Career and Professional Development Strategies for UCR
Office of the Provost
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Background

Consistent with the campus strategic plan, which includes an initiative to "expand high-impact practices and career / leadership development across demographics," and with renewed interest by multiple stakeholders (including the U.S. Department of Education and the California Governor's Office) in the post-graduation success of college students, Provost Watkins requested an evaluation of specific actions the campus might take to enhance career preparation and professional development for UCR undergraduate students. This evaluation relied on a review of multiple recent reports by the University Innovation Alliance, the Chronicle of Higher Education, Burning Glass, and the American Council on Education, a representative sampling (though not a full accounting) of what is currently happening at UCR, a discussion with UC Davis about their Aggie Launch initiative, and discussions with UCR campus leaders about the feasibility, value, and potential success of various approaches.

What is currently happening at UCR?

The career services landscape at UCR includes many traditional elements, as well as some more innovative approaches.

Our Career Center offers a diverse suite of student services, similar to what is found at peer campuses, but also including elements designed specifically for non-traditional students. These elements include career-focused affinity groups and professional attire and photos at no charge. The Career Center has succeeded in partnering with faculty who participate in their Ask Me Anything speaker series, which has received high marks from both students and faculty. They also have partnered with Grow with Google to make Google Career Certificates available to students, and with Apple (with funding from the University Innovation Alliance) to create a summer internship experience focused on underserved students. Peers generally view our Career Center as an innovator, a perception which has been reinforced by invitations to speak at events such as the WASC Academic Resource Conference.

The Division of Undergraduate Education has, for many years, made high impact practices available to UCR students. These include opportunities for students to lead courses and conduct research, participate in internships, and engage with their communities. They also have made LinkedIn Learning available to students. More recently, with donor support, the Excel+ program was developed to help guide students through a more structured approach to developing career competencies that culminates with a microcredential. Modest funding also is available for students who secure under-funded internships.

University Advancement has offered the Student Alumni Mentorship program since the late 1990s. Students are paired with alumni for one-quarter mentoring experiences, and resources are provided to mentors to help them make the experience valuable. Student awareness, participation, and persistence

in the program tend to be low. Historically, the program reached around 50 students per year but more recently about half of this number. However, a new assistant director is starting soon.

From 2017-23, the Office of Technology Partnerships (OTP) offered two training programs for students interested in entrepreneurship. The NSF-funded INNOVAR course was a relatively intensive 7-week program focused on graduate students and faculty. Students worked in teams with instructors and mentors to develop their ideas and competed for proof-of-concept funding. The program trained a total of 267 teams. The second program, funded by the Blackstone Foundation, was less intensive and designed for undergraduates. Students followed the Blackstone Launchpad curriculum over a series of three meetings to gain exposure to entrepreneurial concepts. More than 6000 students participated.

All these campus-wide opportunities are optional for students, and despite efforts to advertise and encourage participation, scaling up to reach significant numbers of students remains a challenge. One way to reach more students is to build professional development into the curriculum. OTP is collaborating with BCOE to convert the INNOVAR program into a credit-bearing course. The schools and colleges enroll the vast majority of incoming students in their learning communities (e.g., NASC 091/093; CHFY 001/002/003), but these courses focus more on undergraduate student success than on career preparation. BCOE created ENGR 001/002 which are somewhat more focused on career preparation, but the college allows departments to decide whether to offer (and require) these courses. So far, only Computer Engineering and Computer Science have done so. As of 2023, other courses focused on professional development were limited to: ANTH 183, BCH 095 (required), BPSC 191, CEE 158 (required), EDUC 100B, ENGR 101, ENSC 191 (required), GEO 150, ME 175A (required), and PHYS 039. Topics in these courses vary but include career options/guidance, teamwork, ethics, lifelong learning, building a professional reputation, public speaking and presentation skills, writing skills, creating a CV, job search skills, interview skills, and undergraduate research and internship opportunities.[1]

BCOE is working to build more professionalization into the curriculum by establishing industry sponsorships for senior design projects, but so far only about 10% of all projects are sponsored. BCOE also has introduced a requirement for first-year students to develop a resume and LinkedIn profile, but these are enforced with a registration hold rather than as part of the curriculum. The School of Business has introduced an internship requirement into their new undergraduate program in business analytics, but this program remains small compared to the business administration major which does not have a similar requirement. The School of Public Policy also has an internship requirement for their undergraduate cohorts which have averaged about 60 students recently.

