

# Exploring the Parental Perspective on College Students' Employability

## Introduction

To succeed in the workplace, employers believe *soft* skills are as essential as traditional *hard* skills. While college graduates are highly confident in their intrapersonal, critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, employers feel otherwise. Recent studies show a widening gap between employer expectations and college graduate perceptions (Nunn, 2013; Stewart, Wall, Marciniac, 2016; Twenge, Campbell, & Gentile, 2012). In addition to employers expecting deeper skills from college students, both parents and students have higher expectations for the resources and services provided by colleges related to college readiness (Fox, 2018).

Over the past two decades, parents have played a more prominent role in their student's college education, requiring that colleges be increasingly cognizant of parental expectations. Some of the factors driving this greater involvement include: the increase in college costs and expenses placing greater pressure on parents' level of financial contribution, a greater likelihood that parents attended college themselves resulting in more specific expectations for their students' experiences, and more recently, students living at home and attending college remotely as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic. While there is a popular conception of parents as helicopters hovering over their college students and stifling their development, the reality is that parents should be seen as partners to administrators because students are actively seeking the advice of their parents, particularly concerning developing the skills and expectations needed to transition to employment (Carlson, 2014; Simmons, 2008). Parents are thus an integral part of the development of students' employability both because they are demanding more involvement in the college experience and because students' decisions on how to make use of college resources are often made with considerable parental guidance.

Higher expectations from employers and parents place increased demands on institutions to prioritize students' career readiness (Cruzvergara, Testani, & Smith, 2018). Campus administrators are rethinking the mode and delivery of career education, including what services to offer and how to engage students. Furthermore, a gap exists between the resources offered by Career Services and what is actually utilized by students. Student Playbook commissioned research to gain ideas on partnering with universities in re-imagining services in a fiscally constrained environment. The goal of this research is to increase career readiness for college students by engaging parents. In order to effectively bring parents into this partnership, it was necessary to understand what skills parents believe their students need to be employable.

## Research Questions

This study examined the parental perspective towards their students' college experiences as preparation for the transition from college to employment. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What competencies do parents believe are most critical for getting hired and are lacking from the college experience?
2. What competencies do parents believe are most critical for success in the workplace and are lacking from the college experience?

## Method

The survey of *Parental Views on Career Readiness* included 14 items that measured parents' knowledge of their students' college involvement, post-graduation employment expectations, and demographic characteristics.

**Recruitment.** The survey was administered to parents of college students and recent graduates (within one year). Parents were recruited by obtaining names and email addresses directly from a diverse set of colleges and universities and through an aggregated database. Parents who completed the survey were entered into a drawing for a chance to win Amazon gift cards or were offered gift cards for quick response.

**Survey Instrument.** The survey included a combination of multiple-choice (select one or multiple response options) and matrix formats with options for open-ended comment. There was one qualitative question that provided parents with an opportunity for free response. Parents of more than one child were instructed to respond on behalf of their oldest child currently enrolled in a four-year college or university.

*College experience:* This section included parental expectations for resources, skills, and experiences students need during college. Parents were provided with a list of specific skills and resources to indicate the level of importance and their satisfaction with the availability and quality of these resources at their child's college.

*Post-graduation attitudes and expectations:* This section explored the skills parents expect their students to receive during college for sufficient workplace preparation after graduation. The skills included were informed by competencies developed by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) and included: critical thinking/problem solving, teamwork/collaboration, professionalism/work ethic, oral/written communication, digital technology, leadership, career management, and global/multicultural fluency. Additional items explored the basic tactics of attaining a job post-graduation (e.g., mentoring, networking, apprenticeship) and highlighted potential resources and services to support this process.

*Demographic characteristics:* The survey concluded with having parents report about themselves (e.g., highest college degree, race) and characteristics of their child (e.g., major, type of college/university).

