

Outcomes and Metrics that Matter

Embedding Career Services at Higher Education's Core

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Foreword by Lynn Pasquerella



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Foreword

Among the many lessons reinforced by COVID-19, the ensuing economic crisis, and this moment of racial reckoning in America has been that now, more than ever, colleges and universities must prepare students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to address the unscripted problems of the future—within the context of the workforce, not apart from it.

Despite the monumental challenges posed for higher education by the worst pandemic in more than a century, we have an extraordinary opportunity to reimagine and revolutionize it in ways that meet American higher education's distinctive mission of educating for democracy. Historically, this mission has been embodied by liberal education as an approach that prepares students for active and responsible citizenship, personal fulfillment, and success throughout their working lives.

Indeed, employers increasingly recognize the value of liberal education—grounded in applied learning and engagement with real-world problems and social issues—as vital to evolving workforce needs and economic growth. Nevertheless, over the past decade, a prevailing national rhetoric has emerged that calls into question the value of higher education in general and liberal education in particular. Burgeoning public skepticism has led to a flurry of legislative proposals aimed at tying public funding for colleges and universities to job prospects for graduates, alongside limiting scholarship funds for those who major in disciplines deemed “immediately employable.”

Threatening to reduce higher learning to higher training, the long-ascendent consumerist narrative at the basis of those proposals is predicated upon a cost-benefit analysis for students and families that focuses on the investment in college versus the short-term economic payoff of a degree or credential. While these efforts are both misguided and run the risk of exacerbating a burgeoning economic and racial segregation in higher education, the concerns at their core—that higher education is too expensive, too difficult to access, and doesn't teach people 21st-century skills—must be confronted directly if there is any hope of restoring public trust in higher education.

Andy Chan, one of this report's authors, has become famous for his viral TEDx talk, delivered in 2013, in which he provocatively asserted that for students to more fully benefit from their college experience, “Career services must die.” The goal, of course, is not really to kill career services but to reinvigorate it in ways that unveil the false dichotomy between a liberal education and career preparation.

Ultimately, the goals and effects of embedding career services into the liberal education core must be reciprocal. On the one hand, the move should ensure that career services is not narrowly focused (either on immediate postgraduation outcomes or on a too-narrow set of skills as “marketable” or directly related to employment or job prep), but rather that it helps students understand how the fullness of their college experience prepares them for long-term career success. On the other hand, it should render visible for students that what they’re gaining from their experiences can be applied to the world of work—and how to apply it. Greater transparency about that on the part of those leading students through educational experiences should be paramount.

It is my sincere hope that this paper, written by two important voices in the field, will help us move toward a fuller, more purposeful understanding of the importance of all students finding meaning in their academic work and careers.

Lynn Pasquerella

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About the Authors



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Andy oversees Wake Forest’s award-winning Office of Personal and Career Development (OPCD) and Mentoring Resource Center, the Wake West Study Away program and the WFU Board of Trustees Innovation Committee. Most known for his TEDx talk, “Career Services Must Die,” Andy and the OPCD have been featured in The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, and NPR.

Andy previously led the MBA Career Management Center at Stanford University, his undergraduate and MBA alma mater, and has held executive leadership roles at The Learning Company and EdTech startups. He also serves as a strategic advisor at several organizations including Handshake, Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education, New Community Church, and others.



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Christine leads Handshake’s partnerships with the higher education community, which includes 18 million students from 1,250 educational institutions. A nationally recognized change agent and expert on strategies to drive equitable student career success, she is regularly referenced in media, such as CNBC, Forbes, and Inside Higher Education.

Prior to Handshake, Christine was the Associate Provost for Career Education at Wellesley College, where she received the 2017 Career Services Excellence Award from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) and the 2017 Innovation Award from Eduventures. She has also held senior level positions and board roles at George Mason University, Georgetown University, The George Washington University, NACE, and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA).

Introduction

Repositioning and Rethinking Career Services

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated an already widening opportunity gap in America. Even before the pandemic, as the price of college rose rapidly, Americans without a degree were losing confidence in higher education as a ticket to economic mobility.¹

This is bad enough. But a troubling disconnect exists even among the college-going population: The vast majority don't see the instruction they receive as relevant to their professional lives.

