



Strategic Approaches to Integrating Career Readiness Competencies

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BY THE NACE CAREER READINESS INTEGRATION TASK FORCE

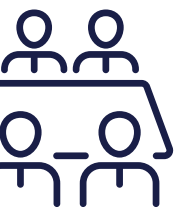


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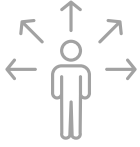
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STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES FOR INTEGRATING SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES INSTITUTION-WIDE

NACE describes institution-wide as an intentional, organized effort or initiative designed to implement competencies across a campus or school involving academic and student affairs professionals.

Competency development is essential for students as they prepare for and successfully transition to life after graduation. The goal of institutional integration is for students to experience multiple “touchpoints” of career readiness—in programs, services, and one-on-one conversations around competencies, for example—throughout their time at their institution. Positive outcomes resulting from such an approach include academic achievement, career readiness, life preparedness, and social justice.

Stakeholders at seven U.S. institutions were interviewed by members of the NACE Career Readiness Integration Task Force to learn about their experiences with integrating competency-based practices institution-wide. (For details about the task force and a list of the institutions, see the Appendix.)



10 Key Findings

There are 10 key findings that came out of the interviews of participating institutions.

1 All seven demonstrate commitment to preparing career-ready students.

The catalyst for integrating the competencies institution-wide varied by institution: For some, career readiness was part of their institution's strategic plan, while others embarked on institution-wide integration as a means to improve graduate outcomes, because of external support for such an effort, or for some combination of reasons.

Regardless of what sparked their action, all demonstrate a commitment to successfully preparing students who would be ready to embark on their career upon graduation.

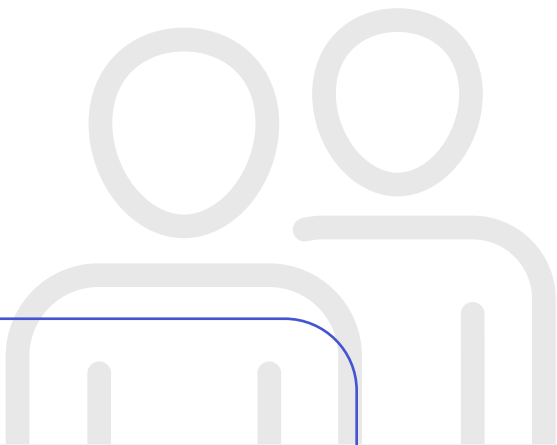
2 Equity is a driving factor of institution-wide career readiness integration.

Addressing equity and social mobility issues was an overarching theme among the institutions interviewed; ensuring all students have an equitable experience and achieve career readiness was a driving force for integrating competencies into the classroom.

This is an important factor that draws faculty to the work and helps them see the advantages of integrating a competency framework into their courses. A commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is inextricably linked to a commitment to career readiness.

3 The vision and strategy for institution-wide competency integration came from the highest levels of institutional leadership—not from the career center.

Among the institutions interviewed, the president, provost, and/or vice provost drove and championed the vision and strategy, which created buy-in. In most cases, the initiatives were inclusive of the career centers, and they played a critical role.



4 Faculty leadership is critical to integrating a competency framework institution-wide.

Faculty leadership is essential to a successful integration across the institution and inside the classroom. At each of the institutions, faculty had an important role in integrating competency development in the curriculum. As one interviewee noted, not all students participate in career-related events, so embedding career readiness into the curriculum brings the competencies to all students.

At the time of the interviews, most of the institutions were at an inflection point, trying to determine how to best support and provide faculty development to build the capacity of their instructors to intentionally scaffold the development of competencies in their courses. In most cases, there were examples of departmental pockets or pilot programs that now need wider application across the institution.

At more than one institution, it has been challenging to achieve buy-in from all faculty. For example, in one case, faculty questioned why they were asked to look at their curriculum to identify competencies addressed in the course. This points to the need to have a long-term mindset and commitment to the process of institutional change; it requires ongoing investment in and support of faculty.

Gaining faculty buy-in

At some of the participating schools, buy-in has been gained through a faculty champion, champions—or even an entire department.