**Reliability and Validity.** Validity refers to whether one is measuring the variables that one intends to and ensuring appropriate conclusions are drawn. Student Playbook assembled an expert panel to review the survey consisting of advisors with professional experience in career services and higher education. This ensured the participants were both informed and engaged by using appropriate and accessible language. (Groves, Fowler Jr., Couper, Lepkowski, Singer, & Tourangeau, 2011).

Advisors of Student Playbook with children either in college or recently graduated participated in a pilot test to ensure that items were clear, measured their intended purpose, and that the survey could be completed in less than 10 minutes. Revisions were implemented to improve the clarity of the wording and reduce the number of questions (by combining and rephrasing) based on feedback received from the pilot.

**Analysis and Reporting.** Demographic characteristics were examined to determine how representative the sample was of the participating institutions. Differences in survey items were compared by the students' class years, majors, and institutional types. Since the survey consisted of categorical variables, crosstabs with chi-square significance to measure differences among groups were performed. Open-ended questions were assessed using thematic coding analysis.

**Limitations.** Before reporting the results of the survey, it is important to acknowledge the limitations. The overall response rate (n= 331) was lower than desired. Furthermore, the percentage of respondents who skipped demographic questions was higher than expected. The ability to analyze differences based on class year, major, and institutional type was impacted because of these limitations. Despite these challenges, there are interesting results from this analysis that align with an employer's desire for improved career competencies among college graduates.

## Results

### Sample

The survey was administered to parents of college students and recent graduates within one year. Parents were instructed to respond on behalf of their oldest child currently enrolled in a four-year college or university. The final sample included a total of 331 parents from a range of colleges and universities. A majority of the sample drew from four-year public colleges and universities (67.7%) followed by four-year private colleges and universities (27.6%). The remainder of the sample included write-in responses that could not be interpreted and assigned to the named categories. Of the total sample (n= 331), more than one-quarter skipped the demographic questions (e.g., race, highest degree earned). Describing race, more than half the sample identified as White, followed by Asian (7%), Latinx (5%), Black (5%), and the remaining answered either American Indian or “Didn’t know or preferred not to answer”. Many parents who completed the survey had personal experience in higher education: graduate or professional degree (40%), a bachelor’s degree (36%), or had at least some college (11.6%), or an associate degree (5.6%); therefore, it was expected that this group of parents would have many opinions on career readiness based on their own college experiences.

When reporting analysis, first results will be presented for the entire sample followed by comparing the following groups: by institutional type, by class year, and by major. Institutional type comparisons were performed between four-year private and public colleges and universities. To examine differences by class year, the following four groups were compared: first-year students and sophomores combined, juniors, seniors, and college graduates. Student majors were compared in two ways. The first was between students majoring in Arts and Humanities compared to all other majors; and the second comparison was between Business, Math, Computer Science, and Engineer majors and all other majors.

**Results of the overall sample.** Overall, parents were knowledgeable about their student’s involvement during college. The following student involvement opportunities were the most common: leadership role in a student club or organization, including fraternity or sorority (n= 137), community service (n= 104), internship (n= 102), off-campus employment (n= 96), on-campus employment (n= 87), intercollegiate athletics (n= 46), and research with a professor (n= 44). There were also a variety of write-in responses including involvements in music theater and performance groups, religious organizations, and the school newspaper. Some parents indicated that they were not familiar with their student’s involvements or their involvements were on hold because of COVID-19.

Parents expect that the first job after college should provide a pathway to a long-term career (68.3%), determination of goals, priorities, and career plans (52.9%), financial independence (51.4%), and preparation for graduate education (30.8%). When asked whether their college student is receiving (or graduate received) the necessary skills and preparation from their college or university to obtain employment, more than three-quarters of parent respondents agreed or strongly agreed. While most of the parent respondents were satisfied with the career education and advising services provided by their student’s college or university (67%), one-third of parents expressed dissatisfaction. Examining results based on class year, major, and institutional type provided some understanding of where these differences in satisfaction may lie. The remainder of the results illuminate some of the aspects of career education parents desire to be improved and priority areas of focus based on parental expectations and attitudes.

