



Leading with Career Development to Attract Prospects

Three Imperatives of a Career-First Enrollment
Strategy

Enrollment Management Forum

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Executive Summary

Recession Brings Career Front-And-Center in the Minds of Prospects

As the coronavirus pandemic threatens to leave a deep, long-lasting recession in its wake, prospective students and families are rethinking their college choices. Is a four-year college degree still worth investing their savings or taking on debt in an uncertain economy? Would it be more prudent to attend a less-expensive, more-career-focused college?

As reports of continuing job losses and economic uncertainty sweep the morning news, institutions must recognize that career readiness is now the top priority for most students. In this “new normal,” it is no longer sufficient for institutions to highlight career support as an auxiliary service for continuing students. Institutions must showcase their essential role in the three core stages of a student’s career development journey – career discovery, skill development, and employer networking – to prospective students and families.

Forward-thinking institutions are working to become trusted partners in all three of these stages of the career development journey by focusing on the following imperatives.

Three Imperatives of a Career-First Enrollment Strategy

1 Engage Prospects in Personalized Career Discovery

Smart institutions are gaining prospects’ attention by providing career resources early in the college search process. They can help students identify possible career tracks, learn about job requirements, and see how their institution will prepare students for those desired career plans.

- Practice 1: Web-based Interactive Career Tool – *Embed your institution in your prospects’ career plans*
- Practice 2: Proactive Personalized Career Advising – *Introduce sticky and scalable career support services for prospects*

2 Demonstrate College-to-Career Alignment

While career exploration tools can grab prospects’ attention at the top of the funnel, institutions can improve their chances of enrolling these career-minded students by painting a vision of a holistic career development process throughout college. In particular, institutions must make sure to address the key areas of concern – alignment of academic coursework with careers and financial support for career initiatives.

- Practice 3: Integrated Career and Academic Development Journey Map – *Provide branded career pathways with paced guidance from orientation to graduation*
- Practice 4: Universal, Guaranteed Internship Funding – *Earmark funding for career initiatives that can be highlighted in first communications to prospects*

3 Provide Industry-Specific Experiential Learning Opportunities

With the emphasis on “relevant work experience” in the labor market, many students are looking to enter the job market straight out of high school – skipping college altogether. Co-designing programs with employers that allow students to attend college, while simultaneously gaining specialized experience and building professional networks, will help institutions attract ROI-focused prospective students.

- Practice 5: Corporate Mentor-Guided Recruitment Drives – *Engage corporate mentors in recruiting events to demonstrate alignment with industry and provide early networking opportunities*
- Practice 6: Contract-Based Projects with Local Employers – *Provide short-term work opportunities with employers in niche industries*
- Practice 7: Career Advancement Program Pathway – *Design programs to help experienced workers progress their careers*



The Present State of Career-Focused College Shopping

INTRODUCTION

The Rise of Return-on-Education (ROE) Skepticism

Today's universities are facing increased criticism for underserving students when it comes to career readiness. The media, the general population, hiring managers, and even their own graduates claim that college does not adequately prepare students for the workforce. This is making prospective students and families skeptical about whether college is worth it or the right fit for them.

Higher Ed Under Fire for Underpreparing Students for the Workforce

Current Students and Alumni



66%

Of college students in 2018 were skeptical that they would graduate with the know-how to succeed in the job market



50%

Of 2018 college graduates reported that they did not gain the critical skills needed to transition into the workforce – such as complex problem solving, resume writing, workplace technologies, and interview skills

Employers and General Population



75%

Of hiring managers in 2018 thought that recent college graduates were ill-equipped to advance their careers



80%

Of U.S. workers in 2020 say that the education system has failed to evolve to meet the needs of the workforce

“

I think college is basically for fun...and not for learning. I don't consider going to college evidence of exceptional ability. In fact, ideally you dropped out.

