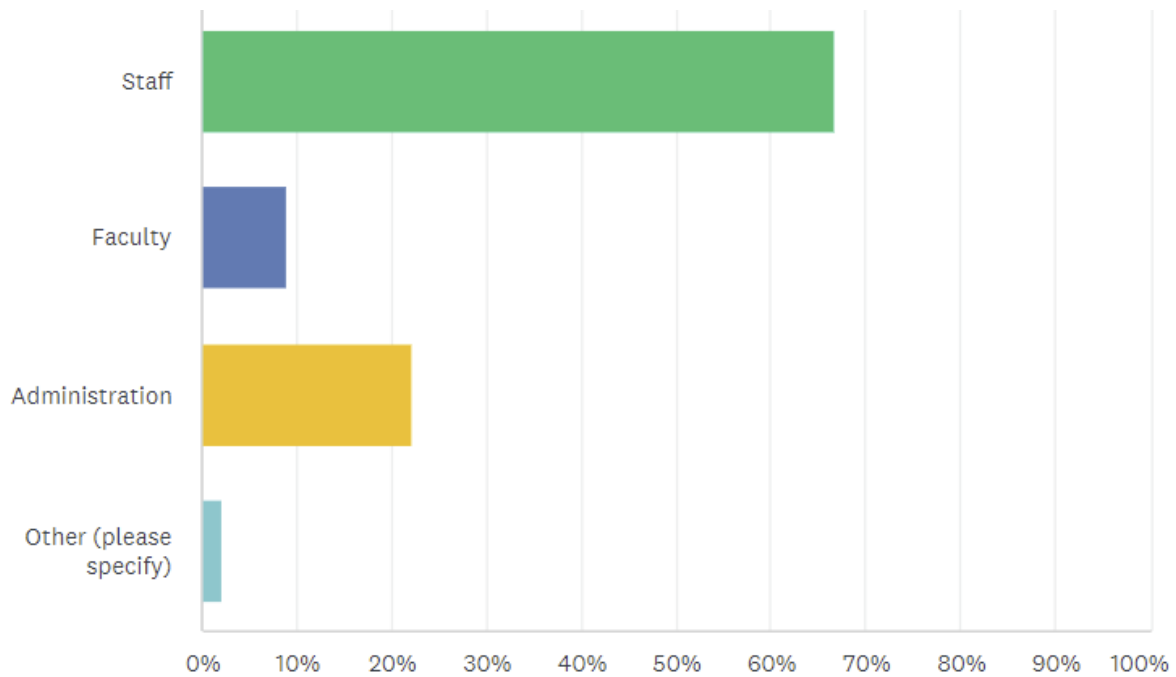
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## CHARTS AND TABLES