Parents were asked to rate the level of importance of career readiness competencies. The Likert scale ranged from 1= ‘Not important to me’ to 5= ‘Essential’. Parents selected the following competencies as essential for sufficient workplace preparation after graduation: professionalism/work ethic (59.6%), critical thinking/problem solving

(57.9%), oral and written communication (55.3%), teamwork/collaboration (48.7%), digital technology (36.4%), career preparation (31.9%), leadership (26.3%), and global and multicultural fluency (14.2%).

Next, parents were asked to indicate the level of importance they place on specific career education resources and opportunities, and how satisfied they are with these services provided by their student’s college or university.

**Level of importance parents place on career education resource (Percentages)**

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Not Important</i>	<i>Somewhat Important</i>	<i>Important</i>	<i>Very Important</i>	<i>Essential</i>
Access to internships/ apprenticeships/paid employment	3.2	5.5	16.4	37.9	37.0
Interview skills training	1.2	6.2	25.3	39.8	27.4
Resume workshops	2.9	10.3	31.4	33.5	21.9
Mentoring with staff/faculty	1.2	9.0	28.2	42.0	19.6
Job fairs	3.0	17.8	29.2	33.1	16.9
Employer info sessions	4.7	13.1	33.5	33.9	14.8
Coaching	4.6	16.2	39.0	25.7	14.5
On-campus interviews	3.8	16.1	36.9	29.7	13.6
Networking with alumni	4.1	26.2	32.4	25.8	11.5
Credentialing (e.g., certificates, digital badges)	14.5	27.2	34.5	14.5	9.4
Student club/organization leadership positions	6.9	32.7	31.0	22.9	6.5

The table above illustrates a range of career readiness resources. As the results above show, the resources parents deem most essential are those resources that are most directly related to seeking employment (e.g., access to internships, apprenticeships, paid employment, interview skills training, resume workshops, and mentoring with staff and faculty). The table below describes parents’ level of satisfaction with career education resources. There is a discrepancy between the resources parents deem as important and their satisfaction with resources. Across all career education resources, at most half of respondents reported satisfaction and the other half were either dissatisfied or not familiar with the resource.

**Parents’ level of satisfaction with career education resource (Percentages)**

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Very Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>Not Familiar</i>
Access to internships/ apprenticeships/paid employment	5.5	18.9	37.8	13.8	24.0
Interview skills training	5.0	14.6	31.4	11.7	37.2
Resume workshops	4.6	9.2	41.4	13.4	31.4
Mentoring with staff/faculty	5.0	19.0	45.5	15.3	15.3
Job fairs	4.3	11.2	37.8	11.6	35.2
Employer info sessions	5.6	10.7	31.3	9.4	42.9
Coaching	4.2	17.2	34.3	5.4	38.9

On-campus interviews	5.2	12.4	35.2	9.9	37.3
Networking with alumni	3.3	18.3	39.4	10.0	29.0
Credentialing (e.g., certificates, digital badges)	2.6	9.1	33.6	7.3	47.4
Student club/organization leadership positions	2.1	8.7	51.0	19.5	18.7

Given the disparity between the importance parents placed on the career education resources provided and their level of satisfaction with the services provided by their student’s college or university, crosstabs were run to explore the relationships among parents’ level of importance and their level of satisfaction.

**Parents’ level of satisfaction with career education resources they view as *essential* (Percentages)**

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Not Familiar</i>	<i>Dissatisfied + Very Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Satisfied + Very Satisfied</i>
Access to internships/ apprenticeships/paid employment	21.1	31.1	47.8
Interview skills training	36.9	32.3	30.8
Resume workshops	23.1	23.1	53.8
Mentoring with staff/faculty	8.3	33.3	58.3
Job fairs	35.0	15.0	50.0
Employer info sessions	45.7	31.4	22.9
Coaching	25.7	51.4	22.9
On-campus interviews	40.6	18.8	40.6
Networking with alumni	25.9	25.9	48.1
Credentialing (e.g., certificates, digital badges)	36.4	13.6	50.0
Student club/organization leadership positions	12.5	12.5	75.0

Statistically significant relationships resulted between resume workshops, interview skills training, and coaching. While the rest of the resources were not statistically significant, the pattern of parents being either dissatisfied or unfamiliar with resources they deemed important was present across all resources.

