Developing and Assessing Meaningful Career Readiness Metrics

Jennifer Rossi Long

West Chester University of Pennsylvania
Executive Director of the Twardowski Career Development Center
jlong@wcupa.edu | LinkedIn

Abstract: Return on investment and the value of a college degree are central topics related to U.S. higher education. National data indicate that alumni who received high levels of career support from their institutions are more likely to view their degrees as worthwhile investments and demonstrate a higher propensity to give back as alumni. Despite this, many colleges and universities prioritize metrics that provide little value to the student experience and focus on less impactful data. This piece illustrates how institutions can strategically develop and assess meaningful career readiness metrics focused on institutional effectiveness and student success beyond degree attainment. The process includes posing equity-minded questions that challenge current career readiness education models, aligning career readiness efforts with university priorities, and performing a comprehensive state of career readiness audit of the campus. By adopting these intentional, transparent, and collaborative methods, institutions can more effectively develop and assess metrics for measuring institutional career support and equitable student success.

Keywords: career readiness, student success, metrics

Higher education is in the midst of an evolutionary shift. With the convergence of declining or stagnant enrollment (Blake, 2024), questions related to the value of a college degree (Blake, 2024), and the importance of work-integrated learning (Busteed, 2024), this moment and higher education's response is critical. The definition of student success must go beyond degree attainment and consider how alumni benefit from their degrees in their work and lives post-college (Clayton & Torpey-Saboe, 2021). This article outlines how West Chester University (WCU) used data and a change management process to advocate for expanding the definition and metrics of student success beyond earning a degree. By evolving the career readiness education model on campus, WCU reached more students and collected more meaningful data to effectively measure progress and success. By being intentional about the factors contributing to this evolutionary moment in higher education, this process aligned the university with incoming student interests and alumni insights into their motivations for attending college.

Literature Review

Traditionally, colleges have focused on measuring three main factors for effectiveness: enrollment, retention, and completion. Chan and Cruzvergara (2021) argued that a shift is needed to assess students' desired outcomes, such as what they should learn and ultimately gain from their college experience. Measuring outcomes beyond the point of graduation and first destination allows an institution to understand and promote its

effectiveness in meeting both its mission and the interests of its students. In addition to measuring outcomes, student career engagement data can be a powerful metric. However, it must tell a compelling, relevant story. For that to happen, institutions need to understand what current students want, as well as their perceptions as students and after graduation.

Students preparing to enter college expect that a degree is connected to their future careers. When considering value, current students agreed that having a college degree increased their job prospects and was necessary for their desired career (Kondakciu, 2023). They also saw it as necessary for economic stability and mobility, believing that a degree would result in higher earnings, future promotions, and the skills needed to succeed financially (Kondakciu, 2023). Inside Higher Ed and College Pulse surveyed current students and found that 80% of respondents felt college should prepare them for a career they love; however, only 46% of respondents thought their college was doing this well (Flaherty, 2024).

In hindsight, alumni noted similar expectations when pursuing a degree. The National Alumni Career Mobility (NACM) report found three of the top four reasons alumni cited for attending college were related to their future career and economic mobility (Yousey-Elsener, 2024). Career success is the primary motivation for obtaining a degree, with 60% of respondents selecting that as their motivation, followed by intellectual development at 51% of respondents, financial gain at 44% of respondents, and required for my career aspirations at 41% (Yousey-Elsener, 2024).

Student expectations and perceptions hold steady well after graduation (Yousey-Elsener, 2024), and they inform how students feel about the value of their investment in a degree over time. According to the Gallup Purdue Index, a national study of alumni, just 17% of respondents stated that the career services they received on their campus were helpful. That same 17% were three times more likely than those who rated career services less helpful to agree that their degree was worth the cost. They were also nearly three times more likely to give financially to their alma mater (Gallup, 2016). In 2022, the NACM report found that just 19% of alumni respondents reported high levels of career support from their institution (The Career Leadership Collective [CLC], 2022). Similar to findings in the Gallup Purdue Index, the 19% who reported receiving high levels of career support from their institution were 2.8 times more likely to agree that their degree was worth the cost (CLC, 2022).

