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INTRODUCTION

In recent years as the price of college has spiraled ever upward and median family income has remained flat, the ability to measure the return on investment of the bachelor’s degree has taken on new importance. Prospective students and their parents now study the financial benefits of higher education and the career outcomes of graduates of the campuses they’re considering as thoroughly as they scrutinize a college’s academic offerings, social life, and location.

This public discussion about the purpose of college—is it for a broad education or training for a job?—is far from a new debate. It’s one that has been raging for more than a century in American higher education. In the 1850s, for instance, the president of Brown University, Francis Wayland, worried about “institutional irrelevance” for colleges that didn’t prepare “practitioners” and instead focused solely on exercising students’ brains. At the time, Wayland was particularly worried about the need to prepare civil engineers to build the nation’s railroads.

Fast-forward to the debate today, and what’s different is that students and employers alike are demanding more of higher-education institutions in terms of preparing graduates for an ever-evolving job market. For young adults, bachelor’s degrees have become table stakes for stable employment, and there is more competition than ever before to secure a shrinking number of good jobs.

For employers, there is growing frustration that today’s college graduates are ill-prepared for the ambiguity of the modern workplace. Only 10 percent of employers say that the graduates they hire are adequately prepared for the workforce, according to a Gallup survey. As a result, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has recommended overhauling the accreditation process in higher education so that it includes employer input on academic matters and student experiences.

Still, despite the concerns of students and employers, providing career assistance remains low on the to-do list for many institutional leaders. As the president of Wake Forest University, Nathan Hatch, recently told The New York Times, career-services offices are “somewhere just below parking” as a matter of administrative priority. Presidents are far more concerned with fundraising, enrollment management, and the overall financial sustainability of their institutions. This paper outlines the ways that institutions could make career services a central part of student engagement and, in the process, improve the career prospects of their graduates and the financial underpinnings of their campuses.
On many campuses, the career center is tucked away in a forgotten corner of campus, starved for funds and talent. It usually sits under the student affairs division and competes for attention with new and expensive challenges surrounding campus mental health, sexual assault, and student activism. Nearly all of the other offices under the student affairs umbrella are focused on the undergraduate experience. Meanwhile, the career center is in a unique in-between position—serving students who are on their way out of school but not yet alumni.

One reason the career center is an afterthought on many campuses is that colleges entered the career-planning business somewhat reluctantly in the years after World War II. At the time, campus enrollments were ballooning thanks to the GI Bill, and Corporate America wanted an easy way to recruit soon-to-be graduates. Campuses set up offices to deal with the influx of employers, and eventually their functions expanded to help students find jobs by curating job listings, reviewing résumés, and setting up mock interviews. Many career offices also added the word “placement” to their names, a term they have since shed so they wouldn't give the appearance of promising students jobs after graduation.
WHY RESTRUCTURE NOW?

If career services have been a part of campuses for decades, why is now the right time to restructure? There are four key reasons why reimagining career services needs to move to the top of the priority list for institutional leaders:

REASON 1: RANKINGS ARE INCREASINGLY INCLUDING CAREER OUTCOMES IN THEIR METHODOLOGIES.

While the U.S. News & World Report college rankings still loom large among campus leaders hoping to improve their positions, there are signs that the list is beginning to show its age in an era of changing consumer behaviors.

Several new tools and sets of rankings that are simply better have emerged in recent years, including those of Money magazine, The Economist, the federal government’s College Scorecard, and LinkedIn. They all attempt to do what U.S. News has largely failed to do: measure what actually happens to students after graduation—their jobs and salaries, and their levels of debt. In other words, they are trying to be Consumer Reports for higher education.

Until recently, colleges could expect students and parents to trust them on the quality of the product. But faith in that assurance is flagging. Only by measuring what truly matters in a college—the actual outcome of a degree, rather than how many valedictorians a college recruits for its freshman class—will parents and students be better able to value the return on their investment by going to a specific college. Armed now with these new tools and rankings, prospective students and their parents approach the college search in different ways than they have in the past.
REASON 2: IMPROVING STUDENT RETENTION REQUIRES THAT COLLEGES PROVIDE REAL-WORLD LEARNING.

