Strategic Framework

Resource Team

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN: BEST PRACTICES

An examination of this topic relative to NKU and its current environment, as summarized by the Resource Team

December 30, 2018

Acknowledgement:

Institutions are living systems, comprised of the dedication and aspirations of its community members. Something as important as charting the future the institution requires a collective effort across that entire system. The following team worked collaboratively in utilizing their knowledge, expertise, and experience in providing the Core Team the following environmental scan. We would like to recognize them for their hard work, their dedication to NKU, and their desire to help the Core Team chart a prosperous future for NKU, our students, and our region

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Environmental Scan: Best Practices

Members of the Best Practices Resource Team have compiled information related to best practices in higher education framed around…

- …enhancing student **access** to NKU using Test Optional Policies, with special consideration given to access for first generation and URM students.

- …enhancing degree retention, progression, and **completion**, with consideration given to minimizing financial burden, engaging 1st-year freshman, setting realistic college expectations from and student and parent perspective, and factors that positively influence 1st and 6-year retention rates.

- …enhancing **career and community engagement**, with consideration given to national best practices for enhancing career readiness and resources currently available at NKU's Career Center.

Executive Summary

*Enhancing Student **Access***

- The number of colleges using Test Optional Policies (TOPs) in higher education admissions has dramatically expanded in recent years.
- Considerable debate exists on whether the use of standardized tests (specifically SAT and ACT) unnecessarily truncates the admission of otherwise well-qualified students.
- Concern currently exists about whether widespread reliance on the use of standardized tests in the admission process tends to replicate the status quo in social class and opportunity in our American society.
- Admission deans from many institutions are now using TOPs as a tool to increasing applications from a more diverse range of students.
- Further evidence suggests that high school GPA had a stronger correlation with college success than the ACT/SAT.
- Ball State University (BSU) is one of the more recent 4-year institutions to adopt a Test Optional Policy (TOP) for its admissions review process.
  - Students who choose to exclude their test scores from their application still qualify for merit-based scholarships and, when awarded, financial aid considers high school GPA if a student has not submitted test scores.
  - In regards to placement (English and Mathematics), Ball State uses test scores, institutional placement tests OR previous college coursework. Test scores are not required for application into its Honors College.
- In a 2018, a US World and News Report stated that for the past four years there has been a downward slide in the readiness levels of college freshman students in English and Math.

- This observation is raising concerns, yet the number of test-optional colleges and universities continue to grow, prompting ACT/SAT boards to caution about solely using high school transcripts when grade inflation continues to be a concern at the high school level and feel this can lead to colleges admitting students who are under-prepared and will leave without earning a degree.
- These boards feel it is the financial barrier, not the test scores, that is affecting access to college for under-represented students.

*Enhancing Degree Retention, Progression, and **Completion***

- Financial burden negatively affects degree retention and progression and NKU should create or further existing financial forgiveness programs.
    - Seven out of 10 college students feel stressed about their personal finance;
    - 32 percent of students reported neglecting their studies at least sometimes, and; because of the money they owed;
    - Nearly three out of 10 students said they reduced their class load because of the money they owed, while 16 percent took a break from their college or university and 13 percent transferred to another institution."
    - International students can also have the added financial stress of sudden and drastic devaluation of their currency.
        - Having a need-based scholarship specifically for international students is important in aiding students who may encounter these types of additional financial stresses

- Other institutions that have been successful engaging freshman in their first year of college have used the following common concepts:
    - **Cross Disciplinary Courses** (Found in Honors or first year seminar courses)
    - **Community Engagement** (service learning or employer projects)
    - **Digital Resources** (Websites for 1st year students and parents to help college transition)
    - **Specialized Advising** (Centralized First Year advising)
    - **Relationship Building** (Enhanced personal interactions with 1st year students)

- Additional & new Ideas for Engaging Freshman that appear to be best practices at other institutions
    - **TED Talks from seniors**;
    - **More annual traditions** such as cell phone light bonding during Convocation;
    - Using Current **Students as Knowledge creators**;
    - **Triage Success Support Model** – academic advisor, career counselor, & faculty mentor.

- NKU should explore using a self-affirmation intervention designed to lessen threat would enhance the academic achievement of negatively stereotyped minority students.
    - Application of a self-affirmation survey is suggested in further sections of this environmental scan.

- Concerning university and student expectations towards degree retention and progression (and how these expectations differ), NKU should consider the following best practices.
    - **Build a culture of student success** (ironically, this current strategic framework process is a help towards this best practice)
    - **Boost information literacy** (this is being done with the introduction of the new QEP)
    - **Improve Communication and Collaboration** efforts between faculty and staff / student affairs and academic affairs (Improving communication also involves information flow within the university for how individuals are informed of events, programs, professional development opportunities and updates)
    - **Align university around meeting student expectations** with determined goals (such as embedding information literacy or student learning outcomes into all daily work)
    - **Taking a fresh look at pre-orientation and post-orientation** student and parent expectations, and closing gaps (One institution created a Parent Canvas program called Parent Lingo to educate parents on university information that is relevant for them, support services at the university, and ways they can be involved and help the student from a realistic distance)

- Review of several sister institutions characterized by a similar variety of students and programming, reveals that NKU is adopting many of the current best practices as they relate to degree retention, progression and completion. Best practices from the following institutions are detailed later in this environmental scan.
    - Cleveland State, WKU, EKU, New Mexico State, Southern Illinois University, Florida Gulf Coast University, University of Wisconsin Whitewater, University of Southern Mississippi, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, and Central Washington University.

- In looking at the factors that might influence why retention numbers are low for NKU compared to sister institutions, a myriad of factors appear to be relevant from both a first year, and longer-term perspective.
    - One of the areas that may be having an impact on first year retention is **early intervention and support for first year students**.
        - Summer Spark, that allows for first generation students to come to campus over the summer prior to freshman year, take one course, bond with other students, and become acclimated to the university is ripe for expansion to more students.
        - Additional student support strategies, such as the upcoming pilot of early 4-week grades and review in the College of Informatics, are key strategies to consider.
    - Another area influencing first year retention are **reduction in resources, turnover, and budget cuts**. Examples include Career Services, African-American Programs and Services, and Latino Student Services, UCAP and Norse Advising.
        - Students seeing depletions in support staff or support mentors can create perceptions that there is not a lot of support for first generation and URM students.
    - First year students (also affects 6-year graduation rates), driven by **economic and financial pressures** to afford tuition, are often working more hours or are more concerned about the cost of an education.

        - Creative programs like the newly reformed EDGE program to offer specialized tuition to competitive markets are helpful strategies.

    - Another factor affecting student retention is making the **connection to faculty during the first year** outside of the classroom experience.
        - In some colleges, cultures exist where professors keep doors closed and/or are not present on non-teaching days. Efforts to align faculty expectations to include more student contact outside the classroom may helpful in changing the culture.
    - **Micro charges, fees, and fines** – At NKU, there are many fees and fines that over time can add up quickly for students and lead to holds if not paid.
        - This raises the question if it is possible to roll some fees and/or fines into the cost of tuition or charge a general student fee to cover many of these micro charges, making students feel less taxed.
    - **Political and Economic Factors & Word of Mouth** – Negative issues such as the KY pension system, and campus budget have had a significant impact on retention for the following reasons.
        - Some instructors shared these issues with students.
        - Students worried about their instructor not returning to NKU may have decided to transfer or not attend NKU in the following semester.
        - Negative perceptions of NKU reach families of students by word of mouth.
        - *Employee training on proper communication about the university is needed.*
    - **Academic Degree Program Complexity / Pathways** – Many of NKU's academic degree programs are heavily saturated with pre-requisites that change every year making it difficult to navigate through the curriculum.
        - A careful examination of pre-requisites is necessary with the aim of making academic programs more obtainable and easier to navigate.
    - **High Credit Hours**- More students are entering NKU with a large number of credits already completed (dual or transfer credit). Some of these students may still need 3-4 years to complete a degree due to pre-requisites and bottleneck courses. Consideration should be given to creating special pathways to graduation for some students entering NKU who have a given threshold of credits already completed.

Career and Community Engagement

- Concerning student career development, a Career Development Model for NKU approved by the Provost and presented to the Deans and the AVP for University Development & Alumni Relations in 2017.
- This Career Development Model requires shared responsibilities among various units across campus and enhanced dedication to assuming these responsibilities is needed.
- The current staff to student ratio and number of positions at NKU limit NKU Career Services from providing the full range of services offered at regional and peer universities.
    - Prior to the RIF in 2016, Career Services was more comparable to other universities in tour regional area.

- Since the colleges have yet to fully implement their portion of the Career Development Model, overall participation of students and employers has decreased since 2016.
- Other universities are increasing staff in their Career Services offices – Miami University plans to go from 24 to 32.
- NKU Career Services has detailed annual reports on career advising, on-campus recruiting, internships/co-ops, programs, CEP 101, and employers recruiting on campus – a pdf containing these reports has been uploaded to Basecamp in the Best Practices Final Report folder located in the Research and Best Practices folder.
- Career services is uniquely positioned to understand the needs of specific companies, industries, roles, etc., and can use these insights to help craft alumni engagement opportunities that provide immediate value to an alum.
- Career readiness should be a collective institutional responsibility as a campus outcome.
    - The momentum of a competencies-based approach linked to real world applications, plus wise measures designed and owned by the entire institution, are a good recipe for collective engagement, effort, and results.
    - The National Association of Colleges and Employers has identified eight competencies associated with career readiness.
        - Critical Thinking/Problem Solving, Oral/Written Communications, Teamwork/Collaboration, Digital Technology, Leadership, Professionalism/Work Ethic, Career Management, and Global/Intercultural Fluency.
- Instead of thinking about career services as a project manager that engages with students specifically for the transition from college to career, what if we viewed it as the primary interface between companies, alumni, and the college or university?
- Career services is uniquely positioned to understand the needs of specific companies, industries, roles, etc., and can use these insights to help craft alumni engagement opportunities that provide immediate value to an alum.

The Best Practices Resource team hopes the core team finds this information useful during development of a strategic framework for the university. Below you will find detailed summaries of best practices associated with the access, completion, and career and community engagement topics discussed above - including links and pdfs to full reports.

Best Practices Resource Team

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACCESS

TOPIC/QUESTION

Ways to assess student readiness for college in ways other than SAT and ACT scores, particularly given the correlation between standardized test measures and family income

Article #1:

Citation

Syverson, Steven, et al. *Defining Access: How Test-Optional Works*. National Association for College Admissions Counseling, spring 2018, pp. 1-85.

Link for a Deeper Dive

https://www.nacacnet.org/globalassets/documents/publications/research/defining-access-report-2018.pdf

Executive Summary

> *"This Commission wishes to emphasize at the outset that a "one-size-fits-all" approach for the use of standardized tests in undergraduate admission does not reflect the realities facing our nation's many and varied colleges and universities. These institutions differ greatly in size, selectivity and mission. At some, standardized tests are important predictors of students' academic success, while at others, they add little compared to high school grades."*
>
> *NACAC Commission on the Use of Standardized Tests in Undergraduate Admission, 2008*

The number of colleges using **Test Optional Policies (TOPs)** in higher education admissions has dramatically expanded in recent years. And these colleges have avoided "one-size-fits-all," finding varied ways to administer TOPs and experiencing varied outcomes. Much of the momentum around Test-Optional admission is focused on whether the use of standardized tests (specifically SAT and ACT) **unnecessarily truncates the admission of otherwise well-qualified students**. In particular, there is concern about whether widespread reliance on the use of these tests in the admission process tends to replicate the status quo in social class and opportunity in our American society.