The data from the Gallup Purdue Index to the NACM survey results suggests that colleges have made very little progress in moving the needle on supporting students' future career plans over the past seven years. However, the relationship between career support from an institution and a graduate's perception of the value of their degree remains. Strada Education found that alumni who felt they were given the support they needed to get a job were eight times more likely to agree that their student loans were worth it (Torpey-Saboe, 2021). Brandon Busteed (2021), executive director of education and workforce development at Gallup at the time of the Gallup Purdue Index, noted, "the impact of work relevance and high-quality career services on the value and return on investment of a degree is astronomical. Yet, the percentages of graduates whose educational experiences

included these aspects remind us this impact is more a rarity than a norm" (para. 5). The idea that high-quality career services are more the exception than the rule is especially poignant in light of student expectations and alumni motivations for attending college. The data indicates that career readiness is a high priority for students and alumni and a low priority for institutions that continue to offer career readiness as an optional service. This disconnect highlights the need to improve the support students receive for their future careers. Institutions that seek to support student career success while strengthening the value of their degree are well served by implementing a strategic plan that guides change efforts, gathers metrics that measure who has/does not have access to career services, and assesses the impact of that access.

Career Readiness as a Campus Imperative

Both incoming students and alumni value their degrees opening doors to their careers. What was once the sole function of a career center now requires campus-wide involvement. This is especially important given that career services are optional and occur outside of class on most college campuses. Career conversations and readiness should not happen solely within the four walls of a career center (Kozhuk, 2023). There are additional opportunities within the classroom, co-curricular experience, advising, and on-campus jobs, just to name a few. Positioning career services as central to the college experience rather than tangential encourages a shared responsibility amongst the campus and creates a more robust experience for students (University Innovation Alliance, 2021).

Ideally, engaging in career readiness should not require the luxury of time outside of class or a certain amount of social capital. When career readiness is thoughtfully and strategically embedded into the classroom, it becomes more accessible and helps students make meaning of their college experiences (VanDerziel, 2022). It also paves the way for students to feel that their institution supports them and invests in preparing them for their careers (Flaherty, 2024). In addition, it increases their propensity to give back to their alma mater (Gallup, 2016). These are just some of the reasons that point to the need for institutions to view career readiness as a campus-wide imperative rather than an optional service in one office or division. Institutions have powerful tools at their fingertips, including "expertise, clout, visibility, [...] energy, and resources" (Studley, 2016, para. 2). Those powerful tools come from various divisions, departments, and individuals within an institution. By leveraging social and intellectual capital on campus, colleges and universities extend the reach and impact of graduating students who "can move into the world of work, participate in the society, and handle their debt" (Studley, 2016, para. 9).

There are several examples of how institutions leverage their resources to center career readiness. One example is having required career readiness courses for credit. Others thoughtfully integrate career readiness into the on-campus student employment. A final example is equipping career champions, including staff and faculty across the campus, to engage students in career conversations. These examples differ from traditional models of delivering career readiness education, which are optional and lack connectivity to the students' required experiences, like going to class or meeting with their academic advisor. Students' interests and alumni's perceptions present the opportunity to integrate career

readiness into the campus experience more thoughtfully. The need to use a thoughtful process and strategic framework for change also emerges.

Utilizing the Lippitt-Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change

At WCU, the Career Center recognized the need to rethink traditional service delivery and assessment related to career readiness. This led us to create a process and data collection informed by the Lippitt-Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change. It is one thing to understand the landscape of higher education and the expectations of students. Implementing changes based on that knowledge is quite different. Moving through a change in the complex environment of higher education presents many challenges. In order to implement data- and trend-responsive career readiness education strategies and use new metrics to measure success, we had to rethink traditional service delivery and assessment methods. This large-scale change also required navigating shared governance structures with transparency. The Lippitt-Knoster Model served as a guiding framework while navigating this initiative.

