

**Student Affairs: Career Readiness and Student Jobs Assessment Plan**

Department of Higher Education, The Penn State University

HIED 840: Evaluating Academic Programs

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March 21, 2021

## **Student Affairs: Career Readiness and Student Jobs Assessment Plan**

The student affairs unit that will be under review is the Career Readiness and Student Jobs division of California Polytechnic University at Pomona (CPP). This unit, commonly known as the career center, focuses on enhancing students' "career readiness" so students are prepared to transition into the workplace successfully following graduation (California Polytechnic University at Pomona [CPP], 2018). This paper will describe the mission of the career center, identify its student learning and program outcomes, propose measures to assess these outcomes, and establish a plan to use the resulting assessment data. I have chosen assignment option #1 because I do not currently work in a Student Affairs unit.

### **Career Readiness & Student Jobs Unit Program and Mission**

#### **Program**

The mission of the career center is to maximize student success and career readiness by providing access to trainings, resources, and activities that will reinforce the unit's seven core competencies (CPP, 2018). These core competencies: "critical thinking/problem solving, oral/written communications, teamwork/collaboration, digital technology, leadership, professionalism/work ethic, and career management skills" align with the Learning Outcomes of the Division of Student Affairs and the university as a whole (CPP, 2018). The career center provides informational services including, "career counseling, campus jobs, federal work-study programs, and internships" (CPP, 2015). They also provide events and opportunities to assist students in professional networking and interview preparation. These resources ensure students are prepared to pursue a fulfilling career.

Normally, the career center operates primarily through hosting on-campus events, but the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted their operations to now be completely digital. Their mission

remains unchanged, but their program offerings are now communicated largely through their YouTube channel, virtual events and office hours, and an online networking and development portal, “Handshake” (CPP, 2021a).

### **Career Readiness & Student Jobs Unit Outcomes**

#### **Student Learning Outcomes Through Core Competencies**

The CPP career center’s Student Learning Outcomes center around “a successful transition into the workplace” through equipping students, “with knowledge and skill to utilize career competencies toward career readiness” (CPP, 2021b, para. 3). Banta & Palomba (2013) emphasize the importance of identifying a unit’s purpose before beginning assessment, so for clarity, this paper will align the career center’s core competencies with the unit’s mission of preparing students for a successful transition into the workplace.

The first core competency is applying “critical thinking and problem solving” skills as a means to assess a problem, identify the contributing factors, and construct a solution (CPP Career Center, 2018). In other words, one must be able to “analyze, interpret...and consider alternative perspectives and solutions” to be a contributing member of today’s workforce (CAS Learning and Development Outcomes, n.d., p. 5). Additionally, students should also engage in teamwork and collaboration, specifically in leadership roles. Both of these core competencies can be practiced through engaging in high-impact activities such as participating in class discussions, club activities, or becoming a volunteer (Kuh, 2009). These are a few examples of activities that encourage meaningful student engagement that the career center introduces to students.

Leadership, professionalism, and communication skills are core competencies that can be nurtured through gaining internships, becoming a peer mentor or advisor, or participating in

student organizations (CPP Career Center, 2018). The career center's suggestions inform students of extra-curricular opportunities that will provide immersive experience to build these core competencies while simultaneously contributing to the institutional mission or goals (Penn State University [PSU], n.d.).

Based on these core competency examples and following review of the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) Learning and Developmental Outcomes (n.d.), the career center should prioritize:

“Student Outcome Domain 1: Knowledge acquisition, construction, integration, and application [through] connecting knowledge to other knowledge, ideas, and experiences. Uses multiple sources of information and their synthesis to solve problems; knows how to access diverse sources of information such as the internet, text, observations, and databases” (p. 5).

### **Program Outcomes**

The career center's purpose is to encourage and prepare students for success following graduation. To effectively pursue this goal, the career center must establish and maintain a vast network of professional connections who are willing to provide internships, volunteering opportunities, professional development, and hopefully employment to CPP students and alumni. If cooperating members of CPP's professional network are satisfied with the quality of work students and alumni contribute to their businesses, they are more likely to support the university financially or provide more internship and employment opportunities in the future. These connections will enhance CPP's prestige and marketability.

Achieving and maintaining high job placement rates following graduation is another desirable program outcome. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, CPP's career

services has produced multiple workshops and tutorials regarding building resume skills during quarantine, what to do if you have been laid off, how to network remotely to apply to new jobs, and various other “job search tips in COVID-19” (CPP, n.d.). Difficult economic periods often result in increased enrollment in higher education, so allowing public access to these materials presents the department as professionals who are engaged in their community, passionate about access to education, and prepared to address current issues. So, not only does this advice help current students and recent alumni apply for jobs in a difficult market, but it also serves as an example to the public that CPP is willing to invest in the community.

Additionally, the career center’s variety of workshops offered weekly including but not limited to, “Career competencies, Job search strategies in COVID-19, and Succeeding at interviewing and managing anxiety” demonstrates their recognition of learning and development as a “dynamic process in which learning needs to be purposefully facilitated and not just expected” (PSU, n.d., p. 9). The unit’s integration of mental health concerns and social media competency are indicative of program outcomes including interdepartmental collaboration and modern technological fluency.

