A New Vision for Career Preparation

May 2015
About This Report

President of the University of New Hampshire (UNH), Mark Huddleston, requested the assistance of the Curran Consulting Group (CCG) in assessing the effectiveness of UNH’s efforts in preparing students for successful lives after graduation.

Sheila Curran, president and chief strategy consultant spent five days on campus in April 2015, interviewing more than 50 students, faculty, administrators, Career Center and College-based career advisors, alumni, employers, Board members, and other stakeholders. She was asked to make recommendations on what it would take for the University of New Hampshire to become a national leader in the delivery of career services and career outcomes for its undergraduates. The project included an evaluation of the effectiveness of current services for students and employers within the UNH Career Center, Colleges, and other advising units. It also involved re-imagining the impact a transformational career initiative could have on student prospects for successful lives after graduation. Finally, CCG determined a plan of action that could take UNH from the status quo to a transformed approach to career preparation—one that could become a strategic asset for UNH as a whole.

The recommendations in this report are based on Ms. Curran’s analysis of interviews, written materials received from UNH, and her broad knowledge and understanding of the field. It should be noted that relatively little research is done in the area of careers, and what does exist may be flawed in survey design or response bias. Therefore, references are made to particular surveys only if similar conclusions have been reached by multiple researchers, or are consistent with findings from Ms. Curran’s own work with colleges and universities.

Ms. Curran has run a higher education consulting business since 2008 and is widely recognized as a national leader in re-imagining institutional approaches to career preparation. Having performed career-related consulting assignments with over two dozen institutions across the United States, Ms. Curran understands the importance of maintaining the integrity of the academy, while encouraging students to build on educational and co-curricular experiences to prepare them for the future. Prior to becoming a consultant, Ms. Curran spent over 25 years at institutions like The University of Michigan, Brown University and Duke University. During that time she transformed two career centers. She is also the author of *Smart Moves for Liberal Arts Grads: Finding a Path to Your Perfect Career*, Ten Speed Press, 2006.

Career development and planning is now a strategic institutional priority for UNH. It is expected that the implementation of recommendations in this report will positively contribute to achieving UNH’s goals, preparing students for a lifetime of successful pursuits, and equipping them with the ability to make good decisions and choices about the next steps in their lives.
Executive Summary

Under the leadership of President Mark Huddleston, UNH intends to develop an exemplary career services program that “integrates and enhances curricular, co- and extra-curricular, student development, and job placement”. In the spring of 2015, President Huddleston hired the Curran Consulting Group (CCG) to recommend a plan for identifying the key components for achieving UNH’s desired results, including a vision; key functions; staffing and organizational structure; space and resources; and, required approach.

Significant external pressures make excellent career preparation of great importance to UNH. These include:

1. Family demand for an ROI on their investment in higher education
2. Student focus on “getting a better job” as a key driver for attending college
3. Proposed government regulations relating to career outcomes

Working with Senior Vice Provost of Academic Affairs, P.T. Vasudevan, Sheila Curran, President and Chief Strategy Consultant of CCG, gathered and analyzed relevant career information from multiple sources. She also gained perspective from over 50 interviews conducted with stakeholders on campus from April 6-10, 2015.

CCG reached a number of conclusions from its interviews and review of qualitative and quantitative data:

• Many high quality career services take place across campus, but because they are not coordinated, they do not achieve their institutional potential.

• UNH is using an outdated model of career services. It must embrace systems, technology, and social media that enable a much more personalized and flexible approach. It must also be responsive to the specialized needs of the Colleges and the importance of alumni and employer partnerships.

• The impact of UNH services related to careers and further education is unclear. No cost-benefit analysis is done that demonstrates the value of programs or initiatives.

• Due to lack of vision and resources, career services are primarily reactive. Thus, it is likely that 90% of those who currently pursue services are the 10% of students who need help the least.

In our opinion, incremental change is not an option. Doing more of the same will only produce marginal benefits. Instead, investment must be strategic—based on an appreciation for the UNH culture and also a broad understanding of the factors that contribute to graduate success. We recommend using the research conducted through the Gallup-Purdue Index as a guide to designing new programs and strategies that will most likely influence graduate success.

The most important first step for UNH is to agree on a vision for career preparation. This represents a significant opportunity for the University, because the right vision will not only lead to enhanced career outcomes; it will also drive matriculation, retention, academic success, appreciation for the ROI of a UNH education, lifelong engagement with the University, and contributions to the State of New Hampshire.

UNH can achieve maximum value from its investment in career preparation initiatives if it makes long-term professional success a hallmark of its education. Proven effectiveness in connecting education to professional success, will enable UNH to better articulate its value to prospective students and their parents. Far from taking resources from other areas, we believe any money spent on initiatives relating to professional success will benefit all UNH’s strategic objectives. Ultimately, these objectives can be linked in one overarching institutional vision:

Great Education...Professional Success...Lifelong Engagement

This report explains how professional success is linked both to a great education and to lifelong engagement with UNH. It identifies what an ideal model of career preparation might look like, and offers recommendations for how to achieve the goals of that model. Finally, we propose a plan for engendering the support of the entire university community, whose help will be invaluable as ideas are put into practice.
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