SPP, BCOE, and Business all have staff members who support extracurricular professional development efforts. Connecting students with internships is an important focus for these units, and they leverage their student clubs to help do this.[2] BCOE reports that internships are relatively plentiful, but each student requires significant attention and coaching from staff to make their experience valuable, so staff time is the main constraint to scaling up. Similarly, Business reports that staffing levels are challenging

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[1] For perhaps the past 15 years, UCR has had a credit-bearing professional development requirement for all graduate programs. Topics are similar to those listed here but vary depending on program and instructor.

[2] Student clubs in Costo Hall also help connect students with internships and mentoring.

because students need individualized attention and employer relationships are labor-intensive to maintain. SPP has a full-time career counselor and internship coordinator (and previously utilized a part-time "coach in residence"). Business plans to utilize student workers to expand bandwidth in some areas.

BCOE also produces a twice-monthly newsletter with a strong focus on internships and professionalization. They also work with students before and after conferences and career events to review their pitches, resumes, goals, and lessons learned. Last year, BCOE hosted an undergraduate professionalization conference at the Riverside Convention Center which included alumni speakers and mock interviews; 130 students attended. This year's goal is 200.

Key Points from Recent Reports

University Innovation Alliance: Bridging the Gap from Education to Employment (2021)

This report focuses on challenges faced by students (especially lower income and first generation), faculty, and institutions. It also provides some employer perspectives.

- Students don't recognize the career-related skills they are gaining through courses and co-curricular activities, and don't know how to communicate them to employers
- Students struggle to secure meaningful experiential learning opportunities due to time demands (course work and jobs), need for income, transportation difficulties, etc.
- Students are unfamiliar with job search and professional workplace norms, and would benefit from mentoring in these areas
- Students lack relationships with people and networks that can lead to mentoring and employment opportunities
- Students lack awareness of career options, as well as the skills/experiences that will help them achieve career goals, and how to secure those skills/experiences
- Faculty have high workloads and lack incentives to invest time in career mentorship
- Faculty are often unprepared to provide career guidance or help students understand career options, job application processes, or the connections between course material and career skills
- Faculty can be resistant to incorporating career information into the classroom
- University messaging can be overwhelming for students, so career messaging is often missed
- University resources can be spread unequally across programs, sometimes reflecting employer engagement decisions; students tend to be unaware of this when choosing a major
- Universities don't integrate career services into the university experience (including curriculum), from beginning to end
- University bureaucracies can frustrate and stifle employer partnerships
- Career services staff want to provide holistic, not transactional, support to students
- Employers see a significant soft skills gap especially regarding communication and professionalism in the workplace
- Employers want to help, including collaborating on curriculum, but need to be invited
- Small businesses can be shut out of job fairs with steep registration fees; these opportunities remain hidden from many students

- Micro-internships have potential: short-term, paid, remote, project-based work experiences
- Employer engagements with students should be direct and frequent; start engaging early before the stakes are higher; leverage alumni in early stages; bring employers into the classroom

Chronicle of Higher Education: Building Tomorrow's Workforce (2022)

This report presents employer perspectives.

- Gallup survey: only 11% of business leaders think graduating students have the skills and competencies their businesses need.
- Some employers (including public agencies) are removing degree requirements for job eligibility
- Universities need to do more to engage with employers to understand their needs and what they can contribute: employment markets can move too fast for degree programs to keep up
- More employers are incorporating their own "boot camps" because they aren't seeing they skills they need in new employees; but these don't allow for the deeper experiences and growth opportunities of a degree program
- Desired skills can vary across sectors and employers, but often look similar to the NACE Career Readiness Competencies: career & self-development, communication, critical thinking, equity & inclusion, leadership, professionalism, teamwork, and technology
- Universities should incorporate desired skills training into the curriculum
- Universities should better utilize internships, apprenticeships, and co-op programs (especially for teaching foundational skills) and work to meld these experiences with the academic experience.
- Many internships lack effective mentorship/supervision. An academic staff member can help, including by ensuring tasks remain appropriate. Planning the internship is similar to planning a capstone experience or research project, and campuses have experience doing this.
- Main reasons students don't do internships: course load already too heavy, had to work a paid job, not enough opportunities available. Unpaid internships are especially challenging for lower income students: offer funding and/or academic credit

Chronicle of Higher Education: New Pathways from College to Career (2022)

This report focuses on post-pandemic changes in the employment landscape, and student expectations for colleges to take a more active role in helping them navigate the path from college to work.

