



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Expanding Access for Student Success: A Focus on Career Outcomes and Equity



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“For our students, this is a game-changer.”

—Brittany Wampler

Director, Career Development & Exploration | Cleveland State University



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A [recent Gallup poll found](#) that only 13 percent of the United States population strongly agrees with the sentiment that college graduates are well-prepared for success in the workplace. “In terms of students’ likelihood to complete a bachelor’s degree, in the last 50 years, the needle has barely moved — especially for students born into the bottom quartile socioeconomic status,” shared Brandon Busteded, Kaplan’s chief partnership officer & global head of learn-work innovation.

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Higher education is thinking more explicitly and emphatically about the transition of “whatever comes next,” especially when it comes to students finding success in the workplace. As college costs go up, so does the belief in the return on investment around career readiness.

Busteded was joined by Kim Canning, Kaplan’s vice president of university partnerships, in hosting three of [Kaplan’s](#) partner organization leaders in a webinar focused on how to better equip students for successful transitions into the workforce or graduate school.

Fuel Student Success with Early Interventions

Busteded noted thinking about talent pipelines decades before the need hits. If students aren’t thinking about potentially joining a specific industry, such as tech, law, or medicine, they’re off the ramp-up pipeline for those jobs. The sooner students realize their career path, the more

opportunities colleges have to help them succeed.

Tony Allen, president of Delaware State University (DSU) in Dover, De., acknowledged that many Delaware State students are first-generation college graduates and first-generation corporate workers. “It’s very important that you start early, particularly with students from disadvantaged backgrounds,” said Allen. “We have an early college school that starts in the seventh grade through the 12th grade, where students can earn up to 60 college credits before they’re even admitted to a university.” The early college school also offers an opportunity for any Delaware student with a 2.75 GPA to receive a four-year scholarship to DSU,

which means they can potentially finish their undergraduate degree in two years at no additional cost.

Eric Dieter agreed with Allen that reaching students pre-college is very important to aid students in realizing their career aspirations sooner. As the executive director of the Longhorn Center for Academic Equity at the University of Texas-Austin, Dieter leads the learning community center’s staff through helping students get acclimatized to college attendance, the process of navigating college life, and ready for what happens after college.

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Executive Director of the Longhorn Center for Academic Equity, University of Texas-Austin

But beyond career engagement, the writing, learning and mental health or counseling centers need to be part of these conversations, as academic success comes from success in those other areas,” said Dieter.

Dieter also noted that students “need to learn how to talk about their talents and how their skills translate into the real world.” Colleges can help students evaluate post-graduate program fit from not just an academic standpoint, but from a geographic, demographic, and financial standpoint. These “match and fit” criteria also extend to careers as a means to evaluate jobs and reduce dissatisfaction in their chosen career paths.

Generate Pathways to Early Work Experience

Brittany Wampler, director of career development and exploration at Cleveland State



University (CSU), in Cleveland, Oh., recognized Dieter’s “match and fit” criteria as an opportunity to focus on building experiences for students through work-readiness partnerships. “We’ve put a lot of effort into building up the employer network, which is building out the opportunities for students to engage in internships. We’re hoping to have more direct partnerships and more awareness around some of the barriers our students face when it comes to landing an internship,” said Wampler.

Wampler cited that 80 percent of CSU’s students stay local after graduation, so they drive a majority of northeast Ohio’s

economy. “There is a need to educate them around finding an internship that will offer transferable skills and help them land that job after graduation,” said Wampler. “But in order to do that, we have to support paid internships.” CSU partners with other organizations to help companies pay interns wages that are competitive to other jobs (such as retail or restaurant jobs), while also incentivizing students by paying them to attend career fairs, workshops, and programming.

Reduce Financial Barriers to Maximize Competitiveness

Financial barriers are one of the biggest hurdles students face, including paying for standardized tests that are often required for a student’s transition into graduate school or into the workforce. The costs associated with prepping for these tests can be significant and can become barriers to student growth. Through their partnerships with Kaplan, each partner college provides their students free access

to resources for standardized test preparation for graduate school admission, professional licensing, workforce readiness, or credentialing. Once these resources are readily available, students can then focus on other aspects of the application process to maximize their competitiveness among their peers.

Wampler considers accessibility to resources as a way to enhance social mobility for students. Participating CSU students have saved approximately \$440,000 across 490 participants that they otherwise would have paid out-of-pocket for test preparation fees. “Our fundraising dollars help go beyond that. We can provide financial resources every single step of the way,” Wampler added.

Dieter noted that the Longhorn Center has saved students over \$211,000, impacting 150 participants taking the GRE®, LSAT®, and MCAT® through Kaplan’s All Access License. “There’s a whole ecosystem of preparing students to apply, get accepted, transition, and persist through graduation. But in the

process, the exams take on an outsized importance to students. They over-contextualize the value of the score in the holistic application process,” said Dieter. “We want to bring students into the Center and take the cost off their plate, because that is a barrier and it can be overly high for some students.” With exam costs out of the way, students can then focus on other graduate literacy support, such as how to network and build relationships with faculty for letters of recommendation.

Create Opportunities to Position Students for Success

The pandemic helped colleges and education organizations realize

where they could step up and support their students better. The biggest opportunity for colleges to improve equity measures is to adapt to the wide spectrum of students’ needs and expectations around education and career development.

Allen thought about the “[stop-outs](#)”— the students in their 30s and 40s who didn’t complete school due to financial barriers. “We need to bring [stop-outs] back into the fold,” said Allen. “Make sure we’ve lined them up appropriately and they have opportunities for additional certifications. And see how many of them want to pursue advanced degrees and professional licenses.”

Wampler expanded Allen’s thoughts around experiential

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Director of Career Development and Exploration, Cleveland State University

education by focusing on acknowledging opportunities for integrated degrees and stackable credentials that enhance students' experiences. One such opportunity is to pair computer science with graphic design, which creates opportunities for the student to apply for 3D modeling or animation jobs. These initiatives require partnering with businesses, employers, and industry experts to ensure the degree and credentials enhance competitiveness and will be valuable in the long term. "We have to navigate where we are and show we're moving the needle on poverty, equity, competitiveness — and we have to have higher education partners," said Wampler.

And while nimbleness is key, Dieter reminded everyone that the effects of the pandemic will be seen in

student behavior for years to come. "Students are doing a better job of living whole-person lives. They're working too hard. They overestimate the consequences of making mistakes. We need to try to ameliorate that as best we can with our programming and our support and guidance." Dieter hopes that more colleges will build questions around the larger landscape of work-life balance into their curriculums.

Meeting students where they are deepens the movement toward equity and accessibility by keeping the learning value of work and life experiences in tandem. Colleges can curate purposeful frameworks for students' success — especially when they fortify partnerships between their campus initiatives and community appropriately.