Supporting faculty through fellowships and grants is another avenue to consider to gain buy-in. The University of Redlands launched such a program to involve faculty in integration efforts by providing fellowships to support their career readiness work. Read about this award-winning program: [University of Redlands' Career Faculty Fellows Program Embeds Career Into Curriculum.](#)

See also:

[CUNY SPS Aligns General Education, Liberal Studies Curricula With Career Competencies](#)

[Facilitating Faculty Buy-in to Career Readiness](#)

[Fostering Faculty Champions for Student Career Readiness](#)

[Faculty Engagement: Career Readiness and Curriculum Integration \(webinar\)](#)

5 Leadership of the career readiness initiative varied by institution, and there was often a committee of multiple stakeholders and units.

At several of the institutions, the initiative involved multiple stakeholders from different units, often as a committee. At one institution, for example, three individuals from different units, including an assistant vice president, an associate dean, and a faculty member, were responsible for the strategic direction. At others, academic affairs led the efforts, often in partnership with student affairs. At several of the participating institutions, the career center was involved in the process along with various partners, including faculty.

As these examples reveal, who led varied, but the important take away is that the work was not owned by one office, which may be why the effort is institution-wide. They also point to the value of integrating student success and academic affairs to steer the success of career readiness integration.

6 Developing an advisory committee for the effort has enabled members to engage in productive conversations and share resources and information with one another and beyond their committee.

Two of the institutions have advisory committees composed of different stakeholders. Although the committees have different names, they served the same purpose of bringing individuals together from across the institution. One group, made up of faculty and staff, discussed existing efforts, what worked well, and perceived gaps, and shared that information across departments. The other meets every two weeks to discuss such topics as policies and student learning outcomes; the members of this group also share suggestions with faculty.

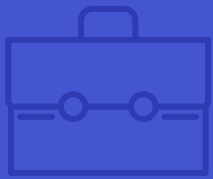
7 A variety of ways have been used to fund the career readiness initiative.

Endowments, donations, grants, federal funding, sponsorships, and other fundraising efforts have all been used to underwrite the initiatives at participating institutions. In some cases, the funding has allowed for adding positions related to the effort, including positions designed to bridge the gap between career readiness and field experiences.

8 At each institution, career readiness is defined through a competency framework that represents student learning outcomes and uses a common language.

All seven of the institutions have demonstrated a commitment to helping students become career ready through competency development. Whether using the NACE competency framework or an institution-specific version of the framework, the institution's focus was not just on helping students to articulate the competencies they developed but also on helping the students develop their capacity in each of the competencies.

In addition, there was a clear focus on using a common language across the institution. In several instances, there was a clear distinction between the competencies as outcomes of their education and the career management competency.



- 9** Institutions have identified experiential learning as a core element of their career readiness initiative. They have interpreted this broadly where experiential learning and competency development takes place both inside and outside of the classroom.

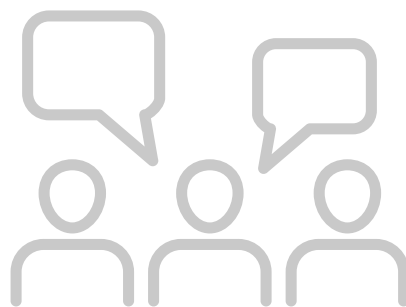
There is broad recognition that experiential learning is an opportunity for students to both develop and reflect on the competencies. Each institution is using a variety of levers to implement these experiences, including capstone experiences, project-based learning, applied learning, traditional internships, and other high-impact practices.

Among the participating institutions, some require students to complete an experiential learning component in order to graduate. However, regardless of whether it is a requirement, all identified experiential learning as a core element.

- 10** Most of the institutions are measuring the integration of career readiness.

Using different methods, five of the participating institutions are currently measuring the integration of career readiness. Some use results from surveys. Others are using assessments, including rubrics and pre/post tests), and others are using program/career outcomes data.

All the institutions identified this as an area for continuous improvement.



Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings from the interviews, which align with the four pillars of competency development.

(See the Appendix for information about the four pillars.)