In this study, we collected student-record level data from 28 institutions that illustrate the variety among institutions that have adopted a TOP. They ranged in undergraduate enrollments from 1,500 to 20,000 and 15%-90% in admission selectivity, and included long-time users of TOP as well as recent adopters of the policy. In most instances, we received four cohorts of student data, in total representing a dataset of 955,774 individual applicant records. We focused on interpreting the data using practical significance rather than experimental statistical techniques.

Many of the admission deans of the participating institutions described a TOP as a tool they employed in the hope of increasing applications from a more diverse range of students, so this report focuses great attention on traditionally under-represented populations in American higher education. To do so, we used our record-level data to identify the **intersectionality of these underserved populations**: First-Generation College Bound, students from lower SES backgrounds (Pell recipients as proxy), and students from racial and ethnic groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in college populations

(URM). We identified students associated with *any* of these three groups and designated them as a single category of "Expanded Diversity," and when possible, used it in our explorations.
The experiences of institutions in this study provide evidence that the adoption of a well-executed test-optional admission policy can lead to an ***increase in overall applications*** as well as an ***increase in the representation of URM students*** (both numeric and proportionate) in the applicant pool and the freshman class. Roughly two-thirds of our TOP institutions experienced URM growth above that of a matched test-requiring peer institution. A similar but smaller magnitude increase was seen among Pell recipients.

Approximately **one quarter of the students in this study did not submit standardized test scores** with their college application (henceforth to be referred to as "Non-Submitters"). As noted in earlier studies, **URM, First-Generation-to-College,** and **Pell recipients** were more strongly represented among Non-Submitters. For instance, **35%** of Black or African-American students chose to be Non-Submitters (12 percentage points higher than the overall non-submitting rate), as compared to **18**% of white students. Similarly, women chose to be Non-Submitters at higher rates than men.

We also found that Non-Submitters were often **admitted at *lower* rates** than Submitters, but, on average, **enrolled (yielded) at substantially *higher* rates**. Their HSGPAs were modestly lower than the Submitters, and, upon entering college, their First Year GPAs and Cumulative GPAs were comparably lower. However, **they ultimately graduated at rates equivalent to, or marginally higher than, Submitters**, the ultimate proof of success.

Furthermore, our data indicated that **high school GPA had a stronger correlation with college success for Non-Submitters than the ACT/SAT** (for the 27% of Non-Submitters for whom we had test scores) -- both in terms of college cumulative GPA and graduation rate. While test scores had a generally stronger relationship with college GPAs for the Submitters, for the Non-Submitters they tended to show a weaker relationship, essentially under-predicting the college GPA. The test scores continued to most strongly correlate with family income.

A financial analysis, though inconclusive, suggested that some degree of financial investment was required to support the success of a TOP policy. While the proportion of students with need did not necessarily increase after policy adoption, average demonstrated need and gift aid per capita did. **Non-Submitters were generally needier** than Submitters. They also, however, included a **sizable proportion of No-Need students,** only modestly lower than that of Submitters. We noted that well over half of all No-Need students were offered some gift aid, but No-Need **Non-Submitters were less likely than Submitters to receive gift awards**, in spite of the fact that these two groups were shown to graduate at comparable rates.

We cannot lay claim to definitive conclusions about the workings of a test-optional admission policy. However, our findings suggest that a **TOP works well for many types of institutions**. It appears to offer a less obstructed path to higher education for this population of students who feel that their scores do not match their ability. We do not argue that institutions should entirely eliminate consideration of the ACT and SAT for all their students, however, we do continue to **question whether the value-add of testing is large enough to justify the price—time spent, financial cost, and emotional drain—being paid by students** due to societal preoccupation with these tests.

We find that there is plenty of room in American higher education for diversity of process, allowing test-optional admission to contribute to that diversity. Some have asked, 'Why ignore a piece of information if it is available?" And we agree. Indeed, when a student chooses to be a Non-Submitter, that, too, is a valuable piece of information.

> *"We have great pride drawn from how well TOP works for first gen and diversity, and kids with special talents. For us, removing the testing was a big help in looking at everything else."*
>
> *Dean from a small private college*

Article #2:

Citation

Ball State University Informational Articles – See the links below

Links for a Deeper Dive

https://www.bsu.edu/admissions/undergraduate-admissions/information-for/high-school-students/test-optional

https://www.bsu.edu/news/articles/2018/7/ball-state-makes-standardized-tests-optional-for-admission

Executive Summary

Ball State University (BSU) is one of the more recent 4-year institutions to adopt a Test Optional Policy (TOP) for its admissions review process. As of August 2018, BSU made SAT/ACT scores optional for all applicants. By making this change, BSU became the first Indiana, 4-year public institution to become Test Optional. Students decide if they want to submit standardized test scores with their applications. BSU cannot advise students on this decision, but the institution includes a profile of its previous incoming class on its admissions website so students know if their test scores will make their application stronger.

Ball State made the change based on its own data and research, which showed that high school GPA and curriculum were the best predictors of long-term student success (both in retention and graduation). The institution also felt that TOP would provide potential students greater access to a college education by allowing their application to emphasize their strengths academically. BSU also feels TOP will have a positive impact on the diversity of applicants and eventually its student body.

Students who choose to exclude their test scores from their application still qualify for merit-based scholarships. When merit-based scholarships are awarded, financial aid will consider high school GPA if a student has not submitted test scores. In regards to placement (English and Mathematics), Ball State uses test scores, institutional placement tests OR previous college coursework. Test scores are not required for application into its Honors College.

While Ball State's undergraduate enrollment is about twice that of Northern Kentucky University, there are many similarities between BSU and NKU. BSU is a 4-year regional public institution.

Article #3:

Citation

Chingos, Matthew. *What Matters Most for College Completion: Academic Preparation is the Key Predictor of Success*. American Enterprise Institute, Third Way Institute, 2018, pp. 1-12.

Link for a Deeper Dive

http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/What-Matters-Most-for-College-Completion.pdf

Executive Summary

There have been a number of studies in regards to identifying the strongest predictors of college readiness. In Matthew Chingos' 2018 report, "What Matters Most for College Completion," he not only analyzes those predictors, but also provides recommendations for K-12 schools as to how they can better prepare students for college with the end goal of College Completion (earning a degree). Colleges are faced with a choice – do they exclude perceived under-prepared students through their admissions process and risk making the opportunity for a college education even less accessible to make their jobs easier OR find a way to serve the students they enroll better by providing them resources to be successful.

Chingos' goals for his report are:

1. Provide an overview of college success predictors
2. Discuss the correlation between academic preparation and college completion; and what does that mean for policies and practices.

Similar to other reports, Chingos illustrates how test scores (ACT/SAT) and high school GPA are the strongest predictors of college completion. However, when looked at together, high school GPA is the stronger predictor of the two. Students with similar high school GPAs can have varying test scores, which will not affect college completion. However, students with similar test scores, but varying high school GPAs will graduate from college at a higher rate based on their high school GPAs.

Earning high grades in high school requires a commitment to consistent behaviors such as attending class, turning in assignments, participating in class, performing well on quizzes/exams. While doing well on a single test like an ACT or SAT test does not necessarily need that type of a commitment. Behaviors that lead to earning good high school grades are the same behaviors needed to earn a college degree. It is not surprising that the organizations that administer the ACT/SAT tests use college GPA, not college completion, to judge the validity in their tests. The data does show a stronger correlation between test scores and first year college GPAs than test scores and college graduation rates.

Using high school GPAs to predict college success may seem to be a simple conclusion, but Chingos cautions that other factors during the K-12 years can affect college success and that current policies and practices could skew high school grades and data. These assertions are not as research-based as the college readiness predictors earlier in his report. He feels enrollment in high school courses that are more rigorous will improve college-preparedness. However, he implies because of government-driven assessments (grades, scores on assessment tests) that students may be placed in less rigorous courses, or receive inflated grades in order to meet benchmarks set for high schools. Depending on how often that happens, that could skew high school performance and college readiness.

Chingos ends with three recommendations:

1. Government-driven assessment of high school quality should expand beyond the single year of test scores and graduation rates that are currently required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act.
2. K-12 schools and districts should work to increase the number of students who take rigorous courses.
3. Researchers and educators should collaborate on pilot interventions aimed at improving success in high school courses (i.e. tutoring for students struggling with learning course content).

Article #4:

Citation

Camera, Lauren. "The Future of College Entrance Exams." *US World and News Report*. October 26, 2018.

Link for a Deeper Dive

https://www.usnews.com/news/the-report/articles/2018-10-26/the-new-opt-out-movement-colleges-make-entrance-exams-optional

Executive Summary

For the second year in a row, the number of ACT test takers has decreased in 2018. In addition, there has been a downward slide, since 2014, in the readiness levels of students in English and Math, with Mathematics levels hitting a 20-year low. With the current incoming college class of 2018, only 4 in 10 students met the math benchmark. These statistics are raising many concerns:

- Is there a mismatch between what students learn and what college exams test?
- Are current tests accurate measures of college readiness?
- Do current tests present an advantage to those with more means?

The College Board has tried to confront these issues by redesigning the SAT test in spring of 2016. The SAT was administered to over 2.1 million students, in part, because of a partnership with 10 states and Washington D.C., which administered many tests free of charge.

Yet the number of test-optional colleges and universities continue to grow, currently totaling over 1,000, including University of Chicago which recently became the first large, elite research institution to make the switch. In addition, the University of California system is considering moving to a test-optional policy for the entire system. Currently, there is a lawsuit filed against Harvard University, which argues its race-conscious admissions policy discriminates against Asian-Americans. Depending on the decision of the UC-system and the Harvard University lawsuit, it could mean several more colleges and universities instituting test-optional admissions policies. Increasing the number of TOP institutions will continue to increase **Access** to under-represented students and could increase diversity without institutions feeling they have to have to specifically consider diversity as part of their admissions process.

This has obviously prompted a response from the ACT/SAT organizations, which recommend colleges and universities need to look at the entire body of work of applicants, including test scores, for admissions as well as enrollment and support purposes. They also caution about solely using high school transcripts when grade inflation continues to be a concern at the high school level. They College Board (SAT) and ACT feel this can lead to colleges admitting students who are under-prepared and will leave without earning a degree. They continue to defend their tests and the ability of the tests to evaluate college-readiness. They also feel it is the financial barrier, not the test scores, that is affecting **Access** to college for under-represented students.

Bowdoin College was one of the first 4-year institutions to go test optional 50 years ago. Its Dean of Admissions offers one piece of advice for colleges/universities considering going test-optional: "You need to have a system that serves your admission process and your student body, and that's mission-driven and school-specific."

COMPLETION

TOPIC/QUESTION

The core team should identify ways to help students who encounter financial need not directly related to the institution but would adversely affect retention and progression, as they matriculate through their degrees.

Article:

Citation

Grabmeier, Jeff. (2015, June 30) 70 percent of college students stressed about finances. National survey finds students optimistic, despite debt and stress.

