

Shared Services for Career Centers!

New opportunities to provide more career services, coaching and help grads get jobs by graduation day, while holding down department costs.

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Introduction

Over the past two years, my firm, TalentMarks has worked with over 1,000 career centers. During that time we learned career centers faced two major issues:

1. They don't have the staff and resources to prepare students for the dramatic changes in the job search process.
2. They can't get students to invest time in career planning .

This is hurting grads prospects of getting a job. In a recent survey by the Career Advisory Board of nearly 600 career directors:

- 48.1% thought grads did not have the knowledge they needed to find a job.
- 55.7% felt their grads resumes were not professional enough to use for their job search.

This may be why it took the average grad in 2011 - 7.4 months to get a job!

Imagine if we could reduce that by half! That would be like giving a graduate a \$10,000 graduation present. Money they could use to pay down their student loan, move out of the house and start living the American dream. [This white paper will suggest ways colleges and universities can better prepare students for their first professional job search by adopting a shared service program.](#)

I welcome your thoughts and ideas on how we can use this idea to help more grads get jobs by graduation day!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Adam'.



"Academically prepared," but not "Market place ready"

A lot has changed for graduating seniors since 2007. Not only are there fewer jobs today with more people trying to get them, but the job search process has dramatically changed. Today students need more than diplomas and resumes to get jobs.

In order to get noticed in this crowded job market and have jobs by graduation day, students need to start networking their freshman years with alumni via LinkedIn and other online communities. They need to develop online identities and presences that include personal blogs and Twitter accounts where they share their thought leadership... and today's student needs to have the soft skills (communication, leadership, ethics, etc.) that businesses are looking for.

But they don't!

Why?

Because their college cultures do not focus on careers. As a result, students invest their time in the activities, curriculum and assignments that are required to get them to graduation day. The career center is not a required activity. It's just any other club on campus that has to market to students to build awareness about their need to take ownership of their careers, as well as visit the career center.

While the Department of Labor suggests there are as many as 3.7 million jobs posted in any given month, few graduates have the knowledge and skills they need to get jobs. Grads don't have a clue about how much time, effort and networking it takes to get a job because they don't invest any time learning. In fact, a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that 27.2% of seniors never went to the career center, 16.1% went once, and another 18.2% went twice. That's not enough time to develop a credible resume, let alone master the intricacies of getting a job.

Is this hurting grads opportunities to land their first professional careers? *Yes!*

- A 2012 report by the **Career Advisory Board** showed that 77 percent of career center professionals surveyed cited students' lack of interest in formal career preparation and professional development as barriers to successfully finding jobs.
- Surveys by **John J. Heldrich Workforce Development** and **Adecco** show students regret they didn't spend more time networking with alumni and searching for jobs prior to graduating.

According to research by the **National Association of Colleges and Employers**, it took the average grad from the Class of 2011 - 7.4 months to get a job. Few students understand the financial impact not having a job by graduation day.

Think about it.

A student that is paid \$3,000 to \$4,000 per month would have earned \$22,200 to \$29,600 more than the average student if they had jobs by graduation day. That's enough to pay back most students loans!

All of these studies suggest something needs to be done!

Career center professionals know this, but they are not being given the resources to do what needs to be done.

At the very time the career center should be ramping up programs and services to help students, their budgets, resources and staffing are being cut. The NACE 2011-12 Career Center Benchmark Survey reported the average career center had an operating budget of \$63,086, down 15.5 percent from the 2010-11 academic year. As a result, there are less campus visitations, fewer events being held, and fewer students are receiving personal coaching.

In this new environment, in order to be competitive in recruiting and to match the demands of a new consumer and political environment, career centers will need to hire more career advisors, provide online career courses and content, and develop a four-year curriculum

students can follow that will ensure they have completed the steps necessary to explore career opportunities, acquire job search skills, create written career plans and build professional networks. This could easily reach \$200,000 for small colleges and more than \$750,000 for large colleges and universities.

In an environment of diminishing budgets, it is going to be hard for colleges to feel motivated enough to make it happen.

That is, unless they start feeling pressure and demands from parents, students, the media and the government!



Legislation, parents, students and the media will force change.

We are living in a time where pressure from legislatures will require colleges to find ways to more effectively utilize tax payers' support of higher education. One does not have to read tea leaves to see that future funding to higher education will be tied to the number of students who:

1. Make it to graduation day.
2. Graduate on time.
3. Graduate with a job.

An article in the Cleveland Plain Dealer, written by reporter Reginald Fields confirms this.