- Nationally, landing a good job is the single most important reason students give for going to college. When campuses show this is also their priority, it helps with recruitment and retention.
- Students expect colleges to deliver services to them; don't wait for students to seek them out.
- Faculty have credibility with students when it comes to career advice but can be resistant to what they view as vocational "work force preparation"; instead of changing what it taught, just highlight/explain/emphasize the career relevance of what is already being taught.
- A degree, by itself, is no longer a great signal for meeting job qualifications; students need to spell out their specific skills and competencies, and campuses need to help students understand the skills they have acquired; portfolios, career inventories, and badging can help.

- NACE survey: employers care less about campus, major, and GPA; and more about internships and first-hand experience
- Some campuses are trying to better integrate career services with academic affairs
    o Addresses the perception that professional development is optional (vs the curriculum which is required): first-year students' stated plans for career development are much grander than actions they eventually take (especially among URM and first generation).
    o Career and academic advisors are most effective when they explore students goals/priorities/passions with them, and these topics span education, professional career, and personal life
    o UC Davis Aggie Launch: make career planning a standard part of academic advising; infuse career development into the curriculum; expand internships, co-ops, and professional on-campus work experience
    o Collaborate with faculty: provide skills-focused modules they can integrate into their classes; overhaul capstone projects to be more hands-on and industry connected; provide guidance to help them decide what would work best in their classes (e.g. experiential learning); encourage them to show how course content aligns with job skills.
- Utilize alumni as mentors and internship providers.

Burning Glass: The Emerging Degree Reset (2022)

This report examines the trend among employers who are dropping degree requirements for jobs and replacing them with specific skills – often soft skills for which they previously assumed a degree was a good proxy. This trend follows a decade of "credential inflation" during which time degrees became ever more important in the hiring process.

Multiple technology companies have announced their commitment to prioritize skills over degrees in IT occupations. For example, Google has launched certificates in areas like Project Management and Data Analytics and is treating them as degree equivalents in job searches. The trend is also strong in several business and finance job categories.

It is difficult for educators to keep pace with rapid changes like these. Partnering with employers to jointly deliver disciplinary and technical skills training could be helpful. Colleges also should stop assuming the soft skills desired by employers will develop naturally – often through extra- and co-curricular activities – during a four-year degree program, and instead deliberately integrate these skills into their curricula.

American Council on Education: Beyond Classroom Borders – Linking Learning and Work through Career Relevant Instruction (2020)

This report argues that significant progress can be made if colleges focus on making stronger and more deliberate connections in the classroom between disciplinary knowledge and skills that employers value. These skills also correlate with civic engagement and citizenship and help build the essential quality of adaptability in students which will support their long-term success in uncertain labor markets.

- Career Relevant Instruction is a collaborative approach: faculty continue to teach their disciplines, and campuses provide support to help them make connections to broadly desired skills; students are mostly unable to make these connections on their own (which also can undermine their engagement and persistence)
- The central focus is on creating adaptability in students: this makes them skilled at lifelong learning which is critical to their value to employers
- A liberal arts education inherently builds adaptability, but liberal arts programs have not embraced their career relevance
- Strada/Gallup survey: perceived value of a degree is influenced more by career relevant coursework than by earnings
- Faculty should continue teaching their disciplines, but incorporate more about why the discipline matters, how it approaches problems, its ways of thinking/knowing, and how all of this is relevant for work and life
- Resist the urge to focus on research and pathways to graduate school
  - The academy is not a good model for most other careers; it is still an apprentice model that values deep/narrow knowledge over broadly applicable skills; faculty often feel stronger affinity to their disciplines than to their employer; faculty enjoy high degrees of autonomy and most remain with one employer for a very long time.
  - Only 2% of UCR students go on to earn a PhD; another 32% earn non-PhD graduate degree (21% MBA + others)
- High impact practices can be hard to access for non-traditional students, and hard to scale up; not so for career-relevant instruction

Promising Strategies for UCR

Three promising strategies for UCR are similar to the three core areas of Aggie Launch at UCD:

1. Incorporate professionalization training into the curriculum
   a. Provide faculty with templates and training for better highlighting the career/professional/life relevance of their disciplines and their classroom topics/activities. Depending on the outcome of the ongoing general education work in the Senate, there could be significant overlap between these templates and general education goals. The ADT could have a leadership role in developing materials and a community of practice and XCITE could help faculty transition.
   b. Leverage ongoing community-engaged learning efforts in UE and XCITE. Community-engaged learning courses can provide relevant training by connecting students with industry professionals and giving them experiential learning opportunities. A faculty working group is updating policies for embedding community-engaged learning into courses and appropriately recognizing faculty who do this through the merit and promotion process.

    c.   Request that the Academic Senate consider a credit-bearing requirement for each bachelor's degree program, similar to the existing requirement for graduate programs.