Links for a Deeper Dive

Article Link: https://news.osu.edu/70-percent-of-college-students-stressed-about-finances/

OSU Center for the Study of Student Life: https://cssl.osu.edu/

OSU report (2017) on "Financial Wellness and Student Engagement": https://cssl.osu.edu/posts/documents/sls-financial-wellness-and-engagement-report.pdf

Executive Summary

- "Seven out of 10 college students feel stressed about their personal finances…"
- "…32 percent of students reported neglecting their studies at least sometimes because of the money they owed."
- "The findings come from the National Student Financial Wellness Study, which surveyed 18,795 undergraduate students at 52 colleges and universities across the country. It included students from four-year and two-year private and public institutions. "We need to help students manage their stress so they can be conscientious about their financial decisions, but not so overwhelmed that it hurts their academics or health..."
- "The survey found that despite the stress of paying for college, more than three-quarters of students think college is a good investment for their financial future and believe they will be able to support themselves after graduation. "Students feel good about their decision to go to college and think it will pay off in the end," Montalto said."
- "When asked how they paid for their tuition, students were most likely to say either loans or scholarships and grants (35 percent each). While parents and family were mentioned as the primary source of funding for housing and books, 17 to 19 percent of students said they relied mostly on loans."
- ""But the good news is that about half the students with loans said they tried to borrow as little as possible." Most students seem to have a good handle on credit card debt, the survey showed."
- "Financial problems lead some students to make difficult choices, the survey found. Nearly three out of 10 students said they reduced their class load because of the money they owed, while 16 percent took a break from their college or university and 13 percent transferred to another institution."

TOPIC/QUESTION

The core team should explore innovative ways to engage freshman in their first year of college (i.e. e-portfolios, innovative internships…)

Article #1:

Citation

Ernest Pascarella, "Cognitive Impacts of the First Year of College," In Improving the First Year of College: Research and Practice, ed. Robert S. Feldman (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005), 113–14. 2.

Links for a Deeper Dive

https://www.airweb.org/eAIR/journalnews/Pages/JournalNewsFirst-YearExperience.aspx

(Journal of the First Year Experience & Students in Transition) –requires purchase to review content, this may be a resource to consider for Office of First Year Programs

https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/reinventing-first-year-experience

http://www.presence.io/blog/75-fantastic-program-ideas-for-first-year-students/

https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advising-first-year-students.aspx

https://www.comevo.com/look-top-5-ranked-institutions-first-year-experience/

Executive Summary

Currently at Northern Kentucky University, one of the key priorities of the institution is our commitment and focus on our first year student population. NKU is unique in that we have a large percentage of first generation students each year who consider our institution, (last year, 55% of our incoming student population was first generation) which creates a dynamic where our first year experience is critical to students being able to understand how to navigate the university system and succeed. This includes providing educational steps for students and families to understand basic concepts about the university experience, along with traditional education on services and academic systems that help the student to graduate.

In one of the articles researched, a review discussed five key areas that are common among institutions that are highly ranked for first year support. These are the common concepts that the highly successful first year schools were using:

1) **Cross Disciplinary Courses** (Typically found in Honors courses, some schools used this concept in their first year seminar)
2) **Community Engagement** (Some schools used service learning projects with their first year students, or partnerships with employers for projects)

3) **Digital Resources** (Several schools created websites for first year students, and in some cases for the parents as well with information on campus resources and programs, and ideas to help with college transition)
4) **Specialized Advising** (One key best practice is Centralized First Year (or First and Second Year) Advising where all freshman students come to one office or one building, or one place for advising assistance regardless of their major, so that there is universal support even if the student changes majors during the first year. This may include housing advisors from multiple disciplines in one location, or having advisors who are cross trained in multiple areas, or advisors who specialize and are trained to help first year students)
5) **Relationship Building** (There is research that indicates that the more personal interactions or "touches" that the student has with advisors, mentors, faculty, peer students, and other stakeholders, then the more engaged and connected the student becomes with the institution, so one best practice is building more of these opportunities. An example might be learning communities, which are two courses connected by way of having the same set of students in both courses, with ideally, shared curriculum. This allows students to have a common shared experience between the two courses, and form deeper bonds and connections)

Positively, NKU is currently delivering on programs, ideas, and framework in place that supports many of these five concepts. In the same light however, there are certainly new ideas to explore, and areas for improvement. Here are some of the innovative ideas and programs NKU uses to engage freshman, along with other best practice ideas that might be future options. It is important to note that engaging freshman also begins before the students arrive, even while in high school, that may form engagement and affinity to the university.

School Based Scholars & Pathway Programs – Delivered out of Learning Plus, NKU currently offers dual credit courses while students are still in high school, taught in the high schools themselves, at satellite locations such as the Grant County Center, online, or on campus. Part of this program also includes a few pathways, for students who already know a career path they wish to take to begin a head start on courses that will help prior to entry to the university. These courses can often connect students to our faculty and advisors through advising support (Norse Advising) to build affinity with NKU prior to the first year.

Summer Spark – this is NKU's bridge program, where first generation students can spend 5 weeks during the summer obtaining credit for a math or general education course, while simultaneously bonding on campus with other incoming students through a campus acclimation experience.
https://inside.nku.edu/summerspark.html

New Student Orientation & 3 Day Orientation- Incoming freshman and their families attend new student orientation during the summer, where they spend the day on campus learning about the university, its many services, and students register for courses. At the end of the summer in the 3 days leading up to the start of the semester, students participate in a 3-day orientation program designed to set students up for student success, and to acclimate students to the university.
https://www.nku.edu/content/dam/orientation/docs/2018%20Orientation%203day%20Overview.pdf

Learning Communities (Traditional and Residential) – Many first year students have the ability to be enrolled into two courses that have a shared dual registration, for instance having the same group of students who are enrolled in UNV 101 and ENG 101 for example. Since the same group of students are in both courses together (sometimes with linked curriculum) students are able to build stronger relationships with classmates, and create bonds that help with retention. Occasionally, these combined courses can pair with a residential experience where students share two common courses and live in the same building or same floor of a residence hall. This creates a living and academic shared experience, often resulting in “hyper bonding” where students really get to know one another deeply beyond the classroom due to the lived shared experience. Often times this program can be complimented with additional programming done in the residential space during the semester, creating shared events.

Peer Mentoring and Coaching – Some academic colleges and units have Peer Mentor or Employer mentorship programs, that pair first year students with either student, professional, or faculty mentors. The Peer Coaches program in Norse Advising, College of Business Professional Mentor Program, and College of Informatics Peer Coaches are examples. Other university-connected partners such as Kentucky Campus Compact with their AmeriCorps Program and newly approved Student Mentorship Program are also initiatives that help first year and even some high school students with mentorship and mentorship opportunities. Efforts towards peer mentor synchronization at NKU are also worth consideration.

Common Reading Program / NKU Book Connection – Currently more of a fading best practice, but used at some institutions, (previously used at NKU) all first year students are directed to read the same book to provide at common shared experience for all first year students, and faculty are encouraged to incorporate elements of the book into their courses. During the semester, the author of the book can be invited to campus to encourage dialogue or provide context for students and faculty.

QR Code Scavenger Hunt / Group Scavenger Hunts – An example of an innovative program in the past at NKU was a QR Code Scavenger Hunt, where by using Qualtrics, (software program that NKU has for employees) QR codes with email triggers were created to be able to provide a high tech unique scavenger hunt for students. Students could download a QR Code scanning app, scan a code, and once scanned, the QR code created can ask for the students NKU email / username, and the email trigger can send to the student’s email the next clue in the hunt, which can continue until the last clue is found. Once scanned, Qualtrics can collect the data on the time and which clue was scanned, to help the creator keep track of progress, and the clues can give more detailed instructions beyond just scanning the next clue. Clues can force students to visit key offices on campus, and tasks to complete can include things like talking to employees who can be the keeper of the code, or force interactions that students might need. It is a creative and inventive way to introduce students to desired offices, and is customizable.

Additional & new Ideas for Engaging Freshman that appear to be best practices at other institutions:

First Year Centralized Academic Advising (Currently being piloted in Norse Advising at NKU) **–** All first year students (or first and second year at some places) are directed to one central office or location for academic advising support. Under this model, regardless of major or even should a student change majors, they are directed to one location all throughout the first or first and second year. Additional services can be added to the same office. Norse Advising is currently piloting this model with College of Health Professions students starting in fall 2019, where first year advisors will work in Norse Advising with all first year students. (29 hours and under) Should students wish to change their major, they still can go to Norse Advising due to Drop In Advising support and Peer Coaches to provide extra help for first year students, or be directed to the right resource in one location.

TED Talks from seniors – Some institutions created programs to allow for graduating students or upper class students to mentor larger groups of first year students in creative ways. By providing seniors the opportunity to present a short presentation to first year students on various topics to educate and encourage first year students, and to maybe share lessons that can accelerate the learning curve of transition to college. Similar to Ted Talks on YouTube, students can work with faculty and staff to sharpen their communication to key, innovative, or important information, and it can help upper class students hone their skills as well.

Annual Traditions - Some universities create annual traditions for their first year students to follow to establish affinity and connection to their new university, and develop appreciation and buy-in commitment to the institution. NKU has established a handful of these, such as cell phone light bonding during Convocation at the start of the year, blowing the horn at NKU basketball games, or through annual events such as Victorfest and Fresh Fusion, which are during our welcome week at the start of the year for incoming first year students. Other ideas and creativity are possible here.

Utilization of Current Students as Knowledge creators- Some institutions are trying new ideas with their first year seminar courses, where instead of a traditional UNV 101 acclimating the student to the university, are creating a fluid first year course. Students come in and create new knowledge by creating their own projects and research right away in UNV 101 courses that are major or college specific, and they collaborate with faculty in their own college to develop research projects and innovative design projects that are student chosen right from the beginning. This approach is designed to allow students to develop critical thinking skills and embrace vision and ideas, while building in some acclimation to university practices as needed based on the knowledge the students come in with already. Service learning opportunities or e-portfolios where students put together an academic project portfolio of work are additional options under this model as well.

Triage Success Support Model – Some universities are moving to a model where each incoming first year student is assigned to a specific academic advisor, career services counselor, and faculty mentor. With each partner in a defined role, this triple support approach for a student can be very helpful in forming specific partners and mentors for each student to focus relationship building from the first semester. Currently at NKU, resources are thin for these three areas, making it challenging to assign all students to all three partners in tandem unless additional frontline human support are added to these areas.

Other important areas of consideration related to engagement of first year students:

1) **University Alignment** – One of the areas NKU should consider that is a best practice of engagement is standardizing and coordinating a first year student experience program. Currently there are several university offices and partners doing work that impact first year students, but these separate ideas are not necessarily coordinated. For example, having a map of what the first year experience is, having each step scripted every step of the way, with coordination of university efforts should be considered, and many successful institutions have done this in building their first year student engagement. NKU is somewhat decentralized due to the various colleges, so this is something to consider.

2) **Yearlong first year seminar experience**- At this time, UNV 101 is being restructured for the 2019-20 academic year to become a yearlong experience. This may allow for more focus and

time to assist students with support beyond just the first semester, or to focus more intently on academic success in the fall and career exploration in the spring.