In a 2018 study released by Strada and Gallup, 58 percent of college students said jobs or career-related motivations were their "main reason" for pursuing a degree. But both research organizations later found that just one in four working U.S. adults with college experience strongly agrees that their education is relevant to their work and daily life.²

An earlier study, also by Strada and Gallup, found that while 53 percent of students believed their major would "lead to a good job," just 34 percent believed they'd graduate with the skills and knowledge needed to actually be successful in the job market.³

At the root of many of these issues is the way that higher education has positioned career services.

Colleges, often nervous about being viewed as vocationalizing their education, have under-resourced career services and placed it on the periphery of the institution. It ends up being relegated to an extracurricular student services office whose job is to just get students jobs.

As a result, it operates as a self-standing enterprise that perpetuates a potentially outdated model. Rather than being integrated into the college student experience, career services often exists in a silo. Students are left on their own to determine how to become career and life ready. The

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“At the root of many of these issues is the way that higher education has positioned career services.”

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¹ Redden, Elizabeth, "When Career Advancement Feels Impossible." Inside Higher Ed, November 17, 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/11/17/survey-many-americans-feel-powerless-over-ability-advance-professionally>.

² Auer, Zac, "Relevance Linked to Views of Education Quality and Value." Gallup Blog, May 3, 2018, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/233636/relevance-linked-views-education-quality-value.aspx>.

³ Gallup, and Strada. "2017 College Student Survey: A Nationally Representative Survey of Currently Enrolled Students." Accessed August 30, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/reports/225161/2017-strada-gallup-college-student-survey.aspx>.

majority of students, especially those from underrepresented and less affluent backgrounds, do not fully utilize the career services resources or programs, oftentimes waiting until it's much too late: spring semester of their final year.

As a result, too often students don't understand or see value in the way colleges prepare them to enter a career, despite this being the main reason they attend higher education.⁴

We believe that going to college should make students employable for life and help them grow intellectually as a whole person. But what would that actually look like?

As it turns out, change is already underway. A growing number of forward-thinking colleges are rethinking career services as a central component of their institutions. In the process, they're rededicating themselves to their core mission.

Technological innovations mean that colleges no longer have to wait until students have graduated but can actually monitor their progress in real time and support students to realize better outcomes.

Brandon Busteed, former executive director for education and workforce development at Gallup, notes that universities typically measure the percentage of graduates who say they've gotten jobs six months after graduating. But that query is problematic, he says. "What colleges need to start measuring—and if they measure this, it'll move them into more action—is the degree to which their graduates are getting *college-worthy jobs*."

College leaders at the forefront of innovation are beginning to identify ways of making this connection, starting with institutions holding themselves accountable for learners after they graduate. Eduardo J. Padrón, the president emeritus of Miami Dade College, notes, "It's important that our responsibility to students doesn't end with a diploma. It ends with our ability to transition them to early career opportunities where they would be able to succeed and find jobs that otherwise would be very difficult to get."

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Dr. Eduardo J. Padrón
President Emeritus, Miami Dade College

⁴ Selingo, Jeff. "College Students Say They Want a Degree for a Job. Are They Getting What They Want?" The Washington Post, September 1, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2018/09/01/college-students-say-they-want-a-degree-for-a-job-are-they-getting-what-they-want/>.

Career readiness is not just a practical consideration. Ashley Finley, vice president of research for the Association of American Colleges & Universities, says a key part of understanding one's purpose and meaning is to understand oneself as a *professional*. "Work provides a sense of purpose," she says. "It provides a sense of meaning. And that's always been at the root of how we envision what it is for somebody to flourish in their lives and careers."

Indeed, Handshake's Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Stull says boosting career services "is not a rejection of the liberal arts. Many of the smartest employers, including tech companies, want people with liberal arts degrees and clear skills, including microcredentials like industry certifications."