Elon Musk, Chief Executive Officer, Tesla Inc

Many Prospects Skeptical about the Value of College



56%

Of high school teenagers say that a high school diploma is sufficient for a “good job”



60%

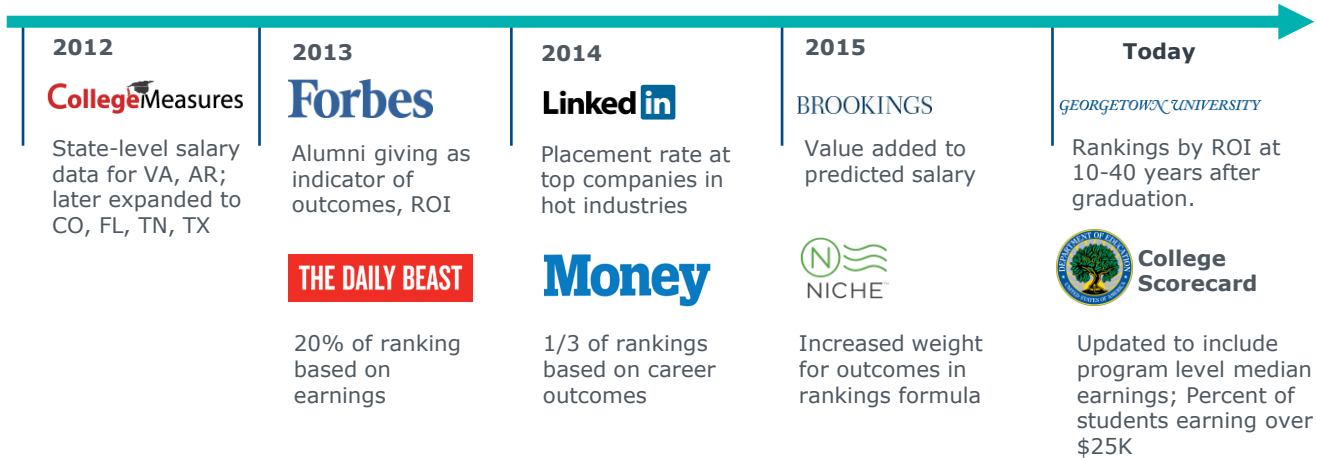
Of parents believe an internship at Google is more valuable than a Harvard degree

No Longer Shopping Blind

Proliferation of Rankings and Search Tools Based on Outcomes

With the rise in concerns about career outcomes, it's not surprising that tools to measure return on education have swept the marketplace. Prior to 2010, prospective students lacked information about differences in post-graduate earnings from different institutions. Today, salary outcomes are freely and widely available through a wealth of "college payoff" tools from various think-tanks, NGOs, private corporations, and state and federal governments.

Resources to Measure ROE Gain Steam in the Last Decade



Despite the intuitive appeal of such ROE measurement tools, they often contain flawed or misleading data, and are plagued by methodological shortcomings. These inaccuracies make it critical for institutions to reclaim their own story about the ROI on their degrees and correct any career-related misperceptions that prospects may have about their institutions.

ROE Measurement Tools Plagued by Methodological Shortcomings



Limited Sample Sizes

Many rankings use self-reported salaries or only consider students who received federal aid.



Focus on Early Career Salary

Professional degrees confer immediate salary benefits, but liberal arts graduates see greater lifetime salary growth



Skew from Graduate School Placement

Lack of immediate earnings of students who go to graduate school directly after college draw down averages



Bias toward STEM

Lack of adjustment for program mix disadvantages institutions that emphasize lower-pay pursuits with high societal value, including social services, education, and volunteer work.

Career Concerns Exacerbated by Looming Recession

Lessons from Previous Recession Justify Student Anxiety about Outcomes

Prospective students are concerned about the financial impact of COVID-19 on their families – and their futures. Faced with a sudden economic downturn, and a lot of uncertainty, we anticipate that they will be more conservative in their spending for college – reluctant to invest their savings or take on what they deem to be excessive debt for college. Thus, they’re thinking hard about their college options. Should they attend a community college instead of a four-year school, stay closer to home, or opt for a less expensive alternative that what they’d been considering? Will the economic downturn resolve in time for them to find jobs post-graduation?