Students are no longer passive consumers. With significant debt burdens and rising underemployment, only 38 percent of college graduates in the last decade believed the cost was worth it, according to Gallup. One-third of undergraduates now transfer at least once before they earn a bachelor’s degree, according to the National Student Clearinghouse, and many drop out of school completely.

Part of the problem is that too many students are sleepwalking through college. They don’t engage enough in what researchers call “high-impact practices”—internships, undergraduate research, study abroad, writing-intensive classes, and interactions with professors. Many of these activities come outside the classroom, and as a result, are often not graded or measured as part of the formal degree program for which students are paying tuition. Career planning is another tool in the student engagement toolbox, but until recently too many colleges were not utilizing it. By bringing career services back into the fold of the daily life of campuses, institutions can begin to engage students around the meaning of their studies and help them discover a fulfilling career and life.

REASON 3: CAREER SERVICES PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW REVENUE SOURCES.

On most campuses, the career office is seen as an expense, not a potential revenue source. By rethinking the career office, institutions could create a network of employers who both serve the campus with potential internships and jobs for students, and also benefit from talent management offerings from the university. For example, through a reimagined career office, colleges could create customized learning opportunities that serve learners at all stages of their lives and careers, and provide modules to companies to serve their specific talent needs.

Employers themselves are already moving in this direction to ensure that their tuition-assistance dollars are spent on quality higher education programs. Some 71 percent of employers offer tuition benefits to their workers, according to Deloitte, and spend nearly $22 billion on the benefit annually. Most employers offer a flat-rate benefit each year and control how that money is used—for classes related to a person’s job or other positions in the organization. Now, employers want more oversight in where their dollars are used.

Employers such as JetBlue and Starbucks are increasingly picking one or just a small group of colleges where employees can use their educational benefit. In making these exclusive deals, the companies are often not only negotiating lower tuition prices than they would pay if the employees enrolled on their own, but they are also making judgments about quality and where students will get the best education and the best advice about their career tracks. Like students worried about wasting their money at a subpar college, employers are also trying to reduce their risks. Targeting career services toward employers’ specific needs for training could be helpful to students and a revenue-producing tool.

WITH SIGNIFICANT DEBT BURDENS AND RISING UNDEREMPLOYMENT, ONLY 38 PERCENT OF COLLEGE GRADUATES IN THE LAST DECADE BELIEVED THE COST WAS WORTH IT.
$90,000

THE AVERAGE ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET FOR THE CAREER SERVICES OFFICE

REASON 4: BOOTCAMPS THREATEN THE CAREER PREPARATION ROLE OF COLLEGES.

The pressure on new college graduates to find jobs has resulted in a surge of “bootcamps” aimed at bridging the last mile of training for jobs. Companies such as Koru, Galvanize, and Fullbridge, among many others, provide short courses in computer coding, business basics, and “soft skills” needed in the workplace.

There are now about 200 bootcamps, and a few have begun to work directly with established colleges. At least one, Northeastern University, has started its own bootcamp. An experimental program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education allows students to access federal financial aid for some of the programs.

The programs have gained traction because many young entrepreneurs—often recent college graduates themselves—saw that students were graduating without employable skills, thus creating an opening in the market. Think of these bootcamps as finishing schools for undergraduates. In some cases, these postgraduate programs have become de facto graduate schools, and they can provide key markers on a résumé to help students jump ahead in their careers.

Many of the services provided by bootcamps should be offered by colleges, but most institutions are not dedicating enough money or people to their career offices. Budgets for career services haven’t kept up with demand in recent years. The average annual operating budget for the office is only around $90,000—less than the published sticker price of tuition for just two students at some colleges—and many offices have actually seen their spending slashed in the decade since the Great Recession. Furthermore, the average career-services office employs only one counselor for every 2,917 students.