In the end, however, no amount of new credentials or certificates will help if leaders don't think about student success more holistically, says Josh Wyner, of the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program. That includes focusing on labor market outcomes and giving students realistic ideas so they can plan for their goals. "Start with the end in mind," he advises.

Kaplan's Busted predicts that career services "is poised to become a core facet of the student experience—as central to student success as the curriculum." At colleges and universities that put career services at the center of their strategic plans, he says, this office will become "one of the most important drivers of enrollment growth as students and parents see career outcomes as their top reason for attending."⁵

Busted also notes that graduates who rated their experiences with career services as "very helpful" are nearly six times as likely as others to "strongly agree" that their alma mater prepared them for post-collegiate life and nearly three times as likely to make a donation to their alma mater.⁶

And in an era when students, parents, and lawmakers are rising in anger over student debt, an **April 2021** survey by the Strada Center for Education and Consumer Insights found that alumni are eight times more likely to say that borrowing for college was worth it when their college gave them resources and support to get a good job.

This paper, drawing from the insights of higher education leaders, lays out a vision for integrating career services into the fabric of the institution, with a focus on how the metrics and outcomes can inform and focus colleges' broader objectives.

It is our hope that it will help higher education leaders understand the link between better tracking career outcomes and meeting institutional goals.

⁵ Busted, Brandon, "Career Services Will Define The Next Big Boom In College Enrollment." Forbes, Dec. 21, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brandobusted/2020/12/21/career-services-will-define-the-next-big-boom-in-college-enrollment/?sh=13a5dcf6145e>.

⁶ New, Jake, "Looking for Career Help." Inside Higher Ed, Dec. 13, 2016, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/12/13/only-17-percent-recent-graduates-say-career-centers-are-very-helpful>.

Section 1

Outcomes and Metrics that Matter

Historically, institutions of higher education have typically measured three key things: enrollment, retention, and completion. While those metrics are certainly important in assessing the life cycle (and revenue) of an institution, at their face they omit students' ultimate goal (or desire) for pursuing higher education.

If we were to measure students' desired outcomes—what they're supposed to learn and what, exactly, they should get out of college—that would be powerful.

Dave Clayton, senior vice president of consumer insights for the Strada Education Network, has noted that most students—60 percent—say they want a career outcome from their college degree. When they believe they have “excellent support” from their institution, 83 percent say it will be worth the cost. By contrast, among those who cite “poor support” around connecting their education to a meaningful career, only 17 percent say they believe their education will be worth the cost, just one-fifth as many.

Simply put, what students want is both a meaningful, fulfilling college experience and a pathway to prosperity.

In a perfect world, that is exactly the role career services would play on campus.

But too often, higher education administrators aren't looking at career education in an interconnected, integrated way across the fabric of the institution. As a result, students in most institutions, having put their faith in the process, end up frustrated and angry as they try to figure out a path from college to career—even as employers ask students to be *more* prepared earlier in their college careers.

The result: Thousands upon thousands of recent graduates, often having taken on massive debt, find themselves unemployed—and four in ten of **all recent graduates are underemployed**. You can begin to understand why they're disappointed. Their colleges are making sweeping promises that they are not fulfilling.

Many educators will tell you that just a small percentage of students—perhaps as few as 20 percent—arrive at college well-directed. Most need help figuring out their academic and career goals. That is especially true of students from low-income families and those studying the liberal arts.

Redefining the mission of career services can help. But first, colleges need a common set of metrics across institutions that senior leaders agree are important. Students, in desperate need of guidance, must also be able to clearly understand the link between their college experience and careers.

However, historically neither colleges nor career services have ever agreed upon the career readiness metrics that define success. They've tended to measure job placement as their ultimate success metric.

Ironically, most schools historically have had a difficult time obtaining that data from their graduates—and obtain that information long after students have graduated from their college. It's then too late to be helpful.

It's therefore important to look at two distinct sets of the metrics. **First** is what happens during the college experience and how institutions can measure their progress, with a focus on equitable outcomes.

If we were to take this problem seriously, what would that look like? What would we measure and do while students were in our care?