2. Expand internship opportunities and access to academic credit associated with them
    a.   In areas where internships are relatively plentiful, examine current staff workloads and administrative processes with the goal to expand available bandwidth for connecting and preparing students for internships. Similarly examine how academic units collaborate and coordinate with the Career Center to maximize efficiency.
    b.   In areas where internship opportunities are relatively scarce:
        i.   Partner more closely with prospective employers in areas of mutual benefit: we have students in need of work experiences, they have employees in need of upskilling – including supervision and project management. Employers might cover the cost for their employees to enroll in a UCR Extension course that culminates with a capstone experience focused on supervising an internship project for a UCR student.
        ii.   Expand remote and micro-internships (currently offered here: https://info.parkerdewey.com/ucr) and campus work-study. Utilize the 198G course framework to provide access and credit for more students.
    c.   Provide more classroom facetime for employers, including smaller businesses. Where appropriate, expand these relationships so that employers can provide recurring in-class instruction on dynamic workplace content and industry trends which can be harder for faculty to stay abreast of. Also utilize employers in the classroom to reinforce the connections between disciplinary knowledge and career relevance (see 1a above).
    d.   Expand the Student Alumni Mentorship program. Consider pairing students, perhaps starting their third year, with alumni mentors who express willingness to engage for at least one academic year. Provide a Canvas course for mentors and students to work through with desired outcomes. Encourage mentors to create, or help the student find, an internship by the end of the year. Cultivate these into apprenticeships where possible. Report alumni volunteer hours just as we report financial contributions.
        i.   Connect alumni with the upskilling opportunity described in 2b above, perhaps with an incentive such as a reduced cost.
    e.   Consider coordinating academic credit for internships through UE. The VPDUE could be the instructor of record for a large Canvas course with many students. Mentors would submit written evaluations. Student success coaches (below in 3b) could have an instructional role. AI might assess evaluations against a rubric to help assign grades.

3. Coordinate academic advising and career advising
    a.   Coordinating these roles into Student Success Coaches would mirror incorporating professional development training into the curriculum. Academic and career training are no longer separate when career training is part of the curriculum. Discussions about major/course choice and skill acquisition necessarily involve discussions about career. Both academic and career advisors are most effective when they take a holistic and long-term approach to student advising.

b. The Career center could develop resources to support the work of these new student success coaches, providing infrastructure (e.g. Handshake, Canvas templates), supporting internships and experiential learning, employer relations, and tracking and assessing outcomes.

Recommended Next Steps

1. Work with ADT and UE/XCITE to develop materials in support of faculty who want to more deliberately connect career relevance to disciplinary learning in their courses. Establish a community of practice, perhaps as a RIDLE cohort or an extension of the current community-engaged learning R'MSI cohort. Pending the result of the ongoing Senate work on General Education learning outcomes, use these outcomes to inform course templates and encourage faculty to align one or more course outcomes with the templates – especially in courses satisfying GE requirements.
2. Collaborate with the Career Center on their ongoing strategic planning effort, with an emphasis on greater coordination with the schools and colleges and corresponding resource alignment.
3. Work with UNEX to pilot an upskilling course with internship opportunities for undergraduates.
4. Work with a vendor like Podium Education to pilot expanded access to remote internships.
5. Work with RED to pilot a credit-bearing online course focused on entrepreneurship, using their community-focused Zero-to-Entrepreneur program as a model.
6. Work with Advancement (including the College offices) to raise the profile of the Student Alumni Mentorship program. Collaborate with student clubs in engineering, business, Costo Hall, and elsewhere. Update existing mentor resources. Establish regular collection and reporting of mentoring hours. Encourage alumni participation in the UNEX upskilling course when available.
7. Work through UE's Advising Council to explore how we might prepare academic advisors to integrate aspects of career advising into their work with students.
8. Support UE directors in their development of courses focused on soft skills, informed by the CASEL framework.