Figure 1: Numbers of students per professional staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>MEDIAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2,917</td>
<td>1,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>3,179</td>
<td>1,789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2,672</td>
<td>1,674</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>2,370</td>
<td>1,487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1,889</td>
<td>1,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1,645</td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2016-17 Career Services Benchmark Survey Report for Colleges and Universities, National Association of Colleges and Employers*
As a result of this limited investment, career services on most campuses are nothing more than information repositories in an era when students can often find much of the same information on their smartphones in a matter of seconds. So it shouldn’t come as a surprise that 40 percent of recent graduates (those who graduated between 2010 and 2016) never even visited their career offices, according to the Gallup-Purdue Index. Among those who made a visit, only 17 percent found it helpful.

The students most disappointed in career services, according to the Gallup-Purdue Index? First-generation students, who often lack the social capital to network for jobs, and undergraduates with heavy debt loads, who need to find work after graduation to pay off their loans—both groups that are critical to broader student success initiatives on campuses.

These findings from the Gallup-Purdue Index, and shifting student and parental attitudes about the purpose of college, make clear that career services desperately needs to be overhauled on many campuses. Given the increasing emphasis on graduate outcomes and the need for colleges to prove their value to prospective students, institutions can no longer afford to treat career services as the campus stepchildren.

AMONG THOSE WHO MADE A VISIT TO THE CAREER SERVICES OFFICE BETWEEN 2010 AND 2016, ONLY 17% FOUND IT VERY HELPFUL

PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGE GRADUATES WHO SAY THEY VISITED A CAREER SERVICES OFFICE, BY TIME PERIOD

WHILE ATTENDING [UNIVERSITY NAME], DID YOU VISIT THE CAREER SERVICES OFFICE AT LEAST ONCE?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up to 1949</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-1959</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970-1979</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1989</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1999</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2009</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2016</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All others indicated they were unsure if they visited the career services office at least once.
To begin reimagining career services, institutions might consider taking a page from the playbook of another campus restructuring project: student retention services. Several years ago, retention rates were at an all-time low on many campuses, and institutions were facing immense pressure to improve those numbers, which would ultimately help their graduation rates and their bottom lines. The department that monitored retention and developed programs to help students stay in school, however, was buried deep within student affairs or academic affairs and had a small and stagnant budget.

Sound familiar?

To boost retention rates, many institutions moved the functions to enrollment management, where they were more closely aligned with the mission of the office. Investment in one had implications for the other, and today student retention rates are rising on many campuses.

The time has come for a similar restructuring of career services. There are two potential models colleges and universities might consider for housing career services in the future:
ALIGN CAREER SERVICES WITH ALUMNI RELATIONS/DEVELOPMENT.

At many colleges, the fundraising office is showered with talent and money. Institutions should spend just as much time and attention building relationships with employers as they do cultivating donors in their development efforts. Career services is the first step in alumni engagement, establishing a structure where the development offices own the relationship with students after they graduate, including tracking their job outcomes and career transitions.

Aligning career services with the development office could create connections with employers through their alumni, which would in turn engage the alumni in a meaningful way with the school, beyond just being asked for money. The result would be alumni who feel engaged and might be more willing to give money, creating a virtuous circle—more satisfied graduates who are more engaged as alumni.

What’s more, career services and alumni relations/development have overlapping incentive structures. They both encourage engagement in activities that are completely voluntary, which means there could be better knowledge sharing between the two parties to encourage more productive participation.

Finally, there is strong evidence that positive career outcomes lead to goodwill among alumni. According to the Gallup-Purdue Index, alumni who had better experiences with career services were nearly three times as likely as other graduates to give back to their schools.

Success in the job market immediately after college is now critically tied to work experiences students have as undergraduates. In recent years, internships have gone from nice-to-have-on-a-résumé to absolutely critical. Employers today go on to hire about 50 percent of their interns as full-time workers, according to the Collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State University. And the share is growing every year in industries like construction, consulting, accounting, and scientific services.

