



10 Tips for Integrating Career Throughout the Student Lifecycle

Effective career preparation isn't about discovering the perfect job. It's about developing a career path that evolves over time. When this process starts early in the college journey, students cultivate their strengths and interests with career outcomes in mind. This leads to better enrollment decisions, higher graduation rates and more choice-filled lives. Career-forward support may especially benefit underrepresented students, who often lack access to career guidance outside the institution.

Here are 10 actionable ways to integrate career throughout the student journey, from point of inquiry through graduation and beyond.

APPLY →	START →	GRADUATION →
PROSPECTIVE	ACTIVE	ALUMNI
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CLARIFY 2. IDENTIFY 3. EXPLORE 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. NORMALIZE 5. DEFINE 6. ENCOURAGE 7. CONNECT 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. INVITE 9. REINFORCE 10. SUPPORT

Prospective Students

1. Clarify student's primary objective

Setting goals right at the start of the educational journey helps students stay motivated and focused. Asking prospective students what they want to get out of college can illuminate how having a degree will impact their next steps in life. As time goes on, reminding students of their primary objective for education will serve as a touchstone that reaffirms their resolve even when challenges arise.

2. Identify student's strengths and interests

When faculty and staff talk to students about the future, they probably ask about potential careers. But while students might struggle to identify their ideal job, they are deeply connected to their personal interests. Discussing career exploration in the student-centered language of interests, passions and strengths ignites students' excitement about the future. When prospective students take time to think about what they enjoy doing and what they would like to learn, they make more informed choices about their degree and major.

3. Explore career paths that match strengths and interests

Students may know what inspires them, but they may not always know about career options that will translate their passions into opportunities. Once students recognize their strengths and interests, the next step is discovering career pathways where their skills will shine. Because most people change jobs several times over the course of a lifetime, honing a set of transferable skills ensures they will continue to advance and develop in a shifting career landscape.

Active Students

4. Normalize student experience

Almost all students experience doubt and insecurity on their college journey. But almost all students assume they're the only ones who feel that way. Exploring students' thoughts and assumptions about school and what they can or cannot accomplish is critical to their development. Once students learn that setbacks are a normal part of growth, they can cultivate the knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs that will support their success.

5. Define relationship between coursework and career

"When am I ever going to use this in life?" Most educators have heard that question from students at some point. Integrated career support can help answer it. Beginning with the first year of college, establishing a course of study that advances students' life goals will help them connect the dots from their interests to their coursework to their larger aspirations. Institutional resources such as career services can also support students' career exploration and preparation. When students see that they can build a career path based on what they care about, they feel invested in their future and in their education.

6. Encourage on-the-job opportunities

Let's say you know a recent graduate who always wanted to be an accountant. She chose her major, degree and even institution based on the belief that she was built for crunching numbers. But in her first few weeks on the job, she realized she'd made a mistake. Fortunately, students can test the waters of a potential career before taking the plunge. Internships, summer programs and hands-on coursework are just some of the ways students can get exposure to a field — and change that accounting major to astronomy just in time.

7. Connect students with alumni

Looking at resumés and LinkedIn profiles, you'd think that everyone's career path was a continual ascension from one promotion to the next. But we know that setbacks and self-doubt are part of everyone's journey. Conversations with alumni about their life path can offer students insights into the ups and down of a career trajectory. Giving students the opportunity to hear about the struggles along with the successes helps reset their expectations and inspires them to overcome their own challenges.

Alumni

8. Invite alumni to share their road

Alumni are an institution's best renewable resource. The same students who looked to alumni for career guidance will become the mentors who inspire future generations. Connecting with alumni offers students a fresh perspective on career development and gives them the chance to sharpen job search skills like networking and informational interviewing. As proud graduates, alumni also help institutions demonstrate what a college degree makes possible.

9. Reinforce lifelong learning

Just as career development is an ongoing process, the student journey can be too. As job descriptions change and new requirements emerge, more people will turn to continuing education to periodically refresh their skill set. Institutions can leverage the trend toward lifelong learning by offering courses and programs that accommodate all stages of the career journey.

10. Support ongoing career development.

Landing that first job out of college isn't the end of the road. It's a new step on a career pathway that will likely have more than a few twists and turns. Whether someone is looking for a different employer, seeking a promotion or ready to try a whole new field, career support continues to be valuable long after graduation.

Visit insidetrack.com and roadtripnation.org to learn more about integrating career support throughout the student lifecycle.