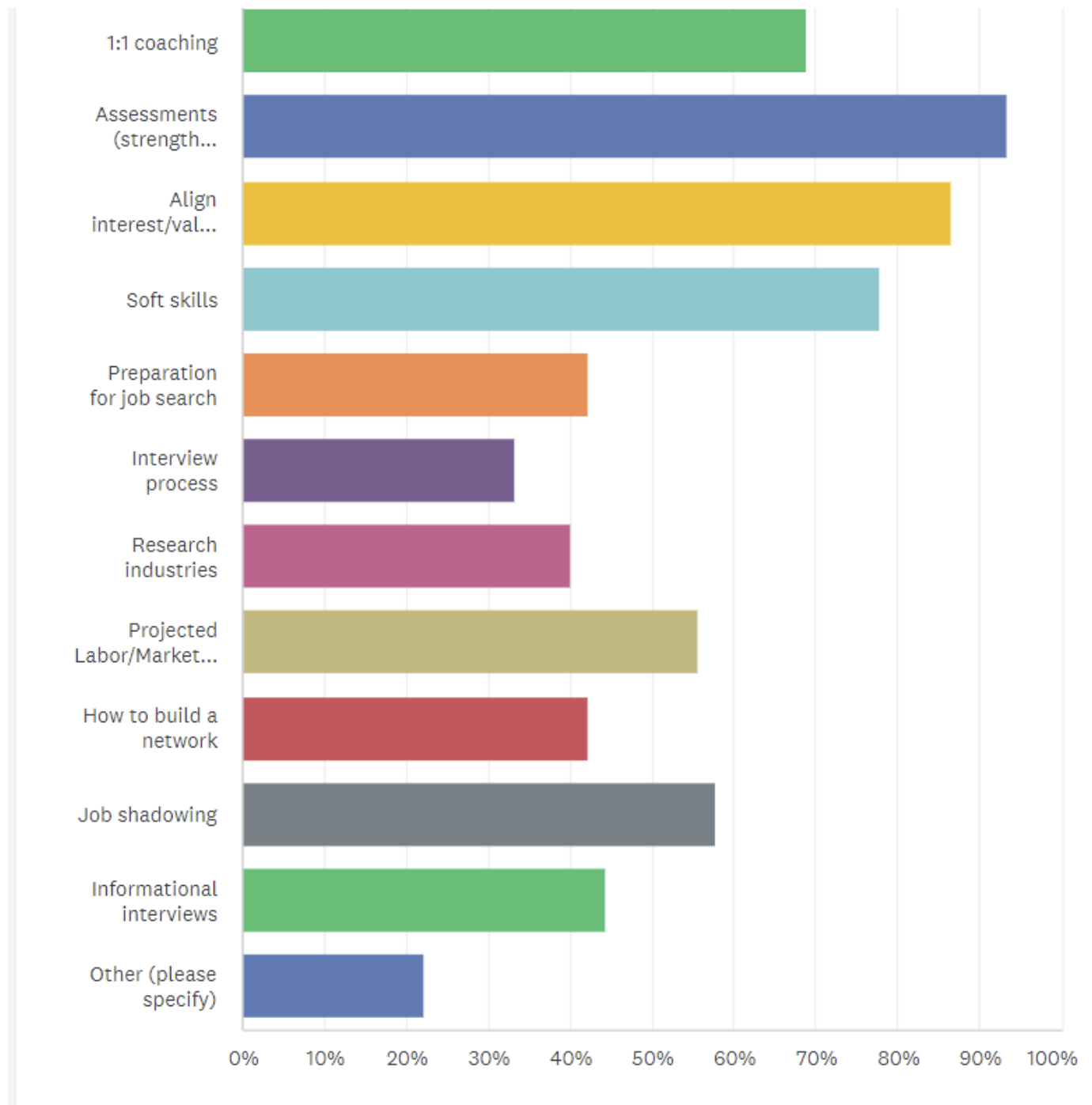
*Survey results* – Based on research and team conversations, developed short survey to hear challenges, best practices, and recommended approach to help students arrive at a best fit major and career they desire. Received 45 total responses from four Ohio colleges (Columbus State Community College, North Central State College, Cuyahoga Community College, and Lakeland Community College).

### *Role at college*



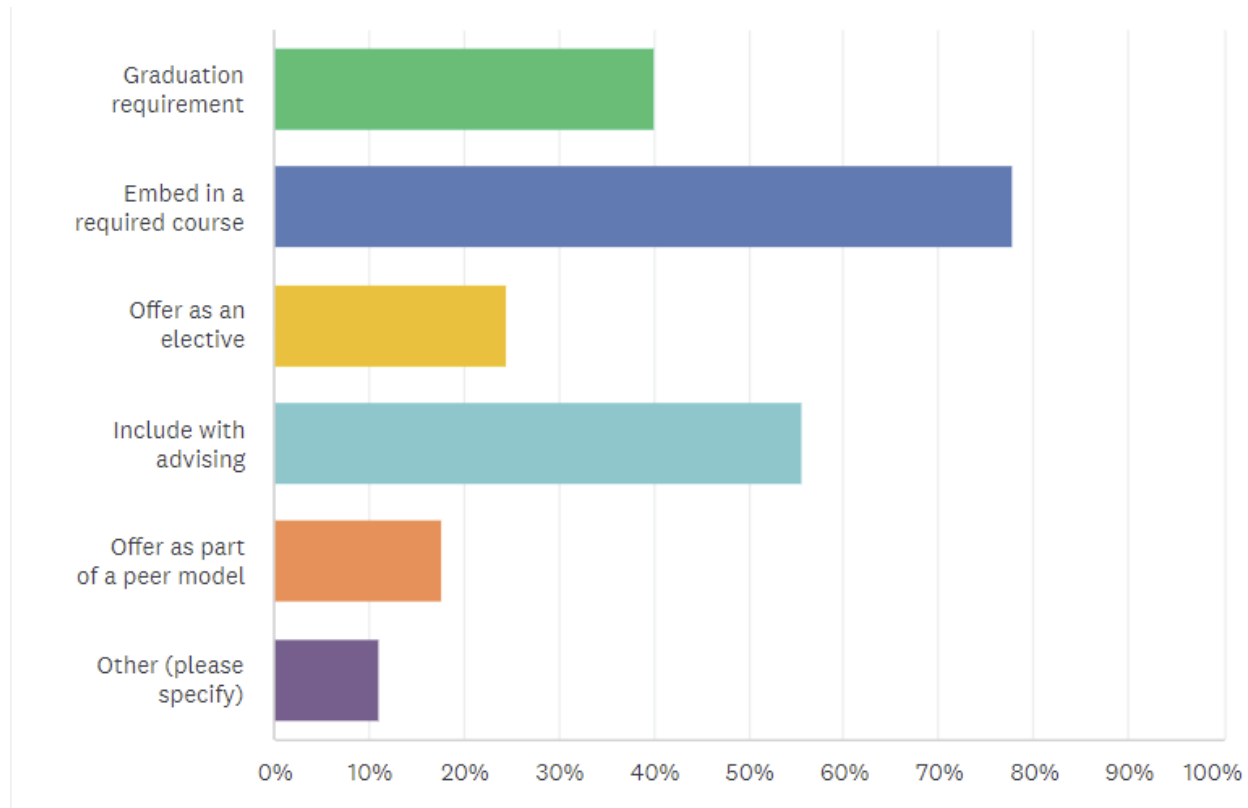
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Staff	66.67%	30
Faculty	8.89%	4
Administration	22.22%	10
Other (please specify)	Responses	2.22%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>45</b>