Forward-thinking institutions are already starting to incorporate that approach. Paul Dosal, vice president for Student Success at the University of South Florida, says USF's definition of student success includes career success. "We aim to prepare our graduates for success in the marketplace or graduate and professional schools, so we already measure job placement rates and starting salaries of our graduates to assess our performance. We also monitor other metrics that lead to success in the workplace, like internships, service learning, and undergraduate research experiences."

The City University of New York Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez says universities should focus on social mobility and career infrastructure. Work-based learning, for example, is one important element. "We must help all students, especially first-generation students, gain access to work-based learning that can help them both gain skills and awareness of new career possibilities."

This social capital is critical. Wyner, of Aspen Institute, notes that equitable outcomes start with equitable access to programs that matter. "Achieving equitable outcomes requires a focus on labor market outcomes. Nationally, Black, Latinx, Indigenous and lower-income students enroll at high rates in degree and credential programs that lead to low-wage jobs while, at the same time, infrequently complete STEM and other programs that lead to the most remunerative careers. Colleges and universities committed to achieving equitable outcomes must focus not only on the important goal of closing race- and income-based gaps in graduation rates, but to equalize the kinds of programs from which different groups of students graduate."

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Félix Matos Rodríguez

Chancellor, The City University of New York (CUNY)

Metrics that Matter—During College

Track, analyze and compare the following student data over time, by program/degree/department, as well as by student demographics and sub-groups (affinity, interests, etc.):



Student Engagement

- ✓ Complete Handshake (or other) student profile
- ✓ Career coach appointments
- ✓ Career event/program attendance
- ✓ Internship/job applications
- ✓ Interviews



Career Readiness

- ✓ Updated college resume
- ✓ Updated LinkedIn profile
- ✓ Career Readiness score



Social Capital

- ✓ Student-employer connections
- ✓ Networking event participation



Experiential Learning

- ✓ Academic programs with integrated internships/work-based learning
- ✓ Internships, co-ops and other work-related experiences
- ✓ Intensive research experiences
- ✓ Service learning experiences

Outcomes that Matter after College

To hold themselves accountable, colleges must also be willing to measure what happens after students graduate to look at the extent to which a college is fully delivering on its mission to prepare students for life after college.

Metrics that Matter—At and Post-Graduation

For the graduating student body, starting at graduation and at three and six months post-graduation, ask the following questions in the First Destination Survey:



First destination outcome

Have you accepted a job or graduate school or other form of vocation/employment/education?



Outcome satisfaction

How happy are you with your employment/graduate school/other outcome?



Level of employment

For what you accepted, do you need a college degree?



Academic alignment

For what you accepted, is your major or degree aligned with what you will be doing?



Competency alignment

For what you accepted, will you use the knowledge and skills you learned in college?



Applied competencies

For what you accepted, what specific knowledge and skills will you be using?



Career readiness

Rate your confidence level of your career readiness—to secure employment and succeed at work.



Social capital

Rate how your connections from college (students, alumni, employers, faculty, staff, parents, others) helped you in your career development.



Qualitative ROI

Rate the effectiveness of your college in preparing you for work and life after college.

Metrics that Matter—Alumni Perspective

For alumni at five and 10 years post-graduation, let's ask the following questions in a regular alumni survey:



Lifelong learning

How have you continued your personal and professional education post-college?



Academic alignment

Given your career to date, is what you studied in college aligned with what you are doing?



Applied competencies

Given your career to date, what specific knowledge and skills from college have you used?



Social capital

Given your career to date, rate how your connections from college (students, alumni, employers, faculty, staff, parents, others) helped you in your career development.



Qualitative ROI

Given your career to date, rate the effectiveness of your college in preparing you for work and life after college.

Those metrics, while detailed, are not actually complex. They get to the heart of understanding students' sense of career and life readiness, how they perceive their school in important dimensions, and how their academic experience aligns with their career path. Ask those questions in the First Destination Survey (FDS) of graduates and a survey of alumni five and ten years postgraduation. Those metrics should be straightforward to gather, given the FDS technology offered by external vendors and the social media and communications tools now available to universities.