The Lippitt-Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change (Knoster, 1991; Lippitt, 1987) identifies six elements necessary for effective change, including vision, consensus, skills, incentives, resources, and an action plan (Caredda, 2020). If any one of these elements is missing, the change effort will be unsuccessful with a different negative change outcome (see Figure 1). Applying this 6-element model to develop new career readiness strategies and metrics was beneficial because it provided ample context before the work began, creating a sense of buy-in and shared purpose. Rather than starting with an idea and working to get buy-in without any context of what constituents valued or needed, this model encouraged starting with a vision and building consensus around that vision early in the process. It also clearly outlined the potential pitfalls of skipping a step so that common issues could be avoided early in the process through thoughtful decision-making. For example, data collection and landscape analysis may seem like a viable starting point; however, constituents must first understand a clear and compelling vision. Asking faculty, staff, students, and external partners to fill out a survey without context on how the data will be used, or any input in creating the survey, will yield low interest and, therefore, be less informative. It could also lead to confusion or potential sabotage, as outlined in the model.

Vision and Outcomes

At WCU, the first step was identifying the vision and outcomes. What did we want to achieve by embarking on a broader landscape analysis and this work, and why did it matter? We identified three outcomes for our landscape analysis: 1) equity mindset, 2) access, and 3) scale. The first was to approach career readiness on campus through an equity-minded lens. This was inspired by the belief that career readiness work is equity work, the campus's established commitment to equitable outcomes as an EAB Moon Shot for Equity school, and the Boyer 2030 Commission's assertion that you cannot have equity without excellence nor excellence without equity (The Boyer 2030 Commission, 2022). Early in the process, we established our intention to create more equitable systems and environments for students to be career-ready. This asset-minded framework kept us

Skills Vision Consensus Incentives Resources Action Plan Success Vision Skills Confusion Consensus Incentives Action Plan Resources Constinsus Vision Skills Incentives Resources Action Plan Sabotage SXIs Vision Consensus Incentives Resources Action Plan **Anxiety** Ince tives Consensus Skills Vision Resources Action Plan Resistance Resources Frustration Consensus Skills Incentives Action Plan Vision Incentives Action Plan Vision Consensus Skills Resources Treadmill

Figure 1. The Lippitt-Knoster Model for Managing Complex Change

focused on understanding systemic barriers rather than deficit-minded thinking that leads to making assumptions about students' out-of-class time and how they need to spend it.

The second outcome was to enhance the university's already established commitment to access. As a public institution, WCU is deeply committed to providing affordable, high-quality education that allows every student, regardless of situation or background, to obtain a college degree. If a degree is the key to opening doors, the institution must grant students a key and teach them how to use it to unlock doors. The institution is also responsible for guiding students to doors they can unlock. Understanding how to leverage the skills learned through a degree, how to translate curricular and co-curricular experiences to a professional setting, and what opportunities exist in terms of career paths are essential for career readiness.

The third outcome was to find innovative, data-informed solutions for scaling career readiness to just over 17,000 students. We recognized that we had to consider all 17,000 students from the start because we believed they deserved the tools, encouragement, resources, and knowledge to meet their professional goals. Meeting the needs of such a large population was no small feat and, therefore, required critical thinking at scale.

Building Consensus

Once the outcomes were developed, we created an introductory presentation that included a brief overview of the project, data on the state of higher education broadly, our intended outcomes, context on some of the questions we planned to ask, and what would happen after data collection. In tandem with delivering this presentation to over 300 constituents across five divisions, cabinet, and external boards, the survey questions were reviewed by several faculty and staff across campus. The outcomes developed were shared in the presentation. We explained that these outcomes were created to guide the

work so that we could intentionally gather feedback on how we would achieve them. We acknowledged that career readiness was equity work and that there was a need to change how career readiness education was distributed to students. In faculty spaces, we engaged in critical conversations that brought us to the consensus that the purpose of college did not have to be intellectual development or preparation for a career. The two can and should co-exist while honoring the relevance and importance of each.