Prospective Students Rethinking their College Plans Due to COVID-19 and Recession

57%

Of teens are concerned about how COVID-19 will impact their plan for the future

30%

Of prospective students plan to delay their college start date

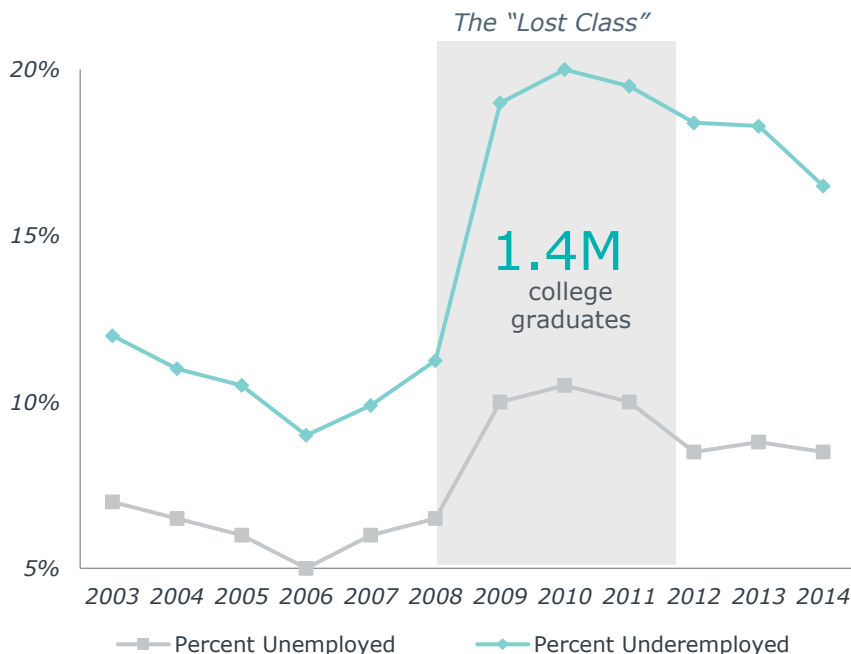
27%

Of high school juniors and seniors say they now plan to work to earn money

If the recession persists, students will also have reason to worry about lifetime earnings and their ability to pay off college debt. Research from the 2008 recession shows that the harmful impact of a protracted recession on graduate outcomes can be especially enduring. Dr. Lisa Kahn, Associate Professor of Economics at Yale University, estimated that even 17 years post-college, the recession-period graduates earn approximately 10% less than graduates who completed when the economy was strong. This earnings deficit experienced by “the lost classes” of the last recession are likely to add to the increased skepticism among students and parents about the ROI of a college degree.

Suboptimal Labor Market Outcomes Immediately Post 2008 Recession...

Unemployment and Underemployment by Graduation Year



...Resulting in Lasting Impact on Graduates’ Lifetime Earnings



Lisa Kahn,
Associate Professor of
Economics
Yale University

↓ 7-25%

Percentage starting income of new graduates falls for every one-point increase in national unemployment

10%

Percent less earned on average after 17 years than those who graduated in a strong economy

Source: <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/24/high-school-students-face-a-new-reality-due-to-coronavirus.html>, <https://www.juniorachievement.org/documents/2009/0/2020+COVID-19+Survey+Executive+Summary.pdf>

Three Imperatives of a Career-First Enrollment Strategy

To help prospective students understand how college will positively impact their future career outcomes, schools must demonstrate their critical roles in the three core stages of a student's career development journey – career discovery, skill development, and employer networking. This white paper shares three imperatives that can help institutions attract career-minded prospects to their campuses.

Leading with Career Development to Attract Prospects

1

Engage Prospects in Personalized Career Discovery



Insert Your Institution in the Career Planning Process

1. Web-based Interactive Career Tool
2. Proactive Personalized Career Advising

2

Demonstrate College-to-Career Alignment



Map Skill Development to College Experiences

3. Integrated Career and Academic Journey Map
4. Universal, Guaranteed Internship Funding

3

Provide Industry-Specific Experiential Learning Opportunities



Showcase Connections to Employers in Specialized Fields

5. Corporate Mentor Guided Recruitment Drives
6. Contract-Based Projects with Local Employers
7. Career Advancement Program Pathway

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Web-based Interactive Career Tool

Embed your Institution in your Prospects' Career Plans




To highlight ROI, most institutions provide information about job placement rates and average starting salaries of graduates on their websites. But these static figures and charts often fail to grab the attention of prospects as they've become increasingly status quo. Institutions can differentiate themselves and engage prospective students more effectively by providing interactive career discovery tools on their websites.