3) **FOCUS 2** expansion **–** Currently, NKU administers the FOCUS 2 assessment through career services, occasionally academic advising, and in UNV 101. This assessment can help first year and other students identify key values that they may wish to see in a career. This data that is already being collected in pockets at NKU may have room to be analyzed more deeply to see trends in our students. Due to limited staff in career services, training additional faculty and staff in focus 2 is also possible. Many academic advisors have been provided training in Focus 2, however due to limitations on time at key periods; use of the FOCUS 2 tool has been limited.

4) **Learning Community integration** – While decent numbers of learning community courses and opportunities exist at NKU, there are some institutions where all first year students are automatically placed into learning community courses, or where options for living (housing) learning communities are created for all first year students. Questions of expansion, modification, or elimination of learning communities may be a question NKU would need to explore. Another option could be more focus on encouraged study groups for academic courses and programs as well**.**

TOPIC/QUESTION

The core team should take an inventory of student and family expectations as they relate to ACCE (i.e. what are legitimate college expectations for incoming freshman, first gen students, URM students). Once determined, the core team should explore how well NKU is meeting these expectations and identify best practices of how to improve in those areas where NKU needs to improve.

Article 1:

Citation

Reducing the Racial Achievement Gap: A Social-Psychological Intervention (Geoffrey L. Cohen, Julio Garcia, Nancy Apfel, Allison Master)

Link for a Deeper Dive

http://science.sciencemag.org/content/313/5791/1307

Executive Summary

- "The research reported here tested whether a self-affirmation intervention designed to lessen threat would enhance the academic achievement of negatively stereotyped minority students."
- "The drive for self-integrity—seeing oneself as good, virtuous, and efficacious—is a fundamental human motivation (1–3). Membership in valued social groups is often a major source of individuals' sense of self-integrity (4, 5)."

- "Because people subjected to widely known negative stereotypes impugning the intelligence of their group are aware of these negative characterizations, they may worry that performing poorly could confirm the stereotype of their group (6–8). This situation can create chronic stress at school and work, by burdening people with an extra psychological threat not experienced by those outside their group."

- "One potentially effective way to buffer people against threat and its consequences, we suggest, is to allow them to reaffirm their self-integrity (2, 3). Self-affirmations, by buttressing self-worth, can alleviate the stress arising in threatening performance situations (11)."

- "…as past research suggests, the psychological availability of mental concepts can affect the encoding and interpretation of social experience (16). Consistent with this possibility, our intervention reduced the psychological availability of the stereotype. This then could have changed African Americans' perception of the level of bias in the environment, and their interpretations of academic success and defeat, over the long term."

- "Our findings demonstrate that alleviating psychological threat can improve intellectual achievement in a real-world environment (8). Our intervention is among the first aimed purely at altering psychological experience to reduce the racial achievement gap, a major problem in the United States. Unlike other interventions, it benefits the targeted students, including those most at risk, reducing group-based inequality while not adversely affecting nontargeted students (17)."

Actionable Idea

Self-affirmation questionnaires could be distributed at orientation or sent out electronically when a student enrolls for the first time. Perhaps one can be sent out each year with different questions as a student advances on their academic path. Copies of the completed questionnaires could be sent back to students upon graduation for them to have as they enter the workforce. (This approach could apply to financial confidence, as well.) It's one thing to show our students we're here for them; it's another to help them nurture their own inner confidence to succeed.

Article 2:

Citation

Article; Brinkworth, Russell, McCann, Ben, Matthews, Carol, Nordstrom, Karin. *First Year Expectations and Experiences: student and teacher perspectives*, June 2008.

Links for a Deeper Dive

http://sydney.edu.au/social-inclusion/documents/meeting-dates-resources/First%20Year%20Expectations%20and%20Experiences_Brinkworth_etal.pdf

(National Resource Center for First Year Experience and Students in Transition) – First Year Experience Journal

https://sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/national_resource_center/publications/journal/index.php

Executive Summary

In looking at student and family expectations as they relate to student success (and its factors/ACCE) and how NKU is meeting those expectations, it is important to consider this topic from both the university and the student perspective.

From the university (NKU) perspective, the university used to look at things in years past such as critical thinking of the student, and general graduation rates, during a time where external expectations like performance based funding from the state was less of a factor. Today, university expectations are more complex with performance funding, and competition for enrollment along with other factors that directly impact expectations around student success and support. The university has higher expectations for student success in order to meet metrics, and to continue to be economically sustainable.

Expectations of the university include areas such as:

- Students meeting created learning outcomes from academic courses and programs
- Providing layers of student support services designed to maintain and increase retention of students

- Meeting state performance metrics such as credit hours completed and degrees conferred to reach state benchmarks

- Creating an inclusive and supportive community for all students of various backgrounds (1st generation, underrepresented minority, veterans, adult (over 25) learners, dual credit school based scholars, online, accelerated online, traditional (18-25) and Donovan scholars (over age 65)

- Graduating students that are academically and professionally prepared for their career of choice

- Providing social engagement and practical application opportunities for students (i.e. co-ops, internships, study abroad, leadership, research projects, and service learning)

- Students growing in their maturity levels, ability to demonstrate academic grit, development of self-responsibility and reliance

In regards to meeting those expectations from a university perspective, NKU is able to meet these expectations to an extent, where many of the services and experiences described above are provided, but NKU is struggling to fully meet expectations implied behind these services based on limited personnel and resources in order to deliver on the expectations set. For example, NKU provides services through the office of African American Programs and from the office of Career Services, however if that office has one or only a few staff members, the level of services provided are diminished or limited due to the number of individuals able to provide said service.

The university also may have a false sense of student expectations in areas as well. For instance, the university may make assumptions that younger generation students are “tech savvy” and can know how to use apps and software programs, but when they actually take the course in Canvas, or try to use educational tools, the students still have a learning curve, and really do not understand the practical application of the educational tool or software.

Further research would be needed to assess internally on frontline areas that may have expectations that are created, but not able to be fully realized or met. Another area of importance to meeting student expectations is institutional alignment around creating consistent expectations for units across campus.

From the student and parent perspective, there are some expectations that may be general in nature such as the parent expectation that the student attending will graduate in the traditional 4-year or 5-year timeline, especially as the student enters the university. There may also be some unrealistic or misunderstood expectations, such as some parents of first generation students who may want the university to be a substitute for the parents themselves, and may not realize that the student will be developing self-coping skills during their higher education experience.

There are also some situations where the student may not know what to expect, and the university needs to help the student to figure out what they need. For example, the student out of high school may only have their high school experience as context, so the student may believe college is similar, and may not have a realized expectation of what college is about. Once the student arrives and gets into courses and starts to navigate the culture, expectations form as the student learns and progresses.

Expectations of the Students and Parents include areas such as:

- The university will teach the student skills and knowledge in the area of major (Dependence on faculty for learning)
- Student will reach consistently reach graduation in traditional 4-year or 5-year timeframe
- Perception that doing well in high school will also translate to doing well in college
- Student will obtain a successful career upon graduation
- University will follow through on marketing and advertising around providing students with support and guidance

In regards to meeting these expectations, there are some factors to consider. One factor is that the student and parent expectations that exist prior to our New Student Orientation program, and those that exist afterwards may be differ. Prior to orientation, students may feel more or less confident in their ability to succeed academically, and after orientation, some students feel more prepared based on learned information about the university, while others may feel more anxious and overwhelmed due to the vast amount of information learned at orientation.

Another factor is that there may be areas where NKU has performed well and others where improvements may be needed. An example of performing well is in an area such as use of clarifying language to describe support offices and units. For example, the name of the Bursar's office updating to "Student Account Services" makes the name of the support office more apparent and easier to understand.

An example of where improvements may be needed might be parents who want to know what NKU's career placement rates are for each major, and while some data may be provided, other data may be limited unless information is collected from alumni. Therefore, we may or may not be able to fully meet the expectation of answers to that question for prospective families without further research.

In relation for how to improve best practices to improve in order to meet expectations, research seems to suggest the following:

- **Building a culture of student success** (ironically, this current strategic framework process is a help towards this best practice)
- **Boosting information literacy** (this is also being done with the introduction of the new QEP for NKU)
- **Improving Communication and Collaboration efforts between faculty and staff / student affairs and academic affairs** (*improving communication also involves information flow within the university for how individuals are informed of events, programs, professional development opportunities and updates)
- **Working towards university alignment around meeting student expectations with determined goals** (For example, creation of a university goal that all units are doing similar activity, such as embedding information literacy or student learning outcomes into all daily work)
- **Taking a fresh look at pre-orientation and post-orientation student and parent expectations, and closing gaps** (One institution created a Parent Canvas program called Parent Lingo to educate parents on university information that is relevant for them, support services at the university, and ways they can be involved and help the student from a realistic distance)

TOPIC/QUESTION

The core team should identify ways to help students who encounter financial need not directly related to the institution but would adversely affect retention and progression, as they matriculate through their degrees.

Article 1:

Citation

National Student Financial Wellness Study: Key Findings Report

Link for a Deeper Dive

https://cssl.osu.edu/posts/documents/nsfws-key-findings-report.pdf

Executive Summary

- "The National Student Financial Wellness Study (NSFWS) is a national survey of college students examining the financial attitudes, practices and knowledge of students from institutions of higher education across the United States, and was developed and administered by The Ohio State University. The purpose of the 2014 NSFWS is to gain a more thorough and accurate picture of the financial wellness of college students."

- "This report highlights 5 key topics: student loans, credit cards, financial behaviors, financial knowledge and education, and financial futures."

- Credit Cards
  - Many students (43.5%) report that they do not have a credit card and 31.9% have only one. Students at 2-year public institutions are more likely to have multiple credit cards and nearly 7% have 6 or more.

  - Of the students who have one or more credit cards, 47.2% typically pay off all of their credit card(s) each month. Students at 2-year public institutions are the least likely to pay off their credit card(s) each month and are most likely to have the largest balance left on their credit card(s) each month. Students at 4-year private institutions are the most likely not to know their typical credit card balance

- Financial Behaviors and Attitudes
  - Most students agree that they feel stress regarding their personal finances (72.1%). A larger percentage of 2-year public institution students agree that they feel stress compared to their peers at 4-year public and private institutions. Nearly 60% of all students agree that they worry about having enough money to pay for school; students at 2-year public institutions are more likely (65.5%) to agree that this is a worry.

  - Many students report they frequently or always follow a financial budget (51.0%). However, students at 4-year institutions, public and private, are more likely to say they never follow a budget.

- Financial stress is associated with a range of negative outcomes for students.
  - Ross, Cleland, and Macleod (2006) found that financial stress lowers students' academic performance.
  - Furthermore, financial stress has been linked to students' decisions to reduce their course loads, withdraw from college completely to pursue full-time employment, and increase time to graduation (Joo, Durband, & Grable, 2008; Letkiewicz et al., 2014-2015).
  - Financial stress among college students has even been linked to poor mental health and suicide attempts (Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein & Hefner, 2007; Westefeld et al., 2005).
  - Experiencing negative financial situations increases reported financial stress, however students with greater financial self-efficacy are less likely to report financial stress (Heckman, Lim & Montalto, 2014).
  - Students across institution types reported stress and worry about their finances; however, more 2-year public institution students reported these feelings compared to their peers at 4-year public and private institutions.