### **Assessment Measures**

#### **Direct Assessment of Learning Domain #1**

Evidence must be gathered to verify that the career center’s programs are both complementary and effective in supporting the university’s goals and mission (PSU, n.d.). As the career center prioritizes student learning outcomes that result from many aspects of the university experience rather than simply resulting from services offered by the unit, careful planning must be in place to identify and gather data that will accurately assess a student’s growth and mastery of desired learning outcomes (Miller & Leskes, 2005). Therefore, “evidence

should be gathered at the point of entry, a midpoint, and at the end of the program” to compile summative data that is reflective of the career center’s various programs (Miller & Leskes, 2005, p. 9). Rather than assessing core competencies, the career center should assess students’ mastery of learning domain one which requires students to recall and apply knowledge from various sources to respond to a problem.

### **Gathering Entry Data**

Entry data will be gathered from the admissions office. Incoming students’ working and volunteering history should be collected, and their application resume should be accessible for later use. Upon entry into the university, students should be encouraged to utilize the career center early to receive career counselling and begin tailoring their resume to be better prepared to apply for volunteering and internship positions. Students utilization of the career center’s services should be documented and preserved so total use of services offered can be evaluated upon graduation.

### **Gathering Midpoint Data**

The career center should distribute an electronic survey through email that can be completed anonymously within ten minutes to all students who participated in career center events or programs within the academic year. The survey should assess students’ accessibility, awareness, and participation in career center programming. Although the response rate may be low due to survey fatigue near the end of an academic year, the responses should indicate if the career center’s programs were accessible and relevant to students. Additionally, students should be required to sign in with their student ID number when utilizing services that do not require anonymity so the students’ participation can be definitively tracked.

## **Gathering End Point Data**

Students will be required to participate in a mock-interview in their last semester at the institution. All graduating seniors should receive a passing score (Ohia, 2011). This direct assessment will gather summative end point data because it is an opportunity for students to exhibit knowledge and skills reflective of the career center's core competencies (CPP, n.d.; Miller & Leskes, 2005).

A mock-interview is a structured opportunity where career services professionals assess a student's ability to apply the skills and knowledge that they have gained from participating in class discussions, clubs, volunteering, or other high-impact practices to real world situations.

The student's resume and cover letter can also be collected, evaluated, and analyzed based on a pre-determined rubric. Members of CPP's career center who will be conducting the interview should attend an in-house training in collaboration with the institution's assessment department. Here, the staff can learn the importance of aligning their assessment of the interviews to the standards defined by a pre-determined rubric. This can be practiced through conducting staff mock-interviews, assessing the interviewee's performance based on a rubric, and comparing the interviewer's feedback (Banta & Palomba, 2015).

The career center provides many resources to prepare students in attaining employment including sample resumes and digital interview practice opportunities (CPP, 2021a). A sample of student resumes should be collected and archived for future comparison and examples to aid in standardizing the resume assessment process and begin data collection to track departmental success in achieving student learning outcomes. Eventually, these standardized assessments can become supporting evidence in a longitudinal study of unit efficiency (Banta & Palomba, 2015).

## **Assessment of Professional Networking**

Assessment of professional networking and community involvement will require various sampling methods. To measure the career center's program outcome of growing their professional networks an electronic survey should be used and distributed by email. The survey should be constructed with good practices in mind so it is easily understood and readily accessible (Banta & Paloma, 2015). The survey should be sent to corporate partners who frequently hire CPP graduates. Questions including: "Have you previously participated in CPP job fairs?" and "What is your level of agreement with the following statements: Our company is satisfied with CPP graduates' professionalism. CPP graduates have strong communication skills. When our company needs to hire a new employee, we send the job listing to the CPP career center." These questions, and others like them, can gather data reflective of CPP alumni's employment performance and indicate the willingness of businesses to continue working with alumni.

A similar method can be used to assess CPP community involvement by constructing a survey with questions specific to assessing student and alumni performance when volunteering with local organizations. The career center should also document the number of views their YouTube videos receive and the amount of visits their website receives each month. This will reflect their digital effectiveness and indirect community engagement.

## **Use of Results for Unit Improvement**

### **Use of Assessment Findings**

Assessment findings will be used to identify if students who utilize the career center's resources do, in fact, gain mastery of the desired student learning outcomes (SLOs). If the assessment findings determine that most students are not mastering the SLOs, the career center



should pay close attention to the lacking areas and implement high-impact practices that could enhance SLO mastery. If SLOs are being met, the career center should discuss how to better achieve the desired program outcomes.

### **Sharing Assessment Findings**

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) (2004) cautions against processing assessment data in isolation because, “these data provide invaluable information not only on what students are learning but also on how programs, classroom instruction, activities, and services should be improved” (p. 28). Therefore, the career center should share their findings with not only their parent department, student affairs, but also academic affairs officers, financial advisors, and various other internal institutional constituents. The assessment findings should also be shared with CPP’s institutional research department to be used to inform institutional accreditation or prioritization efforts. All members of the collegiate community aim to advance the institutional mission and prepare CPP students to be contributing members of society following graduation, so interdepartmental collaboration must exist when implementing changes following assessments.

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