Montgomery College's EMSI Career Coach service leads prospective students through a personalized career exploration exercise, and then maps the results to the institution's programs of study, allowing Montgomery to organically become part of their prospects' career plans.


Students start their engagement with Career Coach by taking a career assessment survey. They can either take a "quick-start" assessment with six questions or a detailed survey of 60 questions about their personal interests. The Career Coach then suggests a range of possible career paths that would best fit their traits and preferences.

If prospects already have a few career options in mind, they can skip the career assessment tool altogether and use the "Browse Careers" option. This allows them to compare information about median wages and the educational degree(s) required for entry-level positions for different careers. Students can then investigate the programs at Montgomery that will prepare them for those preferred career paths.

The EMSI "Career Coach" Service

- 
Career Assessment
 Surface best-fit careers based on interests and competencies
- 
Hot Jobs Exploration
 Compare jobs by description, earnings, growth, and availability
- 
Career-to-Program Mapping
 Browse careers to find programs linked to occupations

Elements of Program Success



- ▶ Interactive, self-service web resources
- ▶ Careers and programs linked to facilitate back-and-forth comparison
- ▶ Promoted to prospects through high school teachers and classroom use
- ▶ Opportunities linked to program content marketing

A Popular and High Impact Tool

2,000

Visitors per month to the site

26


Of Montgomery's major feeder high schools use the tool

100

New students enrolled each fall through tool

\$15

Return on each dollar invested in the tool



Often introduced to prospects by high school teachers and counselors, the Career Coach tool provides free advertisement for Montgomery and helps drive over 2,000 visitors to the website per month, including from 26 high-priority feeder schools in their county. Montgomery's senior administrators calculate that for each dollar they've invested in Career Coach, they receive a return of 15 dollars through new student enrollments.

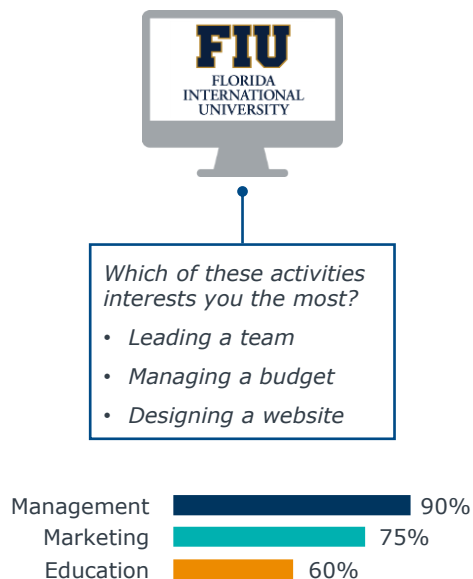
Universities can choose to invest in similar tools by vendors like EMSI or create their own in-house career portal specifically designed to help insert their institutions into the career discovery process.

Proactive Personalized Career Advising

Introduce Sticky and Scalable Career Services to Prospects

While pre-application career discovery tools can help institutions build connections with prospects, institutions should pair those guided explorations with personalized consultations with advisers as early as possible. Universities can equip advisers with the results from the EMSI Career Coach Tool or a similar in-house pre-application survey so that they can have more meaningful career-mapping conversations with students during orientation. The advisers can help students assess their majors and direct them to specific curricular and co-curricular opportunities that best fit their interests and career ambitions – helping them see, concretely, how the institution will impact their career development and trajectory.

Pre-application Survey Links Personal Interests to Career Fields



Survey Results Enable Major Fit Discussions at Orientation



**Good Major/
Interest Fit**

Advising Guide Recommendations

- Recommend courses
- Discuss co-curricular, experiential options

**Major/
Interest Mismatch**

- Revisit major choice motivations
- Discuss alternatives
- Introduce academic support options

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Integrated Career and Academic Journey Map