- "Results from the Youth and Money Survey (American Savings Education Council (ASEC), 1999, indicate that while many young adults have access to money management education, only a small fraction pursue it
- Evidence of the effectiveness of high school-based financial education is inconclusive due to small samples or self-reported data (Center for Financial Security (CFP), 2012).
- However, work by Danes, Huddleston-Casas, and Boyce (1999) suggests that financial education in a school setting can be beneficial."
- "In a multi-institutional study of Midwestern colleges and universities, Lyons (2008) found that many students prefer to receive financial advice through a meeting with a professional or through the internet. Students identified financial professionals, parents, and financial aid counselors as potential sources of financial advice, but few wanted to receive assistance from fellow students. Furthermore, this study suggests that students who would benefit the most from financial advice either do not know what resources are provided by their institutions, do not know where to find advice, or are not pursing it."

Additional Findings:

In addition to the stresses mentioned in this article, international students can also have the added financial stress of sudden and drastic devaluation of their currency. This sometimes results in…

- … thousands of dollars in difference (this happened to our Nigerian students in the past few years).
- …their sponsor suddenly being unable to continue funding their education.

- …a parent becoming sick and having to go to another country to receive treatment, not only resulting in large financial bills, but sometimes the family business (and often the only source of their income) being put on hold for an extended length of time.
- …students being able to afford tuition, but not being able to afford flying home during the summer to visit family.
- …medical expenses which are not covered due to discrepancies in country-country insurance.

Further Thoughts:

Having a need-based scholarship specifically for international students is important in aiding students who may encounter these types of additional financial stresses – NKU currently has such a scholarship and should continue to fund this as our international population grows.

TOPIC/QUESTION

The core team should explore what sister institutions are doing that contain a similarly diverse cadre of students and academic programming (i.e. traditional and non–traditional students, FTF and online programming).

Overview
After review of several sister institutions that have a similar variety of students and programming, it is clear that NKU is successfully adopting and putting into practice many of the current best practices as other institutions. This includes practices such as the use of a degree audit system for students, an integrative studies degree program, an early alert system for struggling students, and emergency financial funding support for students in need.
This report highlights some other key best practices that some of our sister institutions have adopted that could be key areas of focus that NKU may be able to consider:

Cleveland State

- Focus on Student Social Mobility
- Advertising that they offer more internships or co-op experiences for students than other competing institutions in state
- Highlight the return of investment their students have (Grads earn more in their careers than peer institutions)
- Collaboration between college and local school districts, including:
    - providing transportation of students to the university
    - providing academic advising support during Junior and Senior year of high school to give experience beyond high school guidance counseling
    - Having high school students on career pathways starting in high school

Western Kentucky University

- Annual student success summit (One-day conference to discuss best practices, now in 6th year
- Providing students with an academic success coach for adult and distance learners
    - Supporting link:
        - https://www.universityparent.com/eastern-kentucky-university#.XArcl8R7nb0

Eastern Kentucky University

- Guide and website specifically for EKU parents (High School and College parents)
    - Covers topics relevant for parents
    - Monitored by employees of the university

- Chellgren Success Series (13 academic workshops on different days and times to support students)
    - Supporting link:
        - https://www.universityparent.com/eastern-kentucky-university#.XArcl8R7nb0

New Mexico State

- Worked to have companies get more involved on campus through the Career Services Office on campus

Southern Illinois University

- Formal 5th week assessment where faculty members contacted by student support office about which students are struggling, and then the support office follows up with plan to the faculty member

Florida Gulf Coast University

- Service Learning projects appear to be required for all students, providing more intentional involvement with the region and community

University of Wisconsin Whitewater

- Built a new addition for a Student Success Center housing computer labs and collaboration rooms with smart board technology. Also built a Success Center (has an endowment fund) to house tutoring. They increased their tutoring and SI. They currently have 250 tutors and went from 7.000 hours of tutoring each year to 140,000 – 150,000.

- Has the McNair Scholars Program, which assists first generation, low income, and traditionally underrepresented students in pursuing graduate education by engaging them in research projects and other scholarly activities in order to increase the number of PhDs that students from diverse populations earn.

University of Southern Mississippi

- Offers several student success courses that are required and introduce the student to campus student success resources
- Provide learning opportunities regarding careers in their field
- Provide information regarding how to prepare for success
    - For example, all students who major in biological sciences are required to take a course called First Year Foundations, which provides the above information specific to biological sciences.

    - There are similar courses for humanities and social science based majors, transfer students, music, and nursing as well as courses on personal finance, leadership and practice, and information literacy.

    - Supporting Link:
        - https://www.usm.edu/success/student-success-courses

University of Wisconsin Eau Claire

- Offers the first year experience to help students transition from high school to college. Involves classroom experience, online learning modules, campus events, and field trips.

- Offers Bluprint for a Blugold which has 5 catagories to help students get acquainted with campus. The categories are: Cultural Competence, Academic Success, Practical Matters, Health and Wellness, and Getting Involved.

Central Washington University

- Center for Leadership & Community Engagement connects students and community stakeholders for educational service and leadership development programs to promote positive social change.

- The university partners with many community based organizations including the Alzheimer's Association, American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity and many other local organizations (via MOUs).
    - Supporting Link
        - https://www.cwu.edu/leadership-engage/

TOPIC/QUESTION

Discussion of why NKU's 1st year retention and 6-year retention rates are so low (with consideration given to NKU rankings compared to regional/national sister institutions). Another specific area is retention and graduation rates for underserved students in comparison with the student population as a whole. Outcomes will form the basis for intentional actions to improve NKU's 1st year retention and 6-year graduation rates

Article #1

Citations

Astin, A. W. (1997). How 'good' is your institution's retention rate? Research in Higher Education, 38 (6), 647-658.

Hu, S., & St. John, E. P. (2001). Student persistence in a public higher education system: Understanding racial and ethnic differences. Journal of Higher Education, 72(3), 265-286.

Nancy G. Spann, Vincent Tinto (Student Retention: An Interview with Vincent Tinto) *Journal of Developmental Education*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Fall 1990), pp. 18-20, 22, 24

Pre-freshman Summer Programs' Impact on Student Achievement and Retention
Joseph Christopher Maggio, William G. White, Jr., Susan Molstad, Neelam Kher *Journal of Developmental Education*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Winter 2005), pp. 2-4, 6, 8, 32-33

Predicting the Retention of University Students
Paul A. Murtaugh, Leslie D. Burns, Jill Schuster
Research in Higher Education, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Jun., 1999), pp. 355-371

Links for a Deeper Dive

https://irreports.nku.edu/Home/Index (NKU retention)

https://inside.nku.edu/ir/StudentData.html (NKU Student Data)

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_ctr.asp (National Retention and Graduation Statistics)

https://heri.ucla.edu/DARCU/CompletingCollege2011.pdf (Assessment of graduation rates at 4-year institutions)

Executive Summary

In recent years at NKU, the retention rate for our first year students has hovered around 67 -72% from first fall to second fall (72.9 in 2016, currently at 67.9%) and our 6-year graduation rate is around 37.7%. This is compared to other institutions that sometimes average over 80% retention of first year students, and above 50% retention in 6-year rates. In looking at the factors that might influence why retention numbers are low for NKU compared to sister institutions, a myriad of factors seem to be relevant from both a first year, and longer-term perspective.

First Year Retention Factors

1) **Recruitment & Competition** – It is clear that more than ever before, NKU is competing with more and more institutions and academic programs to recruit a population of declining high school graduates. NKU is located in an area of high concentration of educational competitors, many of which that have long histories and reputations, so NKU constantly has to build its own reputation and create awareness in the region. This competitive environment also makes the selection criteria, and seeking out higher academically qualified students more and more important. NKU has gradually raised its admissions standards over the years, and the academic profile of the incoming class has gotten stronger.

   Admissions decisions are made sooner for high achieving students, and pressure and early timing of financial aid packages are factors in student's selection and decision process. Depending on the demographic profile of the incoming class, that can have an impact on first year retention depending on factors such as first generation, test scores, student socio-economic status, academic background, high school GPA, and other factors.

2) **Early Intervention**- 1 of the areas that may be having an impact on first year retention is early intervention and support for first year students. At an institution with a high percentage (roughly 50%) of first generation students, particular emphasis on student preparation is key to first year retention. The current program Summer Spark, that allows for first generation students to come to campus over the summer prior to freshman year, take one course, bond with other students, and become acclimated to the university is ripe for expansion to more students.

   Additionally, early student support strategies, such as the upcoming pilot of early 4-week grades and review in the College of Informatics are key strategies to consider. The 4-week pilot is set to begin where professors will enter in grades at 4 weeks, allowing for earlier warning and detection of students needing more support. At this time, mid-term grades given halfway through the semester are the main indicator of student performance in the first year, but professors do not consistently enter in these grades, making it difficult for advisors to follow up, and some students may slip through the cracks if midterm grades are not evident or known. Midterm grades are also given in October, usually after a point where advisors or early intervention can make a deeper difference in early retention of students. Some programs exist, such as progress reports for student athletes, which provide more frequent check ins, which might be a program to consider on a wider basis, or utilizing progress report features in the newer SSC system that advisors use for currently enrolled students.

3) **Limited Frontline Staff**- Another area influencing first year retention are resources, turnover, and budget cuts that have left some academic support program offices and departments thin on resources and personnel. Of note are areas such as Career Services, which is down to four full time staff, African-American Programs and Services & Latino Student Services, which only have 1 full time staff member and several other areas the used to have more staff. Students are still served by these areas, but the breath and scope of the impact is lessened with less personnel. Other units, such as UCAP and Norse Advising, have experienced recent turnover, making it

difficult for students to receive consistent services in their first year. For our student affairs support offices that do support diversity initiatives, and for units that could have a diverse full time staff, students seeing a depletion in support staff, or support mentors that share their experience as persons of color, can create perceptions for the student that there is not a lot of support for students of underrepresented populations.

4) **Financial Pressures and Economic Concerns**- First year students more today than ever, driven by economic and financial pressures to afford tuition, are often working more hours to afford attending school, or are more concerned about the cost of attending the university. Creative programs like the newly reformed EDGE program to offer specialized tuition to competitive markets are helpful strategies.

   Many first year students enter into NKU under scholarships obtained by strong performance in high school, or based on financial aid (federal and institutional) however in many cases, seem unaware of the steps needed to maintain their scholarship over time. For example, if a student is awarded a renewable scholarship for 4 years, but needs to maintain a 3.0 GPA to keep it, sometimes may lose that scholarship in sophomore year based on not obtaining correct grades, making future years more difficult to afford. Education to the student about what is needed to maintain the scholarship is key, but most academic advisors are not provided details or access to student financial aid records to assist in this process, so many students often can be in situations where their aid decreases as they continue. During the sophomore year and beyond, students are often getting into courses that are more rigorous for their major degree program. This can lead to a common situation.

   A situation that may be typical is a student who received scholarships and grants in year one, but in year two loses that funding for various reasons (possibly low academic performance) and then has a harder time affording year two, might suddenly drop housing first to reduce costs. At this point, they are no longer living on campus, then they are commuting and working to save on costs, at a time where the academics become harder and more rigorous in year two, so then they are more disconnected to the university. As tuition in the third year becomes more costly, the student has to stop out, work more, or even consider internships for their degree, so then they might need night courses or online, and become further detached. This type of experience can quickly lead to attrition, burnout of the student, or decrease the chances of a timely graduation.

