

# PREPARING STUDENTS FOR LIFE AFTER GRADUATION: A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN FACULTY AND CAREER SERVICES

By Kristine Dillon

In recent years, colleges and universities have been called upon to articulate the value proposition of a college degree in the context of its increasing cost. Simultaneously, amid residual anxiety over the recent recession, students are entering college under growing pressure to make sure their educational experiences translate to viable first jobs and durable career opportunities.

With these real challenges come heightened expectations for the effectiveness of career services at colleges and universities, particularly those with an emphasis on liberal arts and humanities — degrees that many believe imply a competitive disadvantage in the professional job market.

## Current State of Career Services

Career services has experienced a coming of age over the last couple of decades. Some of this evolution can be attributed to the shift toward a more diverse student population. Historically, the majority of college students came from middle- to upper-class families, many with college-educated parents who had a built-in network of associates and friends who could connect them to a desirable occupation. Expectations of formal connections between institutions and job opportunities

were not as high when other informal networks achieved strong outcomes.

In the aftermath of the 2008 recession, and with more first-generation, underrepresented and/or low-income undergraduates in attendance (e.g., low-income students increased in enrollment from 12% in 1996 to 20% in 2016), colleges are being called upon to support students with a more formal infrastructure designed to help them achieve their career aspirations.

The advent of online postings has also changed the game by democratizing job searches, challenging many institutions to clarify the competitive advantage of their career services functions. Previously, institutions' unique relationships with employers often meant the difference between a student finding out about a potential opening or remaining in the dark. In an internet-enabled era, such relationships are somewhat diminished by these public postings.

Despite these factors raising the stakes for career services, survey research shows that many students are failing to take advantage of the resources offered. When a student first enrolls, there are a plethora of competing opportunities for their time between classes, extracurriculars and social activities, so students tend to postpone their career planning, thinking this is one college resource that can be tapped closer to graduation. But, given the importance of internships and career-related training in securing a job, many students seek out career services too late in their collegiate experience to see any real benefit.

This phenomenon may explain why, according to a recent survey conducted by Huron, only 24% of recent graduates reported finding a job with the help of their institutions' career services.

**24%** OF RECENT GRADUATES REPORTED FINDING A JOB WITH THE HELP OF CAREER SERVICES.

## The Faculty X-Factor

Huron's study also found that 75% of recent graduates credited faculty members as the most important contributor to their success. One way to invigorate career services may be for institutions to harness the positive faculty influence to connect students with campus career advisers who can facilitate earlier, increased and intentional career planning.

**75%** OF RECENT GRADUATES SAID FACULTY MEMBERS WERE THE TOP CONTRIBUTORS TO HELPING THEM ACHIEVE THEIR EDUCATIONAL GOALS.

Recognizing that many faculty members are understandably most comfortable engaging with students on topics related to their respective academic disciplines, it is clear faculty should not be expected to be the sole career advisers. They should, however, be able to reinforce to students the importance of accessing career services early in their collegiate careers as part of their academic plans. Such endorsements can connect students with valuable, applicable resources. Department chairs and administrators can help by emphasizing the importance of collaboration between these two groups and facilitating meaningful interactions.

At Miami University in Ohio, for example, the career center and faculty collaborate to guide students as they explore potential career opportunities. The university reported a 266% increase in career advising appointments for humanities majors after the implementation of their faculty/career center work group. Faculty can also request career center representatives

lead classroom sessions geared specifically for the students in their area of study.

## Working Together for Student Success

The best equation for students' long-term success is career services staff and faculty working closely together, aligned toward a common goal of helping students find meaningful work after graduation. The power of these alliances, supported by administration, can help institutions deliver on their promise to students: to leave campus highly qualified to be a productive contributor to their communities.

### Carleton College's Career Pathways Project

In the future, career services will continue to evolve with a push for even more customizable, interactive, online resources that connect students at different levels and with different academic interests to a network of alumni and advocates who can help them to achieve their post-college aspirations.

For example, Carleton College's Pathways program includes an interactive webpage that allows current students to explore the career paths of real graduates. Based on the information students enter, the database serves up potential job titles, relevant courses, available internships and alumni who may be willing to act as mentors.

The goal of this initiative is twofold — to emphasize the value of a liberal arts education while preparing students for life after graduation — and can be replicated at any institution willing to architect resources that help students imagine the possibilities associated with a career in English literature, philosophy, art history or any number of other degrees.

## Key Takeaways

### Think differently.

Remember that a more diverse student population requires more intentional outreach on the part of an institution's career services to connect rising graduates with career opportunities.

### Plan differently.

Bring together representatives from faculty and career services to strategize opportunities to collaborate for students' post-graduation success.

### Act differently.

Leverage positive faculty-student relationships to endorse the value of proactive, consistent use of career services offerings.



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