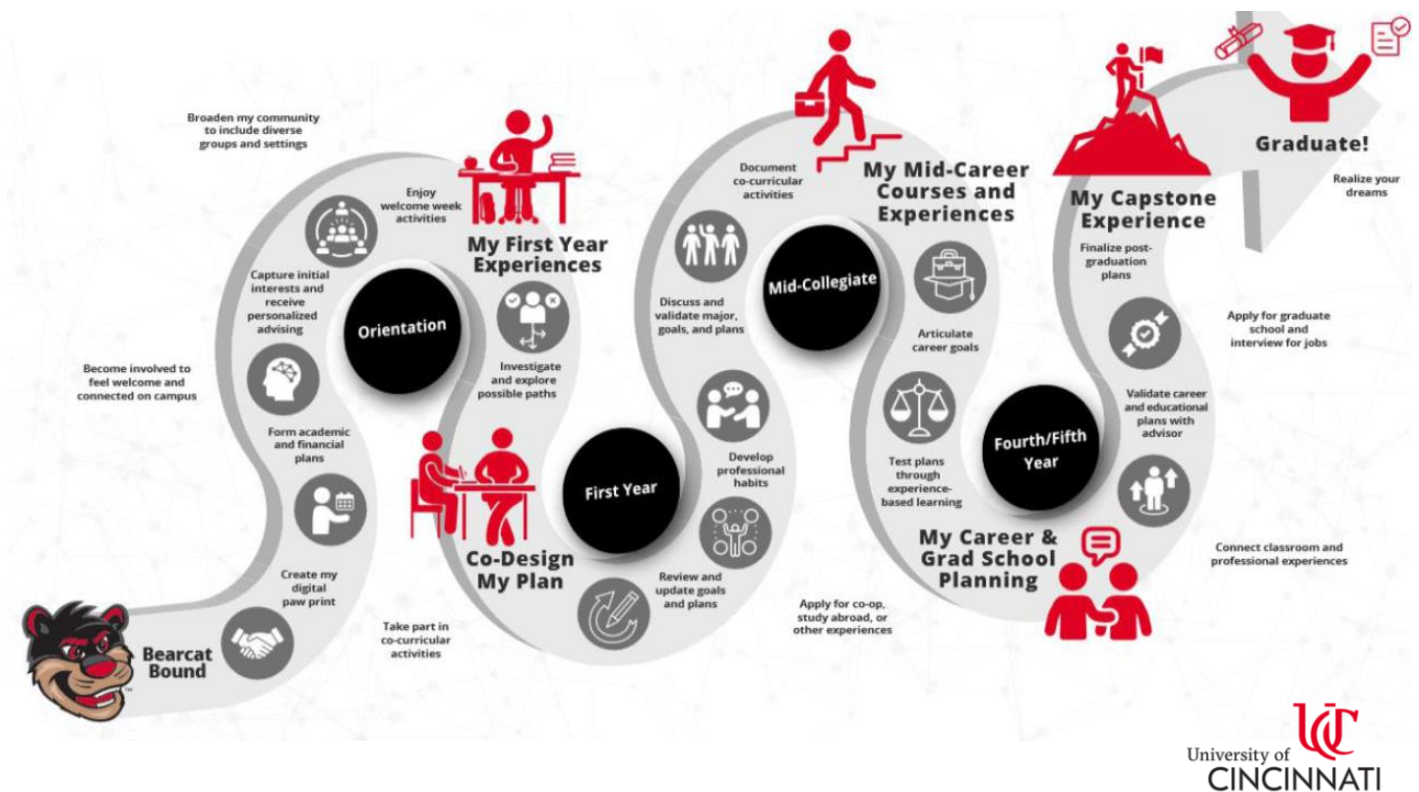
Branded Career Pathway with Paced Guidance throughout College

Career services are often treated as auxiliary, disconnected from academic curriculum and advising, and with limited reach and resources. At the same time, many faculty members struggle to connect their curriculum to students' non-academic career ambitions. The lack of alignment between academic programs and career services makes it challenging for recruiters to convince prospects of their institutional commitment to career development. Prospects are often left skeptical that they will receive adequate career support throughout their four years in college.

To recruit career-minded prospects, institutions must paint a compelling vision for the four-year career development journey that students will embark on once they enroll. To that end, in 2019 the University of Cincinnati (UC) rolled out their Bearcat Promise, an enormous effort to provide integrated career and academic development to all students from orientation to graduation.