   It may be important to assess scholarships in year two and three, or find ways to keep students on campus or connected at this time in the student career to help increase the odds of student completion.

5) **Faculty Contact Outside of Class** – Another area affecting student retention is making the connection to faculty during the first year outside of the classroom experience. Research for this report indicated that the more contact students have with faculty at campus events, or outside of class time, the more comfortable the student feels with the university, or connecting in on a deeper level. Many students discuss having difficulty visiting faculty at office hours, or sometimes seeing them at events on campus after hours or outside of class time. In some colleges, faculty have expressed cultures where professors keep doors closed, are not present on non-teaching days, where other faculty are present and show up constantly at many campus activities. This inconsistency in practice and lack of accountability may affect student retention.

Efforts in alignment with faculty and staff expectations, the performance review process to include student contact outside of class (service) may be helpful in changing the culture in some areas.

6-Year Retention Factors

1) **Financial Pressures over time** – While students are encouraged from academic advisors to maintain a 15 credit hour caseload full time each semester to finish in traditional 4-5 year timeframes, the reality is that students are individually attending school in later years at paces that are affordable based on circumstances. Many students do maintain a full time class load, but there are many students who: Must work more hours to afford school, are commuting, have families, or are in situations where they may have to take a semester off to save money to return. Some students have to go part time to attend, and are limited in the times they can attend courses.

   Many scholarships last for 4 years, so if students end up on alternative schedules or situations beyond the time that aid runs low, then the financial pressures can increase over time, especially with rising tuition. Then if the student is working more to afford school, course options and delivery of timely sections and courses becomes important. If the course needed as a pre-requisite is only taught at one time, or once a year, and the student cannot afford to take it due to time or finances, it can affect retention of that student. Flexible course options and fees become even more of a factor.

2) **Micro charges and fees** – At NKU, there is an orientation fee, application fee, graduation fee, parking fees, testing fees, course fees, and other charges that over time that can add up quickly for students or lead to holds. One retention factor are the charges that students receive that block the registration process. Many students have not registered simply due to a parking ticket or library fine or something that may be something we want to think about with holds. Is it possible to roll some fees into the cost of tuition or charge a general student fee that covers many of these micro charges, making students feel less taxed.

3) **Political and Economic Factors & Word of Mouth** - Issues such as the KY pension system, and campus budget have had a significant impact on retention, and is difficult to measure. For example, when NKU was concerned about budget in 2017-18, and adjunct professors lost positions or were concerned about it, some instructors shared personally these internal issues with students in the classroom due to the relational culture of NKU. Students who may have been worried about their instructor not returning to NKU may have decided to transfer or not attend NKU in the following semester because of worries their professor would not be at the school any more. With some of the employee turnover as well, if exiting employees did not speak well of the status of the university, those word of mouth factors reach families in a region where the degrees of separation between people is less. The perception of NKU as it relates to word of mouth has a direct impact on enrollment and retention. Training with employees on proper communication about the university and promotion of positive communication may be helpful in this area to avoid stressing current or potential students beyond the classroom.

4) **Academic Degree Program Complexity / Pathways** – Many of NKU's academic degree programs are heavily saturated with levels of pre-requisites that change every year as a new catalog is released. This dual approach of annual catalog and program changes, along with complex pre-

requisite structures makes navigating through the curriculum a difficult process for students, faculty, staff, and advisors. Academic Advisors have a challenging time keeping up with policy, academic, and curriculum changes, and in turn, our students have a difficult time. Relationships between advisors and department chairs are critical in making academic changes that can avoid the need for registration permits (advisors and departments' average over 10,000 permits per year, 5,000+ in fall and 4,000+ in spring, with each representing a student who needed help enrolling) and the number of permits has increased over the last 3 years. A careful examination of pre-requisites may be useful, to identify where the important pre-requisites are (it is important for knowledge to build) but also where some that are are not necessary, to make our academic programs more obtainable and easier to navigate.

5) **High Credit Hours**- Similarly, more and more students are entering NKU with dual credit at higher numbers, or with transfer credit, and having pathways for these students so that students with high hours can graduate sooner as intended, may be an area and opportunity to take advantage of. Currently, a student can enter into NKU with 45 hours of credit, making them a sophomore. If the student has all gen eds complete, and has a start in their major, they still may need 3 or 4 years to graduate if the pre-requisites they still need build in a heavy way, or the course needed to get to others is only offered so frequently. These bottlenecks influence the student's ability to be retained and graduate, and make it difficult for advisors to help the student to finish early as intended by doing the dual credit or transfer work. Creating special pathways now for high hour students should be a priority, as we will only see more cases as KY expands its dual credit programs, and more transfer pathways are created.

TOPIC/QUESTION

Best Practices in Promoting a Sense of Belonging among URM Students

Citations

Museus, S. D., Yi, V., & Saelua, N. (2018). How culturally engaging campus environments influence sense of belonging in college: An examination of differences between white students and students of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 11*(4), 467-483. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000069

Supiano, B. (2018). How colleges can cultivate students' sense of belonging. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (32)32. Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-Colleges-Can-Cultivate/243123.

Executive Summary

While there is no singular blueprint, the following practices are key in promoting a sense of belonging on campus. This list is based on a conversation with Dr. Brandelyn Tosolt, race scholar and faculty member in the Department of Teacher Education. It is also important to note that "culturally engaging campus environments are associated with more positive sense of belonging among students in general" (Museus et al., 2018), meaning that creating a culturally engaged campus will positively impact all students on campus, not just those of marginalized populations.

- Assess the campus climate and include students' input in creating solutions to challenges
- Support faculty and staff in developing culturally competent practices
- Hire and retain faculty and staff who look like the students you're hoping will feel like they belong (representation)
- Support students' diverse identities with co-curricular and curricular offerings

CAREER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Best Practices Resource Team

TOPICS/QUESTIONS

The core team should explore career development throughout the lifecycle of the student: career exploration (choosing a major, exploring careers, etc.) beginning with first-year students and career management (resumes, interviewing skills, co-ops/internships, job-search skills, career fairs, grad school planning, etc.) for sophomores through post-graduation.

How are Career Services, Colleges, Academic Advisors, First-Year Programs, and University Advancement/Alumni Programs working together to promote the career development and career success of our students? How does NKU compare with Cincinnati metro universities and universities with best-practice programs in providing career development services?

Article #1:

Citation

Career Development Model 2017

Link for a Deeper Dive

A PDF has been uploaded to Basecamp in the Best Practices Final Report folder located in the Research and Best Practices folder

Executive Summary

IMPORTANT: Please refer to the Career Development Model 2017 spreadsheet. Also see notes below.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT MODEL OVERVIEW:
In this model, the interventions/programs are based on the *student lifecycle*: Pre College, First Year, Sophomore Year, Junior/Senior Year, Post Graduation

- Primary players: Career Services, Colleges, Academic Advisors, University Advancement and Alumni Programs
- Secondary players: Everyone within the university community!

Career Exploration + Career Management

- Career Exploration:
    - Choosing a major
    - Self-assessments
    - Exploring career options

- Career Management:
    - Resumes, cover letters, interviewing skills, LinkedIn, etc.
    - Learning how to seek positions
    - Experiential learning: internships, co-ops, research, etc.
    - Career fairs, on-campus interviews, etc.
    - Graduate/professional school

- All undergraduate students receive structured instruction/guidance (not an opt-in service/office)

- Shared responsibility across campus!

  - **Colleges** provide an introduction to career exploration and an introduction to career management skills.

  - **Career Services** focuses on a specialized services and advanced assistance. Also serves as centralized liaison with employers.

  - **Colleges** designate a *liaison to Career Services* who delivers curriculum content within their respective college and works with Career Services to follow the career development lifecycle.

  - **Academic Advisors** meet with students and review career development checklist and assign/ interpret FOCUS 2, as needed.

  - **University Advancement and Alumni Programs** engage alumni and business community partners to increase their interactions with students.

NOTES:

1. *The Career Development Model was developed and approved in 2017 after Career Services lost three positions in summer 2016. Career Services has since lost a fourth position in April 2018. Currently, Career Services has a staff of four: Director, Associate Director, and Career Advisors (2).*
2. *The Career Development Model was approved by the Provost and presented to the Deans and the AVP for University Development & Alumni Relations in 2017.*
3. *The "College Liaisons to Career Services" have a list of responsibilities. This list is a PDF uploaded to Basecamp. College Liaisons are to work with their college Deans to implement the portions of the Career Development Model that involve their college.*

Article #2

Citation

College Liaison to Career Services

Link for a Deeper Dive

A PDF has been uploaded to Basecamp in the Best Practices Final Report folder located in the Research and Best Practices folder

Executive Summary

IMPORTANT: Please refer to the College Liaison to Career Services PDF.

Best Practices Resource Team

The Dean of each college selects a person within the college to serve as the College Liaison to Career Services and implement the portions of the Career Development Model that involve their college.

COLLEGE LIAISONS TO CAREER SERVICES (as of December 2018)

- **Arts & Sciences:** Bethany Bowling, Associate Dean
- **Business:** Eileen Weisenbach Keller, Assistant Dean
- **Education & Human Services:** Josh Brittingham, Assistant Director, COEHS Advising Center
- **Health Professions:** Tracy Buckler, Nursing Lecturer
- **Informatics:** Juliane Stockman, Interim Assistant Dean

NOTES:

1. *The College Liaisons for Informatics and Business have been working to implement the model for 1.5+ years. The Liaisons for Arts & Sciences, Education, and Health Professions have been in their roles for less than a year (CHP for less than 3 months).*
2. *College of Business has begun scaling career management interventions. College of Informatics has piloted a course and is working to scale it up to more students. The other three colleges are reviewing current offerings and determining next steps.*
3. *The Director of Career Services has met individually with each of the Liaisons and has scheduled a meeting in January 2019 for all the Liaisons to meet together. College Liaison meetings will be scheduled regularly in 2019.*
4. *Since the colleges have not yet fully implemented the model, Career Services is still offering career management workshops and walk-in appointments to students within the limits of current staffing.*
5. *Implementation of the model is going slower than anticipated.*

Article #3

Citation

Career Services Staffing Comparisons

Link for a Deeper Dive

A PDF has been uploaded to Basecamp in the Best Practices Final Report folder located in the Research and Best Practices folder

Executive Summary

See the staffing comparisons between NKU and nearby universities.

NOTES:

1. *The current staff to student ratio and number of positions at NKU limit NKU Career Services from providing the full range of services offered at regional and peer universities.*
2. *Prior to the RIF in 2016, Career Services was more comparable to other universities in the area.*
3. *Since the colleges have not yet fully implemented their portion of the Career Development Model, overall participation of students and employers has decreased since 2016.*

4. *Other universities are staffing up their Career Services offices. For example, Miami University currently has a staff of 24 and plans to go up to 32. Miami University is embracing the career community model.*

Article #4

Citation

Career Services, 2011 to present

Link for a Deeper Dive

A PDF has been uploaded to Basecamp in the Best Practices Final Report folder located in the Research and Best Practices folder

Executive Summary

See a listing that describes the evolution of Career Services since 2011.

