

## 2016 Strategic Plan Key Question Committee – Final Report

**Question(s):** *How do we add career readiness into all programs and add it to Community Engagement and Experiential Learning as University marks of distinction?*

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### Summary:

The career services offered by most universities have marginal success due to poor student participation and limited scope of program offerings. State’s current *Focus Indiana* initiative shows great promise and is distinctive in its programming. To add career readiness as a ‘mark of distinction’ for Indiana State, more must be done to incentivize faculty and students to participate. Career readiness should be adapted to current faculty reward and evaluations systems. A comprehensive curriculum-based approach to student career readiness could leverage current programs and resources. Career readiness should be part of the existing learning outcome assessment process.

### Key Findings Summary

Key Finding 1	Career Readiness is Well Defined
Key Finding 2	“Interview Ready” is not Career Readiness
Key Finding 3	The Current Career Certificate is Limited
Key Finding 4	Employee Skills are Similar to Academic Learning Outcomes
Key Finding 5	Some Departments are More Career Focused
Key Finding 6	Students Need to be Motivated to Pursue Their Own Career Readiness
Key Finding 7	Faculty need to be Educated and Motivated to Adopt Career Readiness
Key Finding 8	Career Readiness Should be a Campus-Wide Initiative

### Recommended Actions Summary

Recommended Action 1	Educate Faculty and Students on the Value and Need for Career Readiness in Graduates
Recommended Action 2	Build a Comprehensive System to Support Career Readiness
Recommended Action 3	Develop Incentives for Student Participation
Recommended Action 4	Connect Career Readiness to Faculty Reward and Evaluation Systems
Recommended Action 5	Tie Career Readiness to Learning Assessment

## **Background:**

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, unemployment in America has fallen from a high of 10% in 2009 to roughly 5% in 2015. However, among college-aged adults, 18-24 years of age, the employment rate is still high, at about 16% (A-10, 2016). Increasingly, employers are demanding that applicants bring with them a broader set of skills beyond just academic preparation (Wyman, 2015)

Indiana State University offers students and alumni a collection of training, consultation, and opportunities that are intended to assist them in making career-related decisions and finding employment. Like many other educational institutions, these developmental activities are organized at the institutional level, such as State's *Career Center*. The traditional career services offered by universities may not be sufficiently comprehensive in scope to certify a student as "career ready." Specifically, the *Career Readiness Partner Council* defines career readiness as:

"A career-ready person effectively navigates pathways that connect education and employment to achieve a fulfilling, financially-secure and successful career. A career is more than just a job. Career readiness has no defined endpoint. To be career ready in our ever-changing global economy requires adaptability and a commitment to lifelong learning, along with mastery of key academic, technical and workplace knowledge, skills and dispositions that vary from one career to another and change over time as a person progresses along a developmental continuum. Knowledge, skills and dispositions that are inter-dependent and mutually reinforcing (Career Readiness Council, 2012)."

This definition suggests that career ready adults must possess a potent set of transferrable skills and dispositions that support any number of jobs across their career. To add "career ready" assurances to our students and supported alumni, Indiana State must cultivate a new comprehensive model for developing its students.

Recently, Indiana State University was the recipient of a grant from the Lilly Endowment in support of ISU's *Focus Indiana* initiative. *Focus Indiana* is a roadmap for Career Center activities that engage students in activities that better prepare them for a lifetime in the workplace. The basic components of the Focus Indiana Student Engagement Continuum are:

1. Employment Awareness – Foundational studies career modules, Freshmen transition course career module, and Sycamore Career Ready Certificate
2. Career Path Exploration – student opportunities to explore career paths, industry specific events, career fairs, networking nights, and mock interviews.
3. Planning for Post-Graduation – career immersion trips, internships, work-based projects
4. Commitment of Full-time Employment

*Focus Indiana* is a promising, comprehensive approach that may assist in closing many student's career-readiness gap. Toward a charge of adding career readiness as a 'mark of distinction' for Indiana State, a number of variables still need to be addressed:

1. Student participation in career readiness programming,
2. Student motivation to meaningfully participate,
3. Development of an adequate collection of skills education opportunities for all students,
4. Integration of career readiness programming into the academic curriculum,
5. Establishment of stronger partnerships with industry,
6. Student feedback concerning their career readiness progress,
7. Meaningfully meeting the resource challenges beyond the Lilly Grant.

## **Analysis Methods:**

A committee was assembled with broad representation from academic units, relevant staff units, and the student body. The committee researched career readiness topics, documented best practice, and reflecting on current offerings at Indiana State. The committee established a shared Blackboard site where members uploaded research findings.

A brainstorming session was convened in late December. Committee members each researched topics, reviewed the Blackboard resources, and came prepared to create a new model of Career Readiness. The committee chair facilitated the meeting and used the *Simplex* (Basadur, 1995) method of creative thinking and problem solving to generate innovative ideas and reach consensus.