**Results by institutional type.** Parents with students attending public colleges or universities indicated greater agreement that their college graduate received or college student is receiving the necessary skills and preparation from their college or university to obtain employment (69.4%) compared to 60.9% of parents with college students attending private colleges or universities. No significant differences or patterns emerged regarding the level of importance placed on competencies or resources based on institutional type. There was a pattern of private college and university parents having lower levels of satisfaction with the career resources. The table below describes differences in parents’ satisfaction based on the type of institution attended by their student. Shown below are the percentages of parents satisfied or very satisfied with the list of resources provided. Those who were not satisfied, either expressed a level of dissatisfaction (dissatisfied or very dissatisfied) or indicated that they were not familiar with the resource. Given that a strong majority of parents view all of these resources as important, it is concerning that more than half of parents were either dissatisfied or not familiar with the resources, and even more so among parents with college students attending private colleges or universities.

**Percentage of parents satisfied or very satisfied with career resources, by institutional type**

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Private</i>	<i>Public</i>
Access to internships/apprenticeships/paid employment	53.3	51.3
Interview skills training	37.7	42.0
Resume workshops	50.8	56.1
Mentoring with staff/faculty	60.7	61.8
Job fairs	38.3	54.8
Employer information sessions	28.3	45.9
Coaching	39.3	39.5
On-campus interviews	33.3	49.7
Networking with alumni	52.5	47.4
Credentialing (e.g., certificates, digital badges)	28.8	43.9
Student club/organization leadership positions	63.3	72.0

**Results by class year.** The table below reveals how parents’ perceptions of what workplace competencies they consider to be essential differ by student year in school. While across all competencies, the level of importance is slightly higher as students are closer to graduation (e.g., junior and senior year), there is evidence to suggest that parents deem most of these skills as essential across all years of college. This pattern was especially present in professionalism/work ethic, critical thinking/problem solving, oral and written communication, and teamwork/collaboration. Colleges and universities can be more deliberate about communicating the ways these competencies are introduced and taught throughout the college experience with both students and their parents.

**Percentage of parents who deem specified competencies as essential for sufficient workplace preparation, by class year**

<i>Competency</i>	<i>First Year + Sophomore</i>	<i>Junior</i>	<i>Senior</i>	<i>College Graduate</i>
Professionalism/ work ethic	60.3	61.5	66.3	56.8
Critical thinking/ problem solving	61.8	61.1	62.7	56.8
Oral and written communication	57.4	57.8	53.0	64.9
Teamwork/ collaboration	51.5	53.3	49.4	45.9
Digital technology	31.3	35.2	50.0	18.9
Career preparation	31.8	27.6	40.7	27.0
Leadership	25.0	29.7	27.7	32.4
Global/multicultural fluency	13.2	15.6	14.6	18.9

The below table describes the level of importance parents place on career resources based on students' class years.

**Percentage of parents who deem specified career resources as essential, by class year**

<i>Resource</i>	<i>First-year + Sophomore</i>	<i>Junior</i>	<i>Senior</i>	<i>College Graduate</i>
Access to internships/ apprenticeships/paid employment	26.2	29.9	29.9	14.0
Interview skills training	25.4	26.8	28.2	33.3
Resume workshops	14.3	20.8	25.4	33.3
Mentoring with staff/faculty	17.5	21.6	20.8	18.2
Job fairs	14.3	13.2	23.2	18.2
Employer info sessions	15.9	16.2	14.5	12.1
Coaching	7.9	14.1	21.1	15.2
On-campus interviews	6.3	14.7	18.8	15.2
Networking with alumni	12.7	13.7	9.7	9.1
Credentialing (e.g., certificates, digital badges)	9.7	8.8	13.0	3.0
Student club/organization leadership positions	9.5	5.4	5.6	6.1



The below table describes the level of satisfaction parents place on career resources based on students' class years.