Kasich worries the state's investment of taxpayer dollars into Ohio's higher education system too often yields paltry results. Look at the low graduation rates on campuses around the state for evidence of that concern.

"We all know that we can all do better on graduation rates and there's been some movement on creating a new formula," Kasich said, surrounded by school presidents at his Statehouse ceremonial office. " We hope we can speed up the process so that we can fund higher education based on graduation rather than based on enrollment."

Parents and students are evaluating colleges on their abilities to ensure their son or daughter has a job by graduation day. The UCLA Higher Education Research Institute conducted a survey concerning why students pursue higher education. The 2012 poll showed that 85.9% of college freshman surveyed cited a desire to get a job as why they were going to college.

Even the media is drawing attention to this issue.

US World and News Report collected data that showed only 55.2% of all 2011 law graduates had a full time job that required a law degree. Reacting to this and reports of law school graduates suing their institutions, *US World and News Report* announced an agreement with the American Bar Association to collect graduation employment data and include it in their ranking formula. Law schools with poor grad employment will see their ranks drop.

For profit colleges now face legislation passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate that requires them to collect and submit data that shows the effectiveness of the educations they are providing.

The "Gainful Employment" law requires for-profit colleges to prove the education they are providing will not only get their graduates jobs that are relevant to their areas of study, but those that provide a sufficient salary to enable them to pay daily living expenses and still be able to pay back their student loans as well.

It's only a matter of time before this type of legislation, in some form or another, becomes required for non-profit colleges too!



Investment in Career Centers set to explode

All of this pressure is going to require colleges and universities to invest more resources in their career centers. Investments in the career center have been traditionally small per student in relation to investments in recruiting students.

For example, the average private college will spend over \$3,000 to recruit each freshman student. With a larger marketing budget and bigger class sizes, the average state college will spend over \$1,000 to recruit each freshman.

Yet surveys by the National Association of Colleges and Employers show in both state and private colleges, the average career center has less than \$100 to spend to prepare seniors for their first professional job searches. If you spread their resources to include freshman, sophomores and juniors (who should be working on their career strategies as well), that amount would be less than \$25 per student.

A small budget limits the ability for career professionals to coach and advise students. According to the NACE 2011-12 Career Center Benchmark Survey, the average number of students to professional staff is 1,645 to 1. At colleges with fewer than 1,000 students, that number is a more manageable 366, but at colleges with 20,000 students or more, there is one professional staff member for 5,876 students!

Shared services reduces costs and provide more services.

Over the past decade, college presidents have been under enormous pressure to cut costs and generate more revenue.

One way colleges have been cutting costs is by finding tasks that are not part of their core competencies and outsourcing them to organizations that specialize in those services. Today over 1,500 colleges and universities have partnered with either Barnes and Noble, or Follett Corporation to manage their bookstores; another 500 colleges have outsourced their computer help desks, and others are exploring ways they can share non-competitive administrative costs including payroll and programming.

This trend is requiring colleges to re-examine their entire operations strategies to see which areas could be done better at less cost through outsourcing or a shared services framework.

In an article in Educause, Luis M. Proenza, President of The University of Akron and Roy A. Church, President of Lorain County Community College write:

“In these challenging economic times, colleges and universities must work together to attain academic and operational successes. The shared-services approach can help higher education institutions cut costs and better serve their students, faculty, staff, and communities. It is a model that can allow institutions to stay focused on the core missions of teaching, learning, and research. Partnerships and collaboration are the keys to the future of higher education in Ohio and in the world.”

As administrators scour the campus to find new ways to better serve students and at the same time reduce costs, many are taking a second look at how they could implement shared-services programs in their career centers.

While private colleges have to balance their budgets and get approval for expenditures from their boards, and for-profit colleges ultimately get approval from their shareholders, the future of state colleges will be determined by the government entities providing them ever diminishing funding.

The Ohio legislature established an advisory committee that is coordinated by Board of Regents Chancellor, Jim Petro.

The Efficiency Advisory Committee is comprised of 40 people representing each state institution of higher education. It meets quarterly to discuss ways to generate optimal efficiency plans for campuses, while at the same time identifying shared-service opportunities and best practices. The newly formed committee (It's first meeting was in September 2012), is challenged to look at ways to not only reduce the costs of education for students and their families by reducing overhead, but to also improve the quality of services.

The shared-services concept is being accepted around the globe. HE-Shared Services Ltd (HE-SS) was formed in 2008 to help the 166 colleges and universities in the United Kingdom find ways in which they could identify significant efficiencies and help large IT vendors understand more about how the Higher Education sector is structured and works.

Career Centers will be more efficient.