NOTE:

1. *Career Services has detailed annual reports on such topics as on-campus recruiting, career advising, internships/co-ops, programs, CEP 101, and employers recruiting on campus.*

Article #5

Citation

Studley, Jamienne S., *Career Readiness Meets Institution-Wide Outcomes Measures*, NACE Journal, April 2016.

Link for a Deeper Dive

http://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/trends-and-predictions/career-readiness-meets-institution-wide-outcomes-measures/

Executive Summary

This is a perfect moment to marry two promising and potent forces in higher education—college to career readiness and systematic focus on shared institutional outcomes. Career services done right can be a key player.

Academia seems to be consciously embracing the importance of integrating all aspects of the undergraduate educational experience, including academic, co-curricular, residential, volunteer, spiritual, and athletic life. But even with this comprehensive vision, the dimension of work, past, present and future, is typically left out of the integrative model. Fortunately, that is finally—if inconsistently—changing.

NACE and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) among others have done fine work in defining sets of competencies that are common to academic and employer expectations. Creative campuses, systems, and collaborations with employers are generating exciting models that explicitly braid those competencies together across academic, advising, co-curricular, and work experiences. Many institutions are growing their experiential learning models that integrate internships, research, and academic settings.

We need to be sure that “career readiness” is also understood to mean preparation for community service, democratic engagement, and leadership. This is an opportunity to reinforce a broad understanding of the value of postsecondary education and the wide applicability of the critical competencies. Giving students much better roadmaps to learning expectations and outcomes, enlisting them in the design and achievement of their learning, adds coherence and focus to a career-readiness-focused enterprise.

How can career services contribute maximum leadership and support? As colleges are measured by students and others on how well they succeed in preparing people for solid careers, career services can be a strong leader and ally in integrated program design and evaluation. That’s only realistic if the team has sufficient capacity and respect within the institution to be a real partner with faculty and with the recruiting and retention, advising, assessment, and planning functions.

Career readiness and collective institutional responsibility for campus outcomes will generate maximum lift when they are linked together. The momentum of a competencies-based approach linked to real world applications, plus wise measures designed and owned by the entire institution, are a good recipe for collective engagement, effort, and results. Career services have much to offer as the whole campus aligns to assure that students graduate with experiences and credentials that reflect genuine capacities that will serve them well in securing work with solid prospects and lives of meaning and agency.

TOPIC/QUESTION

The Career office has been downsized in recent years. How can we plan on providing greater access to students across campus?

Article #1:

Citation

Dey, Farouk & Cruzvergara, Christine Y., *Evolution of Career Services in Higher Education*, New Directions for Student Services, no. 148, Winter 2014.

Link for a Deeper Dive
https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Portals/0/Clearinghouse/advisingissues/documents/Dey%20Cruzvergara%202014.pdf

A PDF has been uploaded to Basecamp in the Best Practices Final Report folder located in the Research and Best Practices folder

Executive Summary

Socioeconomic changes, technological advances, and generational trends have been the impetus behind every major paradigm shift in the delivery of career services in higher education during the past century, including the one taking shape today. This article provides an overview of the changing nature and emerging trends that are shaping the future of career services in higher education. Each paradigm shift in the delivery of career services in higher education was connected to changes in economic, political, social, generational, and cultural norms. Figure 1.1 in the article illustrates the historical evolution of career services in higher education since their inception in the 1900s and predictions for the future.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW:

1. **Vocational Guidance and Teachers Guidance**. Before there were career services on college campuses, faculty assumed the responsibility of mentoring their students and preparing them for future employment. In the 1920s and 1930s, industrialization and a post-WWI baby boom created an influx of students, which increased the need for educational and vocational guidance, slowly moving faculty away from this role.
2. **Job Placement**. Post WWII in the 1940s and 1950s a booming economy transformed vocational guidance into placement centers. Career staff played the roles of job fillers and measured success by placement numbers.
3. **Career Counseling**. In the 1970s and 1980s, higher education shifted into a development model, which placed the responsibility of learning and educational outcomes on the student. A slowing economy forced students to take ownership of their own career development and job search. Career centers emphasized counseling, career planning, and job search preparation. Measures of success were appointments and workshop attendance.
4. **Professional Networking**. In the 1990s and 2000s, the dot.com boom increased completion for candidates, which helped reengage employer relations and helped transform career centers into comprehensive career services offices that facilitated the relationship between students and employers through various networking events and recruiting activities. The shift moved from counseling to employer relations. The measures moved from attendance numbers to learning outcomes.

5. **Connected Communities**. The economic downturn of 2008 has created an ideal environment for another paradigm shift. Due to pressure for accountability, many universities began reinventing their career department, moving them from the traditional transactional model of career services towards a customized connection model that promises specialized career development support to students and meaningful connections to internship and employment opportunities as well as mentoring and experiential learning. A stronger emphasis on building connections through partnerships with employers from a variety of sectors will engage students and alumni for a lifetime. The assessment focus will continue to be about first destinations and lifelong professional outcomes.

EMERGING TRENDS:
Similar to the last four paradigm shifts, the current transformation requires the acquisition of additional resources, elevating the leadership of career centers to higher levels of influence, designing new and creative organizational structures, and establishing stronger campus partnerships.

1. **Elevation of Career Services.** Senior leaders in higher education are beginning to recognize the direct link career services has to recruitment, retention, and revenue of the institution. As a result, many are elevating career services, giving their leadership more institutional influence and the ability to convene internal and external stakeholders in order to help students leverage the power of the university network. Elevation includes changes to titles, reporting lines, and resources.

2. **Customized Connections and Communities**. Students and employers are looking for customized information that will be specific to their needs and desires. By focusing on authentic relationships with stakeholders, career services professionals can transform their offices into hubs of connectivity and provide more tailored advice, strategy, and feedback to their constituents. The ability to build these strong connections leads to the creation of customized career communities to better support student success. Creating customized communities allows for multiple networks to overlap and for reinforced support to guide students through their college and postgraduate experiences. By convening stakeholders across campus and beyond, career services can bring employers, alumni, faculty, families, and administration into virtual and physical communities that better promote and encourage students' aspirations.

3. **Outcomes and Accountability**. The conversation about return on investment and value of higher education has never been more prominent. It is critical for all career services to develop clear strategic plans that align with institutional priorities. The ability to collect data and craft a compelling story will become standard practice. First-destination, career outcomes data only tell part of the story. Career services must showcase metrics on reputation, referral, and engagement of key stakeholders.

4. **Branding**. Establishing presence, creating a culture of career readiness, and showcasing institutional value require a high level of brand recognition, both for employers and career services. For employers, it is core to an effective recruitment strategy. For career services, the need had never been more critical. The ability to create an authentic brand leads to a culture where students regularly share positive experiences and promote the value by referring peers. The web and social media play a critical role. It is a unique platform to showcase approachability and relevance.

5. **New Breed of College Career Services Staff**. The paradigm shift requires staff to not only upgrade their skills and knowledge, but also change attitudes and philosophy about the new needs of their stakeholders and how to help students transition from college to career. The new emphasis on connections and communities required an identity shift from counselor to group facilitator and expert consultant. The focus should be on leveraging the entire campus ecosystem through partnerships and collaboration.

THE FUTURE: CONNECTED COMMUNITIES:
Career services need to embrace and drive change. The mission of the career center of the future will be to build meaningful connections through partnerships with employers, experiences, and mentors, and developing career communities of learners and networkers that will engage students and alumni for a lifetime.

Article #2

Citation

Contomanolis, Emanuel, et al. *The Future of Career Services is Now*. NACE Journal, November 2015.

Link for a Deeper Dive

http://www.naceweb.org/career-development/trends-and-predictions/the-future-of-career-services-is-now/

Executive Summary

The rising cost of higher education is unsustainable, and never before has the value of a college degree and the career outcomes it historically promises been so highly questioned and doubted. Career Services is being called upon to play a central role in helping produce the successful career outcomes higher education promises and society now increasingly demands.

New models and new ways of thinking are critical in confronting the new challenges to higher education, and essential to positioning career services more centrally and prominently within the higher education community. Career services evolved from vocational guidance, teacher guidance, job placement, career counseling, and then professional networking. The emerging model is now characterized by innovative connections and partnerships, and the emergence of career communities. The article focuses on four themes driving the emerging paradigm of career services work. These include themes of staff, collaboration, analytics, and technology.

1. **Staff: Mindset, Skills, Flexibility**
   Staff are changing to respond to our new operating environment. As the current era of career services continues to focus on connections and communities, it is essential for staff to be strong facilitators of groups and synthesizers of information. They must be approachable, engaging, and responsive. They complement the work of their faculty partners rather than transactional service providers. Career services leaders not only run the operation, but are also externally focused, visionary leaders who can engage and connect with stakeholders, provide leadership concerning the efforts of their organizations, and connect the activities and outcomes of our work to institutional priorities, goals, and mission. Institutions must provide career services with the resources at levels necessary to achieve the outcomes expected of them.

2. **Collaboration: Multiple Levels, Multiple Partners**
   At the heart of the era of connected communities is the critical notion of collaboration. No career services organization is successful without the benefit of key partnerships and collaborations. Key stakeholders should benefit from collaborative efforts. Collaborators include alumni relations; fundraising and development; admissions; academic advisors; appropriate student services organizations; student employment and community service organizations; student clubs and organizations; institutional research; and institutional assessment and planning. The key to collaboration is building relationships.

3. **Analytics: Better Data, Better Analyses**
   We must rely on data and metrics to assess and evaluate all our activities and actions. Institutional and academic program accreditation efforts have been a driving force. There is a growing sophistication in our data collection and analysis. Better data and better analyses allow us to more fully understand and articulate what we are doing well, and identify the best opportunities for performance improvement.

4. **Technology: Innovative, Enhanced, Integrated**
   Employing organizations increasingly rely on social media and technology to enhance their recruiting efforts and engage more meaningfully with candidates. Career services organizations must be attentive to the latest technology innovations and applications that relate to our work. Today's generation of students expect simple, intuitive, interactive, and customizable technology interfaces. Employers are increasingly focused on tools that help identify and engage candidates more quickly and efficiently. Technology tools allow us to more effectively collect, analyze, and present data.

IT'S HERE
The "future" is here. The challenge is to embrace this new world with energy and enthusiasm; to recognize the potential that these new priorities, expectations, and tools provide us to elevate career services work and position us for success now and into the future.

Article #3

Citation

Carlson, Scott *The Future of Career Centers.* The Future of Work, The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2017, pp. 29-35.

Link for a Deeper Dive

A PDF has been uploaded to Basecamp in the Best Practices Final Report folder located in the Research and Best Practices folder

Executive Summary

Career centers were once merely a department on campus that put on job fairs and reviewed resumes for students. In the future, they will have to evolve and scale up – often using technology – to serve more students, at a time when the resources for career centers at many colleges are stagnant or in decline.

This article looks at career centers at three colleges: Bentley University, where career-center employees are intensely focused on employers and outcomes; Colgate University, where the career center is using alumni to open doors for students and raise money for job programs; and Colorado State University, where the center's director insists that the work of the career center needs to be integrated into the rest of what the university does.

Article #4

Citation

NACE Staff, *Building a Student Staff Helps Maximize Resources*, Spotlight for Career Services Professionals, April 19, 2017.