- Begin the career readiness initiative with the support of the top academic leader of the institution to create buy-in institution-wide.
- Create an advisory committee with multiple stakeholders/units that will collaborate to achieve the shared goal of successfully integrating career readiness institution-wide. The committee should determine common language and definitions to use across the institution.
- Conduct an analysis to determine how human/financial resources need to be allocated for the institution-wide integration. Make necessary adjustments to ensure every student will have an equitable experience and achieve career readiness.
- Incorporate a competency framework into the career readiness initiative. Identify the experiential learning opportunities where students will develop and demonstrate the competencies
- Measure the progress of the career readiness integration. This can be achieved through many methods, such as survey data, assessments, and program/career outcomes data. Assessment is an opportunity for institutions to reflect on the next steps for continuous improvement.

CAREER READINESS AND SKILLS-BASED HIRING

How employers screen and select new college graduate candidates for internships and jobs?

Major, degree, specific coursework, and experience have typically been among the factors employers consider when identifying potential new hires, but perhaps no screening and selection criterion has been more controversial—and yet widely used—than GPA.

That is changing, as more employers leave GPA behind and look instead to skills and competencies.

Stakeholders at seven employing organizations were interviewed by members of the NACE Career Readiness Integration Task Force to learn about their experiences in using the NACE career readiness competencies in their recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and evaluation practices. (For details about the task force and a list of participating organizations, see the Appendix.)

Diversity Goals Drive Skills-Based Hiring

Among the organizations interviewed, the need to recruit a diverse workforce was the single biggest driver behind dropping GPA in the selection process in favor of competencies and skills.

Some felt that GPA was an arbitrary measure that doesn't effectively evaluate a candidate's overall potential. Others have found that GPA can be influenced by external factors and are concerned that it disadvantages candidates from lower income communities and underrepresented groups. Focusing on competencies over GPA is also more inclusive and broadens the candidate pool.

One organization indicated it had moved away from GPA in favor of work experience as a better indicator of success. To identify talent with the desired skills, another expanded its sources to include apprenticeship programs and coding schools.



In terms of the transformation journey, two of the organizations are in the early stages, three have been implementing the changes for three to five years, and one has been using skills-based hiring for more than five years.

The organizations' overarching goals for moving away from GPA to skills-based hiring included:

- Increasing candidate diversity;
- Expanding the candidate pool;
- Reshaping the mindset about opportunities within the industry; and
- Increasing brand recognition.

One organization also specified that it was aiming to increase diversity within its leadership positions as well as among its intern cohort—a means of diversifying entry-level hires.

Gaining Buy-In

To gain support from leadership and stakeholders, most of the organizations relied on internal and external research, data, and/or benchmarks to show the disadvantage of GPA-based hiring for diverse candidates, along with feedback from career services partners, partner organizations, and stakeholders. *(Note: One organization that did not use benchmark data in their business case, indicated that such data would have been a plus, and another said benchmark data broken down by functions, majors, or degrees would have been helpful.)*

Internally, the initiatives were socialized through various means. One met with hiring managers and aligned the initiative with the organization's DEI efforts. Another emphasized the changing landscape of graduate recruiting, while a third worked directly with hiring managers and provided coaching to students. One organization had a committee review and endorse the initiative, and then trained recruiters and addressed internal stakeholders' concerns. Another conducted manager readiness training and provided unconscious bias training. Another engaged talent leaders, senior leaders, and hiring managers to create a solid foundation of support.



7 Themes

Seven themes came out of the interviews, including five related to success in shifting focus from GPA to skills. Overall, the interviews found that:

1. Many have shifted from GPA to skills/competency-based hiring: Many companies have moved away from relying solely on GPA as a hiring criterion and are now focusing more on candidates' skills, competencies, and experiences. This shift is driven by the recognition that GPA may not accurately reflect an individual's abilities or potential for success.

2. Diversity and inclusion are drivers of the shift: A common motivation for adopting skills-based hiring is to promote diversity and inclusion within the workforce. By removing GPA as a barrier, companies aim to attract a more diverse pool of candidates and create equal opportunities for individuals from different backgrounds.

In terms of how to make the shift successfully, the interviews uncovered five key themes:

3. Gain stakeholder/leadership support: Building a strong business case and gaining support from stakeholders and leadership is crucial for implementing these changes successfully. Companies have used various strategies, such as data analysis, internal and external feedback, and training, to gain buy-in for the new hiring approach.