Section 2

How did we get here? A Brief History of the Evolution of Career Services on Campus

While critics may reject the idea that a main purpose of college is to help graduates find jobs, remember that the first big push to educate large numbers of Americans, more than 150 years ago, came with the development of land-grant and technical colleges. The grants funded 69 colleges, including Cornell University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison.⁷

While the need for teachers in the 1920s—due to the post-World War I baby boom—helped create vocational guidance programs for graduating teachers, most career services offices arose after World War II, during the era of surging higher education enrollment, a result of the G.I. Bill. College enrollment was on the rise and employers were clamoring to find ways to match so many graduates with job demands.

Career services offices arose not only to interface with employers but also to help students navigate post-college job searches. As a result, colleges began posting and curating job listings, reviewing resumes, and arranging mock interviews.⁸

In the 1970s and 1980s, a slowing economy and shift to retail and service industries helped transform the placement model to a career counseling and planning model, one that emphasized a stronger focus on preparing students for career decision-making and planning.

In the 1990s, the dot-com boom re-engaged employers on university campuses and created a stronger employer-relations focus in career centers. Emerging technologies and social media advanced this networking paradigm in the 2000s to a new level of connectedness for students and employers, as well as alumni, faculty, and families.

In the 2010s, we claimed that all signs pointed to an integrated model of customized connections and communities that extends responsibility for college employability beyond the walls of career centers, which typically exist on the periphery of the campus community, to an ecosystem that fully

⁷ Library of Congress, "Morrill Act: Primary Documents in American History." Accessed August 30, 2021, <https://guides.loc.gov/morrill-act>.

⁸ Selingo, Jeff, "College Students Want Jobs After Graduation. So How Can Campus Career Centers Better Help Them?" LinkedIn, July 10, 2017, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/college-students-want-jobs-after-graduation-so-why-campus-selingo>.

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“The changing student demographics, plus the relative ease of making connections via today’s technology, along with the current social environment serve as a foundation for the shifting need to provide more equitable access to social capital and experiences.”

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engages the entire university network of students, alumni, faculty, employers, families, and surrounding communities.⁹

Since then, university career centers have gradually done away with outdated transactional models to make way for customized connections and communities to educate and engage students and stakeholders.

In just the past few years, we have already moved into a new paradigm focused on social mobility. As Farouk Dey and Christine Cruzvergara cover in their most recent article on the future direction of career services, every era of career services has been precipitated by a catalytic event in the economy, and this time is no different. The changing student demographics, plus the relative ease of making connections via today’s technology, along with the current social environment serve as a foundation for the shifting need to provide more equitable access to social capital and experiences.

⁹ Cruzvergara, Christine Y., and Farouk Dey, “Five Future Directions in University Career Services.” LinkedIn, November 6, 2019, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/five-future-directions-university-career-services-cruzvergara>.

Section 3

Three Big Trends Shifting the Need

As U.S. colleges and universities emerge from the post-pandemic era, one thing seems certain: not all will survive. West Virginia University President Gordon Gee has said that only “blue water institutions”—those that are forward-looking and open to change—will likely survive over the next several years. Part of that change, he says, is university presidents’ and faculty’s willingness to shift thinking on career readiness—the pandemic has prompted a “great awakening” to the importance of career preparedness, he says. There are three key trends that will have a profound impact upon universities’ survival:

01 Enrollment/Demographic Changes

Institutions of higher education were never designed for the students we serve today. As **enrollment dips** and as **student demographics shift** the student bodies we serve, universities must be prepared to educate, retain, and make successful an increasing number of students of nontraditional age, those who are underrepresented, from low-income households, or the first generation to attend college. These are the same populations employers seek as they diversify their own organizations and institutions poised to respond will be better positioned to meet this demand.

02 Virtual

In recognition of how operating in the virtual world **opens up access** to a greater under-represented and diverse pool of candidates, employers across all industries, sizes, and sectors are incorporating virtual capabilities into their recruiting strategy and practices. To ensure students are ready and have access, institutions must be proactive in adopting the appropriate technology and hosting virtual opportunities for students. Not only will that mode of interaction persist, employers’ expectations for students to demonstrate fluency will only grow as the world of work continues to take on more flexible and asynchronous ways of work and collaboration.