Link for a Deeper Dive
http://www.naceweb.org/career-development/organizational-structure/building-a-student-staff-helps-maximize-resources/

Executive Summary

Student employees are the backbone of Rutgers University Career Services (UCS) as their support allows the office to maximize its resources. "Our nearly 70 undergraduate and graduate student employees are completing tasks on a daily basis, which allows our office to reach and engage with more students and employers," explains Melissa Blake, associate director for strategic communication and marketing. "Our student staff allows UCS to provide a five-star customer service experience to all of our constituents: current students, campus partners, and employers."

Blake explains that some student employees serve on an as-needed basis, while others manage programs, provide resume critiquing assistance, staff the front desks in various locations, provide phone and e-mail support for students using various online career tools, and more.

Each position that UCS hires for has a job description that outlines the qualities and qualifications it is looking for in a candidate. The position descriptions usually quantify the time spent on specific projects, knowledge of applications or software that is required, and desired skill level.

All UCS student hires are onboarded and participate in an orientation by the assistant director for administrative services. During the onboarding process, students are provided with a student employee manual, staff polo, name badge, and welcome package comprised of a drawstring backpack, portfolio, and branded pen. Student staff are provided a professional e-mail address and a work space in the office. After student employees receive their basic orientation, each supervisor provides additional "job-specific" training.

The new supervisor handbook—developed by a student intern majoring in human resources—also puts in place a mechanism to ensure student employees receive quality feedback that can help them get the most out of their experience. Students then have a mid-year and year-end evaluation meeting with their supervisor. They also receive a written evaluation for each of these meetings. Throughout the year, student employees take part in planned enrichment workshops.

<u>*TOPIC/QUESTION*</u>

The core team should explore opportunities to partner with employers in the region to offer career engagement opportunities to our students, including job shadowing, internships, co-ops and more. It is important to apply this type of engagement to all student populations traditional, non-traditional, 1st gen, URM…

Article #1

Citation

Moss, Jeffrey, *Ensuring Career Success for Students.* National Association of Colleges and Employers Blog, April 3, 2018

Link for a Deeper Dive

http://community.naceweb.org/blogs/jeffrey-moss/2018/04/03/ensuring-career-success-for-students

Executive Summary

Career services departments are uniquely positioned to serve as the hub of the college or university, using students to facilitate more effective engagement between academic faculty, alumni, and employers. Specifically, career services can:

(i) support the efforts of academic departments, including articulating crosswalks from curriculum to career;

(ii) drive improved alumni engagement by facilitating more-authentic mentoring opportunities; and

(iii) help students and recent grads find the *right* job and ensure that companies have access to career ready students who are the *right* fit for their organizations.

Instead of thinking about career services as a project manager that engages with students specifically for the transition from college to career, what if we viewed it as the primary interface between companies, alumni, and the college or university? In this role, career services could be the hub not just for campus recruiting, but also as the hub to facilitate continuous interaction between students, academic faculty, alumni, and companies.

Corporate Insights
Colleges and universities can do better to more effectively prepare students for professional careers. We are not suggesting that academic freedom should be mitigated by corporate programming, nor are we implying that the foundations of liberal arts education should be replaced with vocational training. Instead, we believe that faculty members, students, and companies all benefit when crosswalks between curriculum and careers are highlighted.

Yes, some of this already takes place, especially across classes tied to business and the sciences where “hard skills” are embedded within the syllabus and individual professors often provide examples based upon their research or consulting relationships. However, even in these cases, the insights are limited by the focus of the faculty member. For example, the finance professor whose research focus is tied to market efficiency associated with large mergers is unlikely focused on how this applies for students interested in valuing emerging start-ups. And for departments such as philosophy, history, and literature, the opportunity to provide these crosswalks may seem even more limited as faculty members are typically less connected with the likely employers of their students. That being said, these classes that often have "titles that don't sound like jobs" require demonstration of the skills most demanded by employers according to NACE research.

In contrast, career services professionals have relationships with employers across industries, roles, company sizes, etc., and therefore access to a perspective that goes beyond what may be available to an individual faculty member or department. Through ongoing discussions with companies, career services understand the demands of employers across departments, and the level of preparedness of the school's graduates.
And given the NACE report, we know that the skills most in demand are not related to any one course, which means career services is best positioned to provide insights to academic faculty on those gaps and opportunities.

Furthermore, as intellectually curious individuals, academic faculty members are often interested in exploring new areas both for the classroom and research. Given the limitations of their personal networks and expertise, career services can provide a diverse platform of insights and emerging trends that would otherwise be unavailable to a single professor or department.

For example, a philosophy professor may not be aware of how technology companies are using Karl Popper's theory of falsification to drive marketing strategies, therefore missing out on opportunities to incorporate these examples during lectures—content that could improve both academic and career outcomes for students. And for students who worry that their major doesn't sound like a job title ("I don't see any companies with open philosopher roles.") these things help them see the links between curriculum and careers, thereby driving improved engagement, academic outcomes, and career success.

Alumni Engagement
What if alumni relations used insights provided by career services to focus on helping the alum? Career services is uniquely positioned to understand the needs of specific companies, industries, roles, etc., and can use these insights to help craft alumni engagement opportunities that provide immediate value to an alum. As a result, when the school does make "the ask," the alum feels more engaged and is more inclined to give.

Authentic Mentoring
The other big ask of alumni is often their willingness to provide mentoring. During the past several years, colleges and universities have spent record amounts on alumni management systems with features that go beyond those of social and professional networks. Unfortunately, students do not know what to ask. To be clear, this is not the fault of the student or school, but rather the fact that there are often no points of connection other than the alma mater. Career services can facilitate targeted conversations that leverage the unique perspective of a specific mentor, not only benefitting the student, but also making the mentor feel valued. As a result, these conversations are mutually beneficial (and a lot more interesting).

The Takeaway

Colleges and universities should neither think of career services as an independent entity exclusively responsible for getting students jobs, nor should they consider this outside of their core competency. Instead, institutions need to recognize what career services brings to the table about insights that can support experiential learning, opportunities for increasing alumni engagement, and resources to ensure career success for all students. Through these types of efforts, conversations questioning the value of post-secondary education will cease.

Article #2

Citation

Carlson, Scott *Voices of Employers.* The Future of Work, The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2017, pp. 21-27.

Link for a Deeper Dive

A PDF has been uploaded to Basecamp in the Best Practices Final Report folder located in the Research and Best Practices folder

Executive Summary

To successfully move students from the world of college to the world of work, partnerships between employers and universities may become more common, even essential. Many employers say that they are constantly hunting for high-performing recent graduates who could make a good fit. A barrier for the young candidates often centers on soft skills: Recent college graduates, employers and researchers say, may not display the maturity, initiative, communication skills, and workplace etiquette that would allow them to excel in a corporate environment. Some of the most valued attributes are also the most difficult for colleges to teach and for young workers to acquire. They don't have anything to do with technical skills. It is work attitudes and work behaviors, and personal characteristics like resiliency, initiative, and grit. Lower-risk, real-world working situations can provide opportunities to allow students to learn some of these attributes. Students lack professionalism, skills in networking, communication, leadership, creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Students are book smart, but can't carry a meaningful conversation. Employers with partnerships with colleges can help provide experiences that address these concerns.

An example is the Jackson Development Zone, developed by the National Life Insurance Company and partnered with Michigan State University. Jackson employs 650 people, 70% students. As part of their job, Jackson provides seminars on professionalism to students. How to build a resume, dress for work, conduct an interview, network with employers or clients, lead people effectively, or deliver an elevator pitch. Helping students to build a personal brand in their work and using LinkedIn. Managers at Jackson share their career paths, what their departments do, and how students with majors seemingly unrelated to insurance might find a role in the company. The seminars are voluntary, but students are paid an hourly wage to attend. Jackson watches the good prospects and those who participate and grow are likely to receive a full-time offer after graduation.

VOICES OF EMPLOYERS:
The Chronicle spoke to a more than a dozen recruiters and managers at a broad range of major companies, asking them about the kinds of talents and skills they saw among young people they hired.

Hard Skills: Necessary, but not necessarily most important

Many of the companies had aspects of their business that dealt with technical skills. They hired accountants, engineers, architects, etc. But the talent acquisition managers from most of the firms noted that employees with robust soft skills were the most-desired candidate for any job. Subject-matter expertise is highly teachable. It takes an awfully long time to teach somebody about taking initiative, or how to accept critical feedback. The technical skills is really the ability to learn.

A Key Skill: Communication
Many of the talent-acquisition managers noted that communication skills – both written and oral – were most often the key skill lacking among college graduates who apply and get hired. Employers want colleges to build more writing skills into the curriculum. Also, new employees often use inappropriate means for communication for the setting.

Leadership: Desperately Needed Now and in the Future
Many industries have an ageing workforce. Developing and supporting leadership ambitions among young workers could lead them to stay at the company longer. Millennials recently surpassed Generation X workers to represent the largest share of the workforce. Organizations seek candidates who had some leadership experience in college. Past experience predicts future success.

A Deficiency: Taking Risks and Being Resilient
The Chronicle asked recruiters what attributes seemed missing from new employees. They responded that teaching young employees to bounce back from failure – and encouraging them to expose themselves to the possibility of failure – has been a huge challenge. Recent graduates see less adept at the ability to create a way forward from nothing.

Cultural Competence: Diversity and Differences
Although it seems in 2017 that a number of Americans are uncomfortable with people who are different form then racially, religiously, sexually, or socioeconomically, the work world is going in a different direction. Many talent acquisition managers are actively seeking employees who have experience with people from different cultures and have shown they can work across cultural lines. Cultural competence is a huge asset for any prospective employee. Having a global mindset is highly valued.

The Need for More Real-World Experiences
Employers seek recent graduates who had some kind of experiential learning in college. That experience was often highly predictive of success at a job. Hiring someone out of college with no experience makes it difficult to onboard the individual. Require experiential learning as part of the overall education experience.

Article #3

Citation

Career Readiness for the New College Graduate, NACE 2017

Link for a Deeper Dive

http://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/

A PDF has been uploaded to Basecamp in the Best Practices Final Report folder located in the Research and Best Practices folder

Executive Summary

NACE DEFINES CAREER READINESS, IDENTIFIES KEY COMPETENCIES

The career readiness of college graduates is an important issue in higher education, in the labor market, and in the public arena. Yet, up until now, "career readiness" has been undefined, making it difficult for leaders in higher education, work force development, and public policy to work together effectively to ensure the career readiness of today's graduates.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers, through a task force of college career services and HR/staffing professionals, has developed a definition, based on extensive research among employers, and identified eight competencies associated with career readiness.

The competencies are:

- Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
- Oral/Written Communications
- Teamwork/Collaboration
- Digital Technology
- Leadership
- Professionalism/Work Ethic
- Career Management
- Global/Intercultural Fluency

NOTE: Please see the full article for definitions of above list.

The definition and competencies provide for development of strategies and tactics that will close the gap between higher education and the world of work. They lay the foundation for the work necessary to prepare college students for successful entry into the work force by:

- Providing a common vocabulary and framework to use when discussing career readiness metrics on campus, within employing organizations, and as part of national public policy.
- Establishing defined competencies as guidelines when educating and advising students.
- Establishing defined competencies to identify and assess when hiring the college educated.