## **Key Findings:**

### **Career Readiness is Well Defined**

Career readiness is not a new concept and a good deal of information is available online and in the research literature about the topic. Prevailing thoughts are that career readiness is a broad concept involving active programming starting as early as middle school and continuing past college graduation. Career readiness involves academic preparation and employability knowledge, skills, and preparation (Career Readiness Council, 2012). Competencies commonly associated with career readiness are problem solving, communication, teamwork, information technology application, leadership, professionalism, and career management (NACE, 2015)

### **“Interview Ready” is not Career Readiness**

Many college career centers only prepare graduates for *initial search and employment* by providing assistance with resumes, interview preparation, networking / prospecting skills, and business etiquette. Indiana State's *Focus Indiana* initiative is a major step forward in providing the kinds of programming in soft skills that will be necessary for lifelong employability. It is necessary to conceptualize Career Readiness as a longitudinal approach starting early in the student's career and involving the active assistance of many groups including policymakers, educators, business and industry, parents, and the community.

## **Current Career Certificate is Limited**

State's Sycamore Career Ready Certificate provides a comprehensive programming framework, but the *Focus Indiana* initiative falls short in addressing student incentives to participate. Furthermore, the initiative does not address how the greater curriculum and learning objectives address career readiness, nor does it incentivize faculty to participate.

## **Employee Skills are Similar to Academic Learning Outcomes**

Skills necessary to prepare students for career readiness are components of every curriculum for every major at Indiana State. For example, many classrooms require some level of communication, teamwork, critical thinking, or information technology. However, since career readiness may be viewed as a separate concept, or as only being applicable to the "professional schools," it may be largely ignored in current learning outcomes. There is great potential for career readiness to be integrated across much of the curriculum.

## **Some Departments are More Career Focused**

Some departments and majors have a clearer career focus with learning outcomes that are tied directly to potential job performance. However, there is the potential for every department and/or academic major to contribute to the career readiness skill base.

## **Students Need to be Motivated to Pursue Their Own Career Readiness**

Low student participation in university-offered career services is a common problem among all institutions. More effort is needed to motivate students to not only attend career programming but to be an active participant in their own career readiness preparation.

## **Faculty need to be Educated and Motivated to Adopt Career Readiness**

There is great variability in faculty understanding of "career readiness" and their acceptance of their role in preparing students for employment and career transitions. More effort is needed to educate faculty and to incentivize them to be active participants in student career readiness preparation.

## **Career Readiness Should be a Campus-Wide Initiative**

There are good examples of faculty and programs across campus that have embraced student career readiness. ISU's Career Center does not set curricular goals for the academic colleges and it has little latitude to motivate faculty. In fact, there is no single ISU entity responsible for comprehensive career ready programming across all colleges. Such an effort is necessary to set and prioritize goals, reduce redundancy in programming, oversee career ready learning outcomes, and provide an evaluation of career ready progress for students.

## **Recommended Actions:**

### **Educate Faculty and Students on the Value and Need for Career Readiness in Graduates**

Faculty buy-in into their role in career readiness programming is paramount if career readiness is to become an area of distinction at Indiana State. Likewise, many students do not actively participate in their own career readiness because they do not see the importance of career-related activities. It will be necessary to provide education and training programs that help faculty and students understand the importance of their active participation in career ready programming. Overall, there may need to be a change in the culture of how faculty, and students alike, view the role of modern education.

### **Build a Comprehensive System to Support Career Readiness**

A comprehensive, campus-wide system is needed to support career ready programming. It may be important to construct a larger set of career learning outcome goals and then connect those goals to colleges and departments across the university. Learning goals would be measured within existing assessment frameworks at the university, college, and department level. Career readiness “champions” at each college could meet periodically to discuss successes and leverage existing programming for cross-college collaboration.

It is important to note that a student’s career readiness is dependent on the participation of many groups including policymakers, educators, business and industry, parents, and the community. A comprehensive system must reach across every division of the institution and must seek participation of stakeholders outside the university.

### **Develop Incentives for Student Participation**

Student participation and active participation are important goals of career ready programming. It is doubtful that Indiana State will achieve a significant change in current participation levels without introducing new incentives.

One way to achieve improvements in student attendance is to require participation as part of earned credit toward graduation. This model may be inefficient, as course credits toward career ready goals would compete with credit hour constraints within each major.

Another way to incent students might be to develop broad offerings of career ready programming at the college and university level. Student participation in such programming would earn in-class credit. To make this model work, faculty must be active participants and agree that extra-curricular programming is relevant to course content and, therefore, deserves a piece of the course grade. For example, an out-of-class module on communication may relate to many courses. Students would learn communication skills that are useful in the workforce and could enhance class content. Faculty who may be dissatisfied with the availability of programming would be encouraged to recommend or

assist in developing additional relevant programming. This model would require some level of professional staff to deliver programming.

### **Connect Career Readiness to Faculty Reward and Evaluation Systems**

To be recognized as a university that excels in the career readiness of its students will require the active commitment and participation of a large proportion of the faculty. Faculty participation in career readiness programming must be tied to current reward and evaluation systems. Resources must be provided to remove roadblocks to faculty success.

### **Tie Career Readiness to Learning Assessment**

Important initiatives must be measured, evaluated, and improved. Skills relevant to career readiness include both academic and skills-based competencies and may be measured within State's current learning assessment procedures. To be successful, career readiness cannot be an "add on" component to education, but must be an integral part of the curriculum. Integration of career readiness goals into current processes and procedures insure its success, and guards against student and faculty objections to adding new responsibilities. Measuring career readiness learning outcomes also will provide meaningful feedback to students about their progress toward career readiness. Some committee members conceptualized a "career ready score" similar to a "credit score." This score could provide feedback about the student's preparation level to enter the workplace.

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