

# Meeting the Needs and Motivations of Working Professional Student Segments

Launching and repositioning programs that can compete in a challenging market requires a nuanced assessment of working professional students' needs and motivations. All too often, these students are treated as one monolithic audience—or divided simply into career changers vs. career advancers. A closer look at the different needs and motivations of working professional segments reveals opportunities for professional and adult ed units to innovate program design and strengthen the portfolio.

Audience Segment	Upskilling in Place	Seeking Promotion	Facing Replacement	Returning to Workforce	Preparing for a Switch	Pursuing a Passion
	Self-Diagnose Educational Need		Require Intervention to Recognize Educational Need			
	<p><i>"I need new skills to keep up with job expectations."</i></p> <p><b>Value Added by Education</b> Value most often from skills learned quickly (not credential's authority).</p> <p><b>Career Goal</b> Keep Up</p>	<p><i>"I need to build new skills for my next step."</i></p> <p><b>Value Added by Education</b> Skills often outweigh credential, except in industries with prescribed career ladders.</p> <p><b>Career Goal</b> Advance</p>	<p><i>"My career doesn't exist anymore."</i></p> <p>Inform about job options.</p> <p><i>"I need retraining."</i></p> <p><b>Value Added by Education</b> New skills offer greatest benefit but may require credential to change industry.</p> <p><b>Career Goal</b> Secure a New Job</p>	<p><i>"I haven't worked professionally in a long time."</i></p> <p>Explain how to refresh skills.</p> <p><i>"I need to develop updated skills."</i></p> <p><b>Value Added by Education</b> Credential communicates readiness for today's job, and updated skills ensure performance.</p> <p><b>Career Goal</b> Secure a New Job</p>	<p><i>"I want a better job."</i></p> <p>Articulate pathways to better jobs.</p> <p><i>"I need to prepare for a career switch."</i></p> <p><b>Value Added by Education</b> Credential signals preparation, but fields (e.g., tech) may primarily seek skill growth.</p> <p><b>Career Goal</b> Secure a New Job</p>	<p><i>"I'm looking for a career with meaning."</i></p> <p>Introduce meaningful alternatives.</p> <p><i>"I need to prepare for a career switch."</i></p> <p><b>Value Added by Education</b> Skills learned for new role matter most if entry-level degree requirements are met.</p> <p><b>Career Goal</b> Secure a New Job</p>
	Student Motivations		Student Motivations			
	Require new skills to stay current in their jobs, or to move laterally to another employer.	Need to prepare themselves for more senior roles in their fields.	Must change jobs due to automation, outsourcing, corporate relocation, etc.	Refresh skills to return to work after long-term unemployment or full-time caregiving.	Develop different skills to move to a job with greater compensation, prestige, or work-life balance.	Seek new skills to take job with greater personal meaning (e.g., business ownership, human services, creative roles).
	Student Needs		Student Needs			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affordability, because new skills may not lead to pay increase</li> <li>Flexible scheduling while working</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds on field knowledge</li> <li>Accessibility while working</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accelerated time to completion</li> <li>Retooling for an adjacent field</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rebuild professional networks</li> <li>Update technology-related skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction to unfamiliar field</li> <li>Create new professional networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio creation to demonstrate new abilities</li> <li>Preparation to navigate self-employment</li> </ul>
	Potential Signals of Market Demand		Potential Signals of Market Demand			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High unemployment</li> <li>Growing employment in fields with high need for digital or technical skills</li> <li>Employment concentrated in health and IT fields</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low unemployment within field</li> <li>Demand for managerial skills</li> <li>Growth in entry-level employees needing managers or who will seek to become managers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High concentration of jobs in manufacturing and highly technical fields</li> <li>High regional wages and taxes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Declining wages, or increasing cost of living</li> <li>Cyclical or sudden economic downturn</li> <li>Growing K-12 enrollment (leading indicator of parents returning to work)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low unemployment</li> <li>New industry moving into the region</li> <li>Growing industry diversification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low unemployment</li> <li>High regional income</li> <li>High proportion of millennials (seeking more fulfilling careers) or boomers (pursuing encore careers)</li> </ul>