A *branded* program (i.e. with a name and a website landing page dedicated to the program) and a comprehensive career journey map helps UC communicate to prospects about the granular, paced career development guidance that they will receive throughout college, reinforcing the career relevance of everything they will do while on campus.

Bearcat Promise Marketing Materials Illustrate a Student's Skill Development Journey from Orientation to Graduation



Integrated Career and Academic Journey Map

Branded Career Pathway with Paced Guidance throughout College (Continued)

As part of the program, UC faculty and staff have incorporated career learning outcomes to all 340 majors and have identified key milestones that students must achieve throughout college.

In the first year, students learn to recognize how various disciplines, courses, and majors lead to different career paths. They narrow down their professional goals, in collaboration with their advisers, and map out the courses that most closely aligns with their career plans.

Midway through college, students are encouraged to engage in experiential learning through co-op, internship, service learning, and student teaching and research.

In the fourth or fifth year, students finalize their post-graduation plans and complete a capstone project that helps them demonstrate mastery of professional skills in their specific career track.

Career Learning Embedded into the Curriculum throughout College



“Students will graduate with a degree in one hand and a career plan in the other.”

Caroline Miller, Recently Retired Vice Provost of Enrollment Management

Early Signs of Program Success

92%

Of first year students in Fall 2019 registered on the career network, Handshake, compared to about 23% at peer institutions

Guaranteed Internship Funding

Earmarked Funding for Career Initiatives Highlighted in Marketing Materials

Despite knowing the benefits of accessing career initiatives during college, such as internships and externships, many students still face major financial barriers in pursuing them. 40% of employers only provide unpaid internships, and there are additional costs – such as clothing and transportation – that exacerbate how inaccessible they feel to certain segments of students. While many universities step in to offer internship funding, most students aren't aware of its availability, or feel unsure about whether they'll qualify. Finding internships during a pandemic-triggered economic downturn will be hard enough; institutions can differentiate themselves by leveling the playing field for funding, making it easier for universities to promote their institution to prospective students and families.

Wheaton College signals their commitment to career development by promising every prospective student a pot of internship funding if they enroll. This universal, guaranteed funding for internships is highlighted in their financial aid package and even in their first email communication to prospects. Frontloading this clear, simple guarantee sends a powerful message to prospective students that career support is a top priority for Wheaton.

Wheaton Edge's Internship Funding for all Students Enables Concise Career Support Marketing to Prospects



“

“Everyone gets internship funding” is far more convincing than “some of you may get funding if you apply by this deadline.”

Former Recruiter, Wheaton College

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Corporate Mentor-Guided Recruitment Drives

Provide Early Networking Opportunities to Prospects

Today's students are well-aware of the value of networking. Stories about jobs secured through personal connections abound. Prospects are aware that an excellent education is not enough – they need support from the right people at the right time. They wonder: Where does college fit into this equation? Which institutions will help them build the connections required to launch their careers?

Bentley University's innovative Women's Leadership Program attracts high priority student populations by emphasizing one-on-one mentorship opportunities with industry professionals. The corporate mentors offer students guidance based on their own experiences in the workplace and help them prepare for jobs. The mentors also participate in recruiting events, enabling prospective students to build their career network even before they enroll in college.



Women's Leadership Program Provides One-On-One Support from Corporate Mentors



First-Years Paired with Mentors

- Students develop early connections with industry



Four-Year Leadership Curriculum

- Stepped courses, workshops, networking events, and visits to businesses
- Combines hands-on learning with reflection on workplace gender issues



Additional Scholarships

- Each participant receives a \$10K yearly scholarship, renewable for four years

Targeted to Attract High-Value Segments During the Admissions Process



Prospects Meet with Mentors

- Events with corporate mentors underscore value add of program



Current Students Recruit Prospects

- Current students call prospective students to help recruit the next cohort

“When I was deciding where to go, the opportunity to be part of the Women's Leadership Program at Bentley was a defining point...this program would give me the tools to have a strong voice and be a great leader.