Skills and Resources to Incentivize Change

Many skills were needed to encourage and achieve change at WCU. Changing how career services were scaled and measured institutionally required collaboration, communication, and critical thinking skills. We used these skills to begin the first step in gathering data in this change process: a survey to gather feedback.

The relationships, trust, and collaboration between the career center, faculty, and staff were leveraged to advance changes. Communication throughout the process involved equal parts listening and sharing. Communication about change started before any change took place. It ensured that those impacted by the change understood why it was necessary and their role in that process. Naturally, people will have many ideas and personal interests tied up in how something evolves. Being able to think critically is paramount to actualizing any change. This includes regularly revisiting the initial outcomes and using that to be thoughtful about the approach that is taken. It also included synthesizing what is learned to ensure it addresses the most pressing needs of the campus and its students. Being on a college campus, we were mindful of proposing changes that could be reasonably scaled and managed, assuming no new resources would be available. Not having the resources to make proposed changes could lead to frustration, according to the Lippitt-Knoster model (Caredda, 2020). As a result, what we promised, implemented, and measured needed to be strongly considered. For example, we could not promise to meet with every student individually throughout their college education. Still, we could promise to work towards getting career preparation integrated into enough classrooms to ensure that every student has career readiness touchpoints throughout their time on campus.

When the survey was launched, there were several incentives for participation. According to the Lippitt-Knoster model, change without incentive can lead to resistance (Caredda, 2020). We balanced incentives across two fronts. First was the survey. There was a raffle for a gift card for completing the survey for each constituent group. For alumni, each response triggered an additional two dollars designated to the Fund for Unpaid Internships. On the faculty side, we kept each college appraised of the total number of responses and where each stood compared to the other colleges. A light competition proved to be effective. After sending the survey to each constituent group and conducting two employer focus groups, we received over one thousand responses from students, alumni, employers, faculty, and staff. We then analyzed the data from each collection, and several themes emerged that led us to areas of opportunity moving forward.

The second need for an incentive came with changing how we deliver services, which informed us what we needed to measure going forward. With data in hand that showed the willingness of faculty and staff to have a role in students' career readiness but lacking the

time to do so, the Career Center had an opportunity to present solutions that played to their interests without burdening them. Showing the campus that the department was willing to take the lead, think critically about solutions to existing problems, and commit to an iterative process of listening, learning, and adapting proved an effective incentive for trying something new. Some examples of those new solutions included pre-packaged career assignments, online modules, and class engagement in large-scale career events with pre-built reflection activities.

Action Plan: A New Model with New Metrics

The data guided us to changes impacting our overarching equity outcomes, future access, and scalability by clearly showing what was going well in relation to career readiness and where the opportunity gaps existed. This ultimately led to our action plan, which included collaborating with faculty who were willing partners but reported that they lacked the time and expertise to integrate career readiness into their classrooms. We developed pre-packaged career assignments and online learning modules that could be seamlessly integrated into the classroom setting. These were designed to address many barriers students and faculty cited for not engaging in career readiness activities, such as time, capacity, and confidence.

This new iteration of our service delivery model made it necessary to develop new metrics to measure effectiveness. These new measures were created as university metrics, not career center metrics. The metrics used engagement data we already have access to or existing surveys we administer. The metrics included (a) students rating the institutional support they received for their future careers through our Experiential Learning Survey, (b) calculating the total number of unique students engaged in career readiness activities through data in our online career services manager, Handshake, (c) determining equity gaps by race and biological sex in engagement using Handshake data and university headcount enrollment data, (d) exploring equity gaps in first-destination outcomes by race and biological sex using WCU's first-destination survey, and (e) the career and economic mobility of alumni using Lightcast's NACM survey. Some of these metrics are predictive, some focus on initial outcomes, and some measure longer-term outcomes. To create a baseline, unique engagement as well as equity gap metrics in engagement and first-destination outcomes, were calculated starting in the academic year 2021-2022, allowing us to study trends and any persistent gaps over time. The following sections provide more details for each of these measures.