4. Look at the impact on the candidate pool and candidate diversity: The identified goals and outcomes of the initiative include increasing the candidate pool and improving candidate diversity. Companies expect to see improvements in representation, particularly among underrepresented groups, and aim to provide equal opportunities for all candidates, regardless of their GPA.

5. Use various implementation strategies: Companies are implementing changes through various means, such as revising job descriptions, modifying the selection process, incorporating skills-based criteria, providing training to recruiters and managers, and updating marketing materials. These strategies aim to align the entire hiring process with the skills-based approach.

6. Measure success through evaluation and feedback: Companies are using qualitative and quantitative metrics to measure the success of their initiatives. This includes gathering feedback from students/candidates, hiring managers, and career center partners to assess the impact and effectiveness of the skills-based hiring approach.

7. Invest in continuous improvement and sustain momentum: Companies are actively maintaining buy-in and sustaining momentum by regularly evaluating the outcomes, engaging in dialogue with stakeholders, addressing any concerns or resistance, and continuously refining their processes to ensure the long-term success of the skills-based hiring approach.

The organizations that took part have seen promising outcomes, including:

- **Increased diversity:** Several organizations reported doubling the number of diverse candidates in their internship class after removing GPA requirements.
- **An expanded candidate pool:** Companies were able to interview more candidates and consider a broader range of qualifications.
- **Streamlined processes:** Removing the need to file for exceptions simplified the hiring process.
- **Reallocation of talent:** Companies experienced benefits by broadening their selection process and placing candidates into positions based on skills, aspirations, and motivation.



Lessons Learned

The organizations shared valuable insights and lessons learned:

- **Be prepared for a larger candidate pool:** Opening the aperture and removing GPA requirements can lead to an influx of candidates, requiring effective management strategies.
- **Make incremental changes:** Avoid changing everything at once and focus on ensuring each individual aspect works before moving forward. Large organizations may face challenges in adapting quickly.
- **Understand the business:** HR professionals should have a strong understanding of their organization's goals and objectives to gain buy-in and trust from the business units.
- **Provide manager readiness training:** Training managers on the new approach is crucial, as some may resist the change. Anonymous experience surveys and pulse surveys help in continuous improvement and reinforcement.
- **Provide unconscious bias training:** Recruiters and managers should receive training on unconscious bias to ensure fair and equitable hiring practices.
- **Expect diverse perspectives:** Managers should be prepared for new hires with different ideas and perspectives, which can be beneficial for the organization.
- **Use data and challenge the status quo:** Use data to drive decision-making and push for necessary changes. Beta testing and challenging the status quo are important in an ever-evolving industry.
- **Benchmark with other organizations:** It is helpful to have access to information about other organizations that have eliminated GPA requirements, including their thresholds and benchmarking data.

Eliminating GPA Requirements Supports Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Shifting from GPA-based hiring to skills-based hiring is an effective strategy for supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

What does this look like in practice?

- GPA is not a metric focused on internally with business partners.
- Job descriptions do not include GPA preferences.
- Recruiters are trained to focus on relevant skills and experience when seeking candidates.
- Intern performance/feedback focuses on competency.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

A subgroup of members of the NACE Career Readiness Task Force identified several overarching questions for NACE, institutions, and employing organizations to use in framing research into career readiness. These include:.

In what ways does an intentional and strategic approach to career readiness development lead to improved outcomes among institutional outcomes and student growth and development?

This frame could be used to identify:

- The relationship between career readiness and time to employment, likelihood of degree completion, time to degree, and student retention.
- Differences in career readiness scores based on institutional type and among institutions with and without an intentional career readiness program.
- Most effective ways for students to increase their career readiness.
- Differences in career readiness between students who have completed career readiness programming and those who have not and between students who have completed experiential learning activities and those who have not.
- Differences in pre- and post-program scores among students taking part in career readiness programming.

What tools are needed to allow institutions, students, and employers to evaluate and analyze institutional and student outcomes in ways that are streamlined, accessible, and scalable?

Does a strategic approach to career readiness development close the equity gap among underserved populations?