Sara Buitrago Montoya '22,
Women's Leadership Program Leader

Promising Early Results

70

Women in the initial cohort

15%

Of female, first-year students

Contract-Based Projects with Local Employers

Provide Short-term Work Opportunities with Employers in Niche Industries

Students interested in pursuing careers in technical industries often rightly question whether college will provide them with enough practical experience to break into their chosen field. At the same time, employers struggle to identify top emerging student talent for entry-level positions who are ready to add value from day one. Deploying students to help employers complete one-off projects represents an opportunity to develop high-impact partnerships that provide value to both students and partnering organizations. Students can learn critical skills first-hand from employers while improving their chances of employment post-graduation. Employers can access inexpensive specialized labor for urgent projects while identifying a steady pipeline of long-term talent.

Wichita State University (WSU) partners with several regionally prominent aeronautics firms to provide students for contract projects. WSU sources and trains the students, provides faculty oversight, and retains 25 percent of the contract revenue, while students earn a \$25 hourly wage and opportunities for full-time employment. Enabling students to gain practical experience and establishing a pipeline to employers helps recruit the next generation of ROI-focused prospective students who are looking for assurances about gainful employment post-college.

Other universities have developed similar programs for other industries such as advertising, based on availability of local employers and strong programs of study at their institutions. In the COVID-era, institutions may find that opportunities exist even beyond their local community, with a nationwide shift toward virtual work.

University-Based Contracting Opens Doors to Employment During and After College



National Institute for Aviation Research



Wichita State contracts students for engineering projects at \$25/hour



University establishes pipeline to aeronautics firms in the Wichita State area



University hires, fires, and trains students



Employers gain inexpensive student labor for urgent projects, while identifying potential future, full-time employees



Students earn \$10-15K/year and gain critical skills

Result of Beechcraft Partnership



35%

Of student workers were employed at Beechcraft after graduation

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

Career Advancement Program Pathway

Design Programs to Help Students Progress in their Careers

Some prospective students interested in specialized industries wonder whether college is worth their money – or their time. After all, many well-paid technical jobs do not require a four-year college degree. For example, students can acquire entry-level positions at Newport News Shipbuilding, Virginia’s largest industrial employer, with high school diplomas or associate degrees. These new, junior-level employees undergo on-the-job training as apprentices in Newport’s own “Apprentice School.”

However, entry-level employees have difficulty advancing their careers to management or leadership positions without a bachelor’s degree. Old Dominion University (ODU) solved this problem by collaborating with Newport News Shipbuilding to offer a program specifically designed for students who would like to work at Newport as apprentices while taking courses at ODU for a bachelor’s degree in Mechanical or Electrical Engineering.

In a typical week, the apprentices spend two days at ODU, learning concepts and theory (e.g. heat transfer, differential equations), and three days at the Apprentice School/Shipyard, applying their knowledge in engineering and design. The students are paid a \$16 hourly wage and have their tuition, fees, and books covered by Newport, along with a guarantee of full-time employment post-graduation. Graduates of the program bypass entry-level positions, join at a higher pay grade, and are expected to advance quickly and take on managerial roles at the firm.



4-Year Brings Apprenticeship to Engineering

- 10 apprenticeships/year
- Mix of students who would have attended a 4-year for bachelor’s, Newport News apprentices up-credentialing

Beyond the Traditional Co-op, Blended Learning

- 2 days/week class at ODU, practical and theory
- 3 days/week at shipyard, applying new knowledge
- Earn BS in Mechanical or Electrical Engineering
- Maintain employment with Newport News Shipbuilding upon completion



Graduates Bypass Entry-Level Roles

Traditional Apprentice Route

\$35-55K

Entering salary

Job Titles

Cost Estimator
Marine Designer
Nuclear Test Technician

Baccalaureate Apprentice Route

\$55-65K

Entering salary

Job Titles

Mechanical Engineer
Electrical Engineer
Marine Engineer

- Complete with first-hand experience, more attractive to employers
- Eligible for Engineer 2 positions, higher pay grade
- Expected to advance quickly and take on managerial roles

Universities can leverage partnerships with similar employers in local industries to show prospects how college fits into their goals for career progression. For more information on how to find and secure best-fit employer partners, please refer to EAB’s Publication, *Critical Disciplines to Grow Employer Partnerships*, and the accompanying implementation resource, *Toolkit to Grow Employer Partnerships*.



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