With this restructuring, career services would be the beginning of the pipeline for alumni engagement and the mechanism through which alumni start to feel connected to their alma mater. Alumni giving, especially among recent graduates, has been declining at unprecedented rates for the last two decades, and attempts to reverse this trend have thus far failed to address one of the root causes—alumni engagement around their careers.
ROLL CAREER SERVICES INTO STUDENT SUCCESS AND RETENTION EFFORTS.

As mentioned earlier, efforts to improve student success on campus—academic advising, first-year experiences, and in some cases, counseling and financial aid—have had positive results. Right now, the career services office reaches the students most likely to succeed. For everyone else, career services are often seen as an added function to their undergraduate experience and something they don’t need to do, much like students treated advising and first-year programs years ago.

Rolling career services into student success efforts would help them be seen as part and parcel of the academic experience akin to academic advising. Only by making career planning part of the curriculum from Day One will students be able to build the skill sets and growth mindsets that they need to succeed in today’s competitive workforce. Student success initiatives are designed around regular and consistent interaction with students, efforts that have been shown to improve student engagement and be exactly what is needed to help students navigate the transition from education to career.

The first year of college is critical to student success efforts because that’s when students are most likely to drop out, yet career services don’t really kick into gear until a student’s junior or senior year. The curriculum at most colleges and universities fills the first year or two with introductory courses. Some students fail to see the relevance of those courses and leave. By marrying general education with career planning, as well as hands-on work experiences (e.g., internships, co-ops, undergraduate research, project-based learning), from the moment students enter college, they will more easily recall and transfer their learning from one context (the classroom) to another (a research project or an internship). This is how students actually learn: by applying knowledge and knowing why they apply it almost immediately. The problem in most traditional undergraduate programs is that students might study a concept in the fourth week of a semester, but not use it until two semesters later, by which time they often have forgotten what they learned. Engaging more students in learning from Day One of their freshman years will only encourage more students to remain in college and graduate.

ROLLING CAREER SERVICES INTO STUDENT SUCCESS EFFORTS WOULD HELP THEM BE SEEN AS PART AND PARCEL OF THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE AKIN TO ACADEMIC ADVISING
FIVE KEY STRATEGIES

No matter which approach institutions follow in finding a new home for career services, there are five key strategies that institutions should explore to broaden the impact of career planning on their campuses:

**STRATEGY 1: INTEGRATE CAREER PLANNING WITH THE CURRICULUM.**

Career planning offerings need to be accessible early on in the undergraduate curriculum to help students realize the wide range of career choices available to them. Part of the required undergraduate curriculum for every major should include mini-courses on a range of career-related topics from networking to professional writing.

In addition, colleges should connect alumni with students in all class years—not just seniors—so alumni can relate their own career stories and help students craft their own emerging career narratives. Franklin & Marshall College in Pennsylvania, for example, hosts a major declaration dinner for sophomores each spring, after they have chosen their fields of study, where they sit with alumni who graduated with the same majors.

**STRATEGY 2: OFFER VOCATIONAL OPTIONS ALONGSIDE THE FORMAL CURRICULUM.**

It’s time to retire the old debate about the purpose of college. Its goal should be to give students a broad education and train them for a job. As a result, colleges need to encourage and formalize vocational work programs through internships, co-ops, and even the work-college model, where students work on campus or in local businesses to pay for school. Given that companies are increasingly forgoing the campus recruitment circuit to search for full-time workers, and instead using their internship pools as a recruiting tool, colleges would be wise to beef up their work offerings during a student’s undergraduate career.

The co-op model—where work is integrated into the undergraduate experience rather than being an add-on like an internship—is especially suitable for institutions. The largest co-op program in the world is at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, where almost half of its 30,000 students alternate between four-month periods on campus and in the workplace. Because of co-ops, Waterloo students are accustomed to toggling between long stretches in the classroom and the work world, and they are able to refine and reflect on what they learned in both places.
STRATEGY 3: ASSIST STUDENTS IN TRANSFERRING THEIR LEARNING FROM THE CLASSROOM TO THE JOB.