APPENDIX

The NACE Career Readiness Integration Task Force

This report, developed through the work of the 2022-23 NACE Career Readiness Integration Task Force, provides insight into how career services professionals and their counterparts at employing organizations are integrating career readiness competencies into their work with students, interns, and new hires.

The task force was charged by the NACE Board of Directors with:

- Identifying resources and tools, content, research priorities, and professional development needs that will advance the implementation of career readiness competencies within the profession, and
- Providing recommendations on infusing readiness career readiness initiatives and competency development within higher education and employer organizations.

The task force tackled the charge by creating three teams: One examined career readiness among institutions that have integrated the competencies across the institution, the second examined how employers are leveraging career readiness and competencies, and the third team focused on identifying areas for future research, development, and discussion.

2022 – 23 Career Readiness Integration Task Force

Judy Anderson, University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, co-chair

David Gaston, University of Kansas, co-chair

Jessica Perez, LaGuardia Community College, co-chair

Tracy Austin, Clemson University

Scott Kustis, The Ohio State University

Kaelin McMenemy, IBM Corporation

Christopher Mesaros, The Washington Center

Julie Nguyen, Suffolk University

Kelly O’Shaughnessy, William & Mary

Meghan Ostrowski,
Liberty Mutual Insurance Company

Lindsey Pollack, Lindsey Pollack, LLC

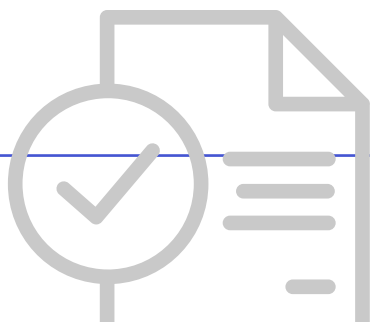
Tina Reed, Huston-Tillotson University

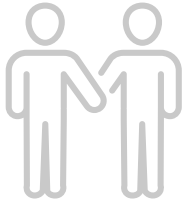
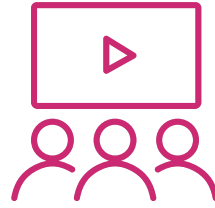
Gracy Sarkissian, New York University

Maggie Songer, Villanova University

Tim Harding, Board adviser

Matthew Brink, staff adviser





Definitions

Career readiness: Career readiness is a foundation from which to demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare the college educated for success in the workplace and lifelong career management.

Institution-wide: NACE defines institution-wide as an intentional, organized effort or initiative designed to implement competencies across a campus or school involving academic and student affairs professionals.

Participating Institutions and Organizations

Seven institutions took part; six that agreed to be listed appear here:

- Colorado School of Mines
- Dominican University
- Furman University
- Georgia State University
- Missouri Western State University
- North Central College

Seven organizations took part in the project; four that agreed to be listed appear here:

- LPL Financial
- Liberty Mutual Insurance
- Protiviti
- T-Mobile



The Four Pillars of Competency Development

PILLAR 1: Conceptualization & Planning: Competency learning, development, and articulation should be made apparent and infused into the curriculum and co-curriculum to provide opportunities for students to actively demonstrate competency development and readiness. Framing programs, services, and one-on-one conversations around competencies provides students with multiple touchpoints throughout their time at the institution.

PILLAR 2: Coalition Building: The value of an institution-wide competency development and career readiness initiative that supports overall student success is apparent when strategic relationships result in the initiative being reflected in institution/division/ college/department strategic plans and general education. A common vocabulary and definitions for institution-identified competencies provides a shared understanding, buy-in, and brand. One area may take the lead in mobilizing stakeholders while refraining from solely owning the initiative.

PILLAR 3: Resources: Institution-wide competency infusion may be achieved through new and re-purposed human and financial resources and single departmental or collaborative initiatives. It is imperative to keep a pulse on trends and issues affecting higher education and the evolving world to ensure an institution-wide approach and learning opportunities remain relevant.

PILLAR 4: Assessment: Competency development should be assessed at the micro and macro levels in curricular and co-curricular experiences. Collecting outcomes data will help individual students realize developmental progress and institutions focus on continuous improvement.



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