Rating of Institutional Career Support

We knew from national research that a graduate's perception of the career support they received from their institution impacted how they viewed institutional investment in the degree (CLC, 2022). Knowing how alumni rated the institution for career support helped draw a larger picture related to degree value after a student graduated and had time to see the impact of their experiences on their career. However, collecting students' ranking of institutional career support allowed us to know how students felt about the career support they received from the institution in real time. This ensured the institution graduated students who felt supported and whom we predicted would be more likely to

see the value of their investment. It is important to note that this differs from a satisfaction survey related to an event or service. Instead of developing a new survey for this metric, we considered the surveys we were already using.

We decided to use the Experiential Learning Survey since it is distributed each fall to the entire campus except for first-year students. The survey was developed in partnership with faculty, and the career center distributed, analyzed, and reported the results. The Experiential Learning Survey typically yielded responses across all colleges and most majors, giving us a representative sample of the student body. Whether or not students have engaged in experiential learning, they are encouraged to take the survey. For those who have not engaged, it allowed us to explore barriers. It also allowed us to identify relationships between those who have engaged in experiential learning, which includes experiences such as internships, research, or volunteering, and how they rate the career support they received from the institution. At WCU, we found an increase in students' perception of the support they received for their future careers if they engaged in at least one experiential learning activity. In 2024, with just some changes implemented related to integrating career readiness into the student experience, we saw an increase in students' perception of the career support they received from the institution compared to 2022.

Unique Students Engaged

Another metric is tied to the accessibility of career readiness education. This metric focused on whether career experiences were embedded in learning spaces students frequented, like the classroom. This metric allowed us to better understand how many unique students we served, which groups were over or underrepresented in that number, and in which spaces they engaged. The career center collected data around two types of services—optional and required—to calculate the unique number of students engaged in career readiness activities. Optional services included one-on-one career counseling appointments, online resume reviews, workshop attendance, recruiting and networking event attendance, visits to the career closet, and use of the professional photo booth. Required services included class presentations, classroom assignments, and online learning modules developed for classroom use. For the past two years, there have been approximately 4% gains year over year in unique students engaged (Table 1).

Table 1. Gains in Engagement with Career Services Academic Year 2021-2022 to Academic Year 2023-2024

Academic Year	% of Unique Students Engaged	# of Unique Students Engaged
2021-2022	40%	6,810
2022-2023	44%	7,432
2023-2024	48%	8,127

Note. Percentage is taken against the total number of students at WCU, n = 17,000.

The gain of approximately 700 students each year is not attributed to increased staff but to prioritizing time in spaces like the classroom that extend staff reach. Those gains would not have been possible through one-on-one appointments. Another benefit to understanding unique students served was disaggregating the data by race and biological sex. This showed the campus where investments needed to be made for students to access career readiness education.

Equity Gaps in Engagement

At WCU, equity gaps in persistence and retention were calculated and used to impact student degree attainment positively. The career center calculated equity gaps in the same way. However, we used them to explore career readiness engagement. To do this, we pulled the total number of unique students engaged in the career center's services, which included appointments, online resume reviews, class presentation attendance, career closet usage, professional photo booth visits, workshop attendance, and recruiting and networking event attendance. These data were available through our online career services manager, Handshake. The students who engaged were then disaggregated by race and by biological sex. Using the university's public student data from the Office of Institutional Research, we pulled the overall number of students by race and biological sex. We calculated engagement against the total number to see the percentage of a demographic population engaged. Next, we calculated the overall percentage of students who engaged against the overall student population on campus. We compared that overall percentage to the percentages for each race and biological sex and noted where there were gaps, as outlined in Table 2. We identified which racial, ethnic, or biological sex groups were underrepresented in engagement with our office and to what degree. This revealed year-over-year patterns in the data related to underrepresentation in engagement. This important metric allowed us to examine our service delivery model through the lens of underrepresented students and think critically about how to close that equity gap by modifying our service delivery model to be more accessible. We found a persistent and growing equity gap in engagement for our Latino and Latina student population, and other data are being utilized to create strategies to shrink and eventually close that gap.