The back-and-forth movement between theory and application that co-ops offer trains the brains of students differently from how a traditional curriculum largely restricted to classroom learning does.

The ability to transfer knowledge between the classroom and the workplace and back again is what gets new college graduates hired, because it allows them to show in job interviews what they cannot easily display on their résumés or in applications. But college students find that task particularly difficult because they haven’t had to make connections between the disparate capabilities they have acquired.

This is the thinking behind a new program at Northeastern University called SAIL—Student Assessed Integrated Learning. Beginning just before freshman year, the program provides a technology platform for students to align their learning experiences across school and work. It breaks the experiences into five pillars: intellectual, civic, wellness, global, and professional. By tracking their progress, students can visualize what they have done in all five areas and where they have grown, which could provide useful information for them during a job interview.

STRATEGY 4: EMPLOY TECHNOLOGY TO PERSONALIZE CAREER PLANNING FOR STUDENTS.

As mentioned earlier, career offices are still seen as specific physical spaces and most students prefer to access information on their mobile devices. Several tech start-ups are already helping colleges reinvent career services, including Handshake, PeopleGrove, and uConnect.

Wake Forest University, for example, used to target its services to specific class years. But then officials realized that some freshmen were more advanced in their job searches than some seniors. What’s more, students in different majors approach the job search differently, just as companies in different industries recruit in different ways. So Wake Forest has abandoned its one-size-fits-all approach and now is using Handshake, which uses algorithms based on students’ profiles to suggest pertinent information about recruiting and deliver alerts about campus career events to students’ mobile phones.

STRATEGY 5: TURN CAREER SERVICES INTO LIFELONG SERVICES.

Learning is now a lifelong necessity in a global, information-based economy. But many graduates will struggle throughout their lives to reimagine their careers and then to find the right training at the right time and price.

Colleges can help graduates by creating “plug and play” lifelong-learning platforms that alumni can gain access to throughout their careers. These platforms would not be simple continuations of the tired and dated services offered by career offices, but instead would include courses, mentors, and credentials that could benefit a current career or help jump-start a new one.

Denison University, for instance, is expanding its OnBoard curriculum, currently aimed at undergraduates, to all alumni in the coming years. OnBoard offers 50 unique, self-paced mini-courses on everything from leadership to e-commerce to budgeting.
As we approach the end of the second decade of the new millennium, the higher-education market is shifting and the economy is changing in fundamental ways. Career paths for this generation of students are no longer as clear and straightforward as they were in the past. That’s why colleges must focus on career development for students. If they don’t, they will be yielding the field to outside ventures and losing a vital opportunity to create a life-long—and essential—connection with alumni.

This paper introduces two potential models and five key strategies colleges and universities might consider for the future of their career services offices:

**MODEL 1**
Aligning career services with alumni relations/development.

**MODEL 2**
Rolling career services into student success and retention efforts.

**STRATEGY 1**
Integrate career planning with the curriculum.

**STRATEGY 2**
Offer vocational options alongside the formal curriculum.

**STRATEGY 3**
Assist students in transferring their learning from the classroom to the job.

**STRATEGY 4**
Employ technology to personalize career planning for students.

**STRATEGY 5**
Turn career services into lifelong services.
Entangled Solutions is an innovation and design engine for the education ecosystem. It develops solutions for academic institutions, philanthropic organizations, and private companies. Services include program/degree creation, institutional change, enrollment strategy, outcomes management, go-to-market strategy, market research, and nonprofit incubation.

Entangled Solutions was founded in 2015 as a collective of education innovators and builders with more than 100 collective years managing and driving change in education. Its mission is to guide the education ecosystem through fundamental changes in the society and economy. The team includes education technology entrepreneurs, former institutional leaders, and education policy experts. Headquartered in San Francisco with team members in Austin, Boston, and Washington, Entangled Solutions support both U.S.-based and international organizations.
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