What should be included in a first year Career Coaching Program?



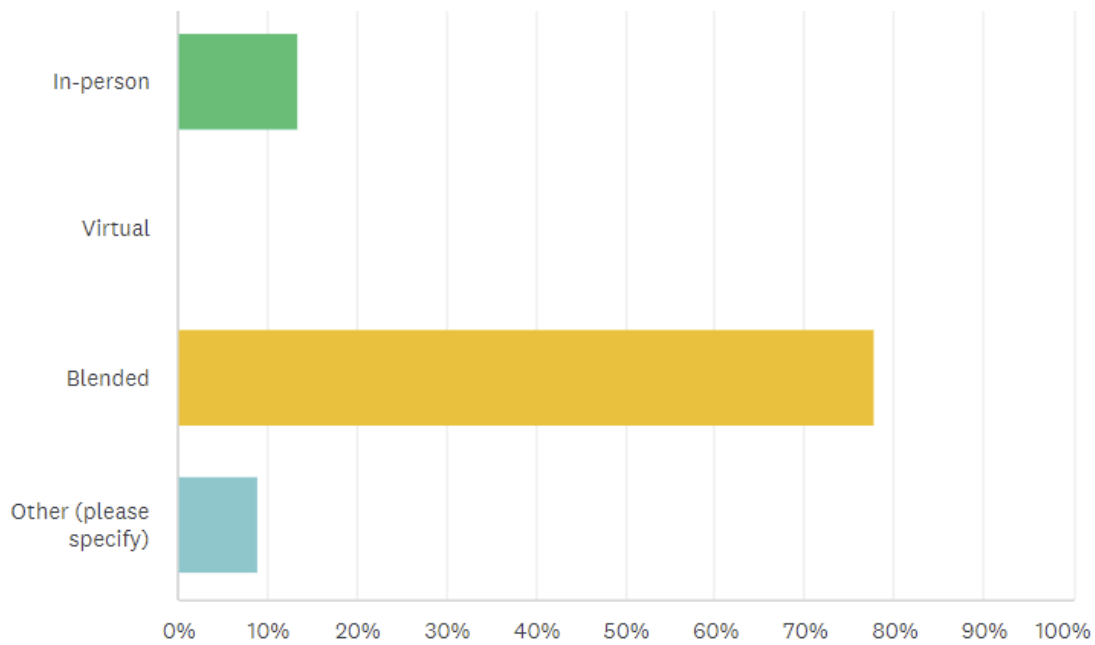
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
1:1 coaching	68.89%	31
Assessments (strength inventory, skills, interests, etc.)	93.33%	42
Align interest/values to major and career path	86.67%	39
Soft skills	77.78%	35
Preparation for job search	42.22%	19
Interview process	33.33%	15
Research industries	40.00%	18
Projected Labor/Market Data & Wages	55.56%	25
How to build a network	42.22%	19
Job shadowing	57.78%	26
Informational interviews	44.44%	20
Other (please specify)	Responses	22.22% 10
<b>Total Respondents: 45</b>		

*Best way to offer a career coaching program?*



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Graduation requirement	40.00%	18
Embed in a required course	77.78%	35
Offer as an elective	24.44%	11
Include with advising	55.56%	25
Offer as part of a peer model	17.78%	8
Other (please specify)	Responses	11.11%
<b>Total Respondents: 45</b>		

*Best delivery format to facilitate student engagement?*



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
In-person	13.33%	6
Virtual	0.00%	0
Blended	77.78%	35
Other (please specify)	Responses	8.89%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>45</b>