03 Skills

Employers are utilizing technology to identify and recruit students, analyzing their profiles and majors to find students with relevant credentials and skills. So, students need to add credentials and work-integrated learning experiences to their areas of academic focus. That creates an additional challenge for liberal arts majors, valuable areas of study that are not, on the surface, naturally aligned with high-demand career fields and may require additional skill and/or credential building.

Section 4

Key Considerations for Institutional Leaders

Perhaps the biggest challenge career services faces is that university academic leaders are out of touch with how prepared students are for work.

Busteed notes recent findings by Gallup and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges in which 96 percent of provosts said their universities were doing a good job preparing students for success in the workplace. Meanwhile, just 11 percent of C-level business executives and 6 percent of trustees said the same.

The data show that universities need “a mindset shift” that places career services at the center of universities’ missions.

“Until provosts start to think about career services as core to the academic mission, we’re never going to make progress,” Busteed says. “If this just continues to be seen as a student affairs initiative, we’re never going to get where we need to be.”

Universities, he says, must make internships and long-term projects key parts of their experience. “It can’t be seen as a ‘student affairs nice-to-have.’ It’s got to be core to the academic mission. We need to get to a place where from a mindset perspective, the chief academic officer looks at the learning value of work.”

He and others say universities would do well to focus on all forms of experiential learning, from internships to partnerships to project-based learning in the classroom.

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Brandon Busteed

President, Kaplan University Partners

Here are 10 ways university leaders can position career services to thrive in the future, of which several align with author Jeff Selingo's writings on learning and the future of work.¹⁰

1

Make career readiness a core component of the college experience.

6

Teach students to articulate and translate their learning from the classroom to their work experiences—and back again.

2

Give career service leaders a seat at the strategic table, and team them with other leaders at the institution.

7

Employ technology to personalize career education and engagement, recognizing that students in different fields approach and experience the job search differently.

3

Clarify the key outcomes and metrics (per the suggestions in this paper); then collect and report the data—overall and by all types of subgroups.

8

Partner with faculty to guide, mentor, and support students by encouraging the career engagement process.

4

Integrate career readiness education into the academic curriculum—offering credit or other policy-based motivators to ensure student engagement.

9

Activate your college's network of employers, parents, and alumni—and teach and motivate students to utilize that network.

5

Offer vocational options alongside the formal curriculum via externships, internships, or student work opportunities per the work-college or co-op model.

10

Provide career readiness and learning opportunities for alumni by connecting career services with graduate and professional schools to offer badges, certificates, and degrees.

¹⁰ Selingo, Jeff, "College Students Want Jobs After Graduation. So How Can Campus Career Centers Better Help Them?" LinkedIn, July 10, 2017, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/college-students-want-jobs-after-graduation-so-why-campus-selingo>.

Conclusion and Call to Action

The ideas included in this paper are meant to be iterative, adding to a debate that has long been underway about the future of higher education and how it can meet students' needs. Despite its challenges, the COVID-19 crisis has, in many ways, created an opportunity to rethink higher education and how it delivers the services that matter most. No matter what the future holds, the path forward starts with the metrics we use to hold institutions accountable.

As our nation moves forward, that must include a push to rethink career services, not only as an investment that's central to the core mission of higher education but one that will also produce dividends in the future, with more successful students and tighter bonds between alumni and their alma mater.

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About

Handshake is the number one site for college students to find jobs.

Today, the Handshake community includes over 9 million active students and young alumni at over 1,200 colleges and universities—including 150+ minority-serving institutions. We connect up-and-coming talent across all 50 states with over 550,000 employers recruiting on Handshake—from every Fortune 500 company to thousands of small businesses, nonprofits, startups, and more.

Handshake is democratizing opportunity and ensuring college students have the support they need to find a great job and kick-off a meaningful career regardless of where they go to school, what they choose as a major, or who they know. Handshake is headquartered in San Francisco and has offices in Denver and London, England.

Learn more at joinhandshake.com.