Equity Gaps in First-Destination Outcomes

In addition to calculating equity gaps in engagement, the career center calculated equity gaps in First-Destination Survey outcomes specific to race and biological sex. The same calculation was used, replacing the unique students engaged with unique students who had a positive first-destination outcome. The first-destination survey reported students' career paths within six months of graduation. Positive outcomes in first-destination data included employment, continuing education, starting a business, or entering military or public service. Reporting first-destination outcomes in the aggregate told a different story than disaggregating the data to understand who was represented in the positive outcomes category and who was placed in the overall narrative's margins. While the overall percentage of students with positive first-destination outcomes is above 90%, we found equity gaps for our students who identify as Latino and Latina, as well as our Multiracial students. Unlike the gaps in engagement, these gaps ebb and flow between years, so

Table 2. Calculating Equity Gaps Using Enrollment and Engagement Data

Variable	Description of Calculation
Demographic Group	Disaggregate by race, biological sex, first-generation status, or any other demographic data.
# of Students Engaged	For each demographic group, enter the unique number of students engaged in services (make note of how you define engagement)
# of Students Enrolled	For each group, use university data to enter the total number of students enrolled at the institution from that demographic group
% of Students Engaged	Calculate the percentage of students engaged in each demographic group taking the number engaged against the number enrolled
Equity Gap	Calculate the percentage of students engaged overall, taking the total of all engagement against the total of all students enrolled across demographic groups. Then, subtract the percentage of students engaged in each group from the percentage of engagement for all students enrolled.

a specific trend has not been identified. As a university, we already administered the first-destination survey. We just repurposed the data to understand representation in positive first-destination outcomes. We expect the strategies we have implemented in the classroom to impact these data moving forward since more students will have access to the foundations of career readiness.

Alumni Career Mobility

Lastly, using the NACM survey, WCU measured the career mobility of their graduates who are five and ten years out. This will take place on a three-year cycle going forward. The impact of a college degree has rippling effects throughout a person's life. Assessing graduates' career and economic mobility beyond their first destination assisted the institution in understanding those rippling effects and the institution's role in those longer-term outcomes. It highlighted relationships between high-impact career experiences and economic mobility, which served as a road map. For example, if engagement in experiential learning impacted high career mobility for graduates, it would be in the institution's and student's best interest to ensure those experiences are accessible through the curriculum and co-curriculum.

Accountability

The last part of the change management plan is developing an ongoing action plan (Caredda, 2020). For WCU, this focused on identifying how to infuse ongoing accountability and shared governance into the process, which was equally instrumental post-change as it was throughout the process. One of the best ways we discovered to

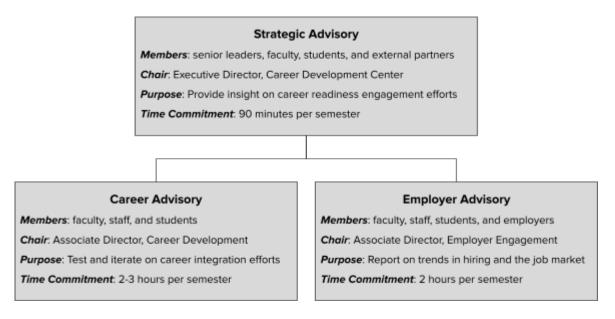
remain accountable was to share data with the campus community regularly. For WCU, that included yearly state of career readiness presentations to the campus for targeted groups and through open forums. These presentations reviewed our annual progress on the new metrics we established and invited the community to celebrate our collective wins and think critically about our shared challenges. That level of transparency invites the campus community back to the table once per year to understand the data and contribute to enhancing the state of career readiness.

Another accountability measure is the creation of the Career Readiness Collaborative at WCU. The Career Readiness Collaborative is a group of faculty, staff, students, and external partners led by the Career Center, who, based on the belief that all students deserve access to the knowledge, tools, and encouragement to pursue a fulfilling professional life, work to break down barriers and provide equitable career readiness education to all students. The structure of the committees, referenced in Figure 2, includes a strategic advisory committee composed of campus leaders, students, and external partners. There are also two sub-committees, one focusing on career integration in the curricular and co-curricular experience and one centered on employer engagement in the career readiness process. The career integration advisory sub-committee comprises faculty, staff, and students. The employer advisory sub-committee comprises external partners, students, and staff.