A shared-services approach will not change the way career centers operate. They would still advise and coach students, organize and manage career fairs and campus visits, and provide resume coaching.

However, a shared services approach could provide the career center with new technology, career curriculum, website management, marketing services to increase student participation, and career webinars, along with more analytics of effectiveness and even "overflow" career coaching during busy periods. In addition, it could offer more anytime-anywhere services, including providing more services to graduates who are looking for jobs.

A centralized shared-services program can be branded so that the resources, courses and materials will have the college logo and brand. It can be designed to provide marketing expertise that few college career professionals have time to acquire, and to increase the buzz, excitement and student commitment about building career strategies.

By not having to duplicate services and hire more staff, the career center can remain nimble, reach more students, and at the same time, provide more services. On top of that, a shared services approach is predicted to cut expected cost increases mentioned above by as much as seventy percent.



Shared-Services Opportunities

Adopting shared services for the career center makes a lot of sense. Besides the fact that the career center does not have to reinvent the wheel, career centers will:

- Not have to invest time and money creating new services.
- Be able to deliver services to students via their smart phones, smart pads and computers

Some of the services that could be coordinated through the shared-services partnership include online:

1. Career dashboards
2. 24/7 Career Fairs
3. Career courses
4. Career webinars
5. Career tools
6. Career dashboards
7. Marketing

Additionally, a shared-service approach could offer students and grads extended hours:

- Evening, weekend and summer help
- Post-graduation help

The shared-services partner could also provide advanced services that are not part of the career centers' core competencies.

Any organization that wants to reach students today must have an extensive knowledge and expertise in utilizing Social Media. They need to know how to use Facebook, and social plug-ins to leverage the authentic voices of peers and increase awareness and desire to build a career plans.

They will need to implement online reward systems like Badges to recognize students who are participating in and using the resources available to them. They will need to dedicate time to build sustainable marketing and promotion strategies that utilize student ambassadors, successful alumni and even celebrities who are all promoting the need to take ownership of one's career strategy.

Career Centers focus on their core competencies

The program will enable career centers to reorganize around providing more in-depth services to students in the following areas:

- Advanced Resume Development
- Advanced One-on-one Coaching
- Department Outreach
- Career Fairs
- Campus Interviews & Preparation

Shared Services built on a new foundation

Conversations and research are suggesting simply adding additional services will not move the needle as far as is needed. Because career centers are like clubs on campus that have no authority to require students to participate, career centers will need to do the following:

1. Require students to take career assessments the summers prior to their freshman experiences and participate in events to gain an understanding of them
2. Engage parents and enlist their help in requiring students to take ownership of their careers
3. Offer four year career plans and methodology for students to follow
4. Take more active roles in connecting students immediately when they reach campus to network with alumni

Next steps!

Should you be moving in this direction? While I'd say yes, here are a couple of things you can do to see if this strategy is the right one for your college:

1. Identify the type of services, and tools and coaching you think will be necessary to stay competitive (if not a leader), and help more grads get jobs by graduation day.
2. Determine which strategies could be implemented faster, and at a lower annual cost by adopting a shared services model.
3. Develop a business and implementation plan and present it to your management.

Now that you have a plan, you will be able to make a greater impact on a greater number of students sooner than later!



Summary

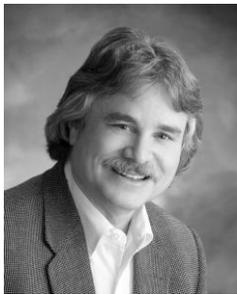
Working in partnership with career centers, a shared-services partner will take over mundane, task-oriented responsibilities so that the career center staff will have more time for one-on-one coaching sessions with students and enable them to build relationships with faculty and departments that can have ties to businesses that hire interns and grads.

Colleges will see a reduction in repetitive services and reduce costs as well as increase revenue streams that can be applied to scholarships or general operating funds. The college will also see an increase in retention as students who are focused on their careers will stay focused on their career plans and students will graduate on time!

A shared services program will benefit everyone.

- **Parents** become aware of their roles in helping students understand the importance of taking ownership of their careers as soon as they reach campus.
- **Students** develop professional networks with alumni and pick up the skills they need to get internships and jobs.
- **Companies** get better prepared students
- **Ohio colleges** graduate more students with jobs!

This program, when implemented, will go a long way to increase the number of grads that will get jobs in the state of Ohio.



Don Philabaum is the President/CEO of TalentMarks, a provider of online career curriculum, tools and services through any device. TalentMarks provides career centers a branded online strategy designed to increase students' ownership of career planning. The programs are designed to increase retention, graduation rates and grads with jobs by graduation day!