Lessons Learned

We learned several lessons along the way, the first being that career readiness is a team sport. Our natural instinct as collaborators led us to build a high level of partner engagement in this process early and often. We thought of it as a better way to inform our work. We did not expect how critical it would become when it came time to make actual changes later in the process. It makes sense, but sometimes, this point gets missed when

Figure 2. Structure of the Career Readiness Collaborative at WCU



collaboration suddenly happens in the midst of the process rather than from the very beginning. Collaboration also helps you to really know your campus, the culture, and what the appetite for change might be. There is an important difference between hearing about a best practice and assuming it will work on your campus versus understanding what your campus needs, what is in the way of their needs, and then identifying which best or new practice provides a solution.

Another lesson learned was utilizing the team's strengths and making time and capacity for the work. It is too easy to get sucked into the day-to-day of a job, leaving little time at the end of the day for strategic work that propels the mission forward. At WCU, we converted a portion of one of the career counselor roles to a project manager and faculty-facing role. That person had experience and talent in analyzing data and tending to details. She partnered with me, and as the executive director, I focused more on the vision, collaboration, and strategy for campus-wide change. This complement worked well. Left to my own devices, I would have had all the ideas while struggling to implement them. My colleague would have had a strong plan for action but may have lacked the political capital on campus to get the attention of senior leadership and other critical partners. When that career counselor role switched to make capacity for this work, additional graduate student support was hired to pick up the career counseling appointments.

Lastly, we learned that ensuring all students are career-ready is a journey, not a destination. The work of collaborating, strategic planning, analyzing data, and providing the campus with valuable services and data is never done. The wins can be found in the progress towards closing gaps in engagement and outcomes, securing new faculty partnerships for classroom integration, regularly providing valuable insights to the campus, and seeing students and alumni report that they feel better supported by the institution for their future careers. Change does take time. However, intentionality is the real game-changer.

Conclusion

The annual state of career readiness presentations, along with the ongoing work of the Career Readiness Collaborative, will ensure that the process and progress at WCU remain transparent and collaborative. This level of accountability enables career readiness metrics and success to be owned by the university rather than by one department or division. It also ensures that the metrics are measured promptly and utilized to target and alleviate challenges, as well as celebrate successes. Through thoughtful planning and the use of a change management model to guide the complexities of the work, large-scale change is possible. As with any change, this is more a journey than a destination, and having compelling and relevant metrics that are measured, utilized to inspire ongoing change, and shared with the broader institution is paramount. As higher education continues to move through this evolutionary shift, new and innovative strategies and updated, impactful metrics will bring clarity, focus, and success to the future of higher education and its generations of students.

References

- Blake, J. (2024, March 13). Doubts about value are deterring college enrollment. *Inside Higher Ed*. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/retention/2024/03/13/doubts-about-value-are-deterring-college-enrollment
- The Boyer 2030 Commission. (2022). The equity-excellence imperative: A 2030 blueprint for undergraduate education at U.S. research universities. *The Association for Undergraduate Education at Research Universities*. https://www.ueru.org/boyer-2030-report/about-the-commission
- Busteed, B. (2024, January 21). The future won't distinguish between places of learning and places of work. *Busteed Bold*.

 https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/future-wont-distinguish-between-places-learning-work-brandon-busteed-v9efe/
- Busteed, B. (2021, December 10). Career services will define the next big boom in college enrollment. *Forbes*.

 https://www.forbes.com/sites/brandonbusteed/2020/12/21/career-services-will-define-the-next-big-boom-in-college-enrollment/
- Caredda, S. (2020, March 3). Models: The Lippitt-Knoster model for managing complex change. Sergio Caredda. https://sergiocaredda.eu/organisation/models-the-lippitt-knoster-model-for-managing-complex-change
- The Career Leadership Collective. (2022). *National alumni career mobility report: Transforming career practices to increase ROI and equitable career success.* https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:US:acab292e-e89d-48ac-b7e2-86c9ac62d70f
- Chan, A., & Cruzvergara, C. (2021). Outcomes and metrics that matter: Embedding career services at higher education's core. Handshake. https://go.joinhandshake.com/FY21Q3-EDU-AMER-WC-Qutcomes-that-Matter-Outcomes-and-Metrics-that-Matter-Whitepaper.html
- Clayton, D., & Torpey-Saboe, N. (2021). 2021 Strada outcomes survey: Student outcomes beyond completion. Strada Education Foundation. https://stradaeducation.org/report/pv-release-october-27-2021/
- Flaherty, C. (2024, January 19). Student career desires: 3 survey findings to know and 2 areas to act on. *Inside Higher Ed.* https://www.insidehighered.com/news/student-success/life-after-college/2024/01/19/survey-students-career-influences-and-desired
- Gallup, Purdue University (2016). *Great jobs, great lives: The value of career services, inclusive experiences and mentorship for college graduates.* Lumina Foundation. https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/great-jobs-great-livees-3-2016.pdf
- Knoster, T. (1991, n.d.). *Managing complex change* [Unpublished conference presentation]. Association for Severely Handicapped (TASH) Conference, Washington, DC.
- Kondakciu, K. (2023). Attitudes towards higher education, US 2023. *Mintel Group Ltd*. https://store.mintel.com/us/report/us-attitudes-towards-higher-education-market-report
- Kozhuk, D. (2023). The evolution of career services: 3 phases to inform where we've been and where we're going. *uConnect Inc*. https://www.gouconnect.com/career-everywhere/the-evolution-of-career-services
- Lippitt, M. (1987). The managing complex change model. Enterprise Management, Ltd.

- Studley, J. S. (2016). Career readiness meets institution-wide outcomes measures. *NACE Journal*. https://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/trends-and-predictions/career-readiness-meets-inst itution-wide-outcomes-measures/
- Torpey-Saboe, N. (2021). Alumni perspectives: Are student loans worth it?. *Strada Education Foundation*. https://stradaeducation.org/report/pv-release-april-7-2021/
- University Innovation Alliance. (2021). Putting college to work for all students: Bridging the gap from education to employment playbook action guide. https://college2career.theuia.org/
- VanDerziel, S. (2022). *The value of career services*. National Association of Colleges and Employers. https://www.naceweb.org/career-development/organizational-structure/the-value-of-career-services/
- Yousey-Elsener, K. (2024). *National alumni career mobility annual report 2024*. Lightcast. https://www.datocms-assets.com/62658/1729533800-nacm-report-2024.pdf

How to cite this article: Rossi Long, J. (2025). Developing and assessing meaningful career readiness metrics. *Journal of Student Affairs Inquiry, Improvement, and Impact*, *8*(1), 133–146. https://doi.org/10.18060/28337

Editorial Acknowledgement. The *Journal of Inquiry, Improvement, and Impact (JSAIII)* uses an open and transparent peer-review process designed to foster professional, rigorous dialogue that strengthens each article. This approach also enables us to publicly recognize the essential contributions of our editorial team—work that is often invisible and uncredited. By acknowledging these efforts, we aim to bring greater equity to scholarly publishing and highlight the collaborative labor behind every published piece. The following individuals contributed to the editorial development of this article.

Kimberly Yousey-Elsener, Ph.D.

Guest Editor

Binghamton University
Visiting Research Associate Professor,
Higher Education and Student Affairs

LinkedIn | ORCiD

Emily Carpenter, Ed.D.

Assistant Editor

Nazareth University

Associate Vice President for Experiential Impact

LinkedIn

Production editing for this article was completed by *JSAIII* Editor, Heather J. Strine-Patterson, as part of the journal's commitment to publishing quality scholarship with care and consistency.