**Percentage of parents who are satisfied or very satisfied with specified career resources, by class year**

<i>Resource</i>	<i>First-year + Sophomore</i>	<i>Junior</i>	<i>Senior</i>	<i>College Graduate</i>
Access to internships/ apprenticeships/paid employment	28.3	23.9	33.3	14.5
Interview skills training	33.9	44.3	49.3	42.4
Resume workshops	45.2	51.4	62.0	66.7
Mentoring with staff/faculty	58.1	55.6	63.9	72.7
Job fairs	46.8	40.3	60.9	53.1
Employer info sessions	41.9	32.8	52.2	34.4
Coaching	38.7	38.6	46.5	33.3
On-campus interviews	41.9	37.3	50.7	56.3
Networking with alumni	46.8	44.4	59.2	45.5
Credentialing (e.g., certificates, digital badges)	27.9	43.3	49.3	43.8
Student club/organization leadership positions	61.3	73.2	73.6	78.8

**Results by major.** Interesting differences emerged when comparing parents of Arts & Humanities majors and parents of Business, Math, Computer Science, and Engineering majors to the rest of majors. Only half of Arts & Humanities majors' parents felt their student was receiving the necessary skills and preparation to seek employment or were satisfied with the career education and advising services provided by their student's college or university; however, 71.6% of parents of Business, Math, Computer Science, and Engineering majors felt this way. Colleges and universities should examine how they tailor services by major, and explore whether some majors have supplemented career services which may explain this disparity.

The table below shows the percentage of parents who deem the following career competencies essential.

**Percentage of parents who deem the following workplace competencies as essential, by student major**

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Arts &amp; Humanities</i>	<i>Business, Math, Computer Science, &amp; Engineering</i>
Professionalism/work ethic	52.6	54.8
Critical thinking/problem solving	69.6	58.9
Oral and written communication	61.4	50.7
Teamwork/collaboration	43.9	45.1
Digital technology	35.1	38.4
Career preparation	31.6	29.9
Leadership	26.3	23.3
Global and multicultural fluency	21.4	9.6



The table below shows the percentage of parents who deem the following career services essential.

**Percentage of parents who deem the following career services as essential, by student major**

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Arts &amp; Humanities</i>	<i>Business, Math, Computer Science, &amp; Engineering</i>
Access to internships/apprenticeships/paid employment	39.7	40.5
Interview skills training	19.6	27.0
Resume workshops	19.3	24.3
Mentoring with staff/faculty	24.6	16.2
Job fairs	16.1	14.9
Employer information sessions	14.3	14.9
Coaching	17.9	13.5
On-campus interviews	12.5	16.2
Networking with alumni	17.5	5.4
Credentialing (e.g., certificates, digital badges)	10.7	5.4
Student club/organization leadership positions	5.3	4.1

The table below shows the percentage of parents satisfied or very satisfied with the following career services.

**Percentage of parents who are satisfied or very satisfied with specified career services, by student major**

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Arts &amp; Humanities</i>	<i>Business, Math, Computer Science, &amp; Engineering</i>
Access to internships/apprenticeships/paid employment	38.8	56.1
Interview skills training	19.4	45.9
Resume workshops	46.4	59.5
Mentoring with staff and faculty	57.1	60.8
Job fairs	46.4	51.4
Employer information sessions	32.1	39.2
Coaching	33.9	35.1
On-campus interviews	33.9	44.6
Networking with alumni	46.4	42.5
Credentialing (e.g., certificates, digital badges)	39.3	35.1
Student club/organization leadership positions	67.3	70.3

**Qualitative results.** The survey included an open-ended question that asked parents how career-related resources provided by their students' colleges and universities have met their expectations, and what improvements, if any, they would recommend. There were a total of 239 responses that were thematically coded. At least ten responses related to each of the following themes.

### **Theme 1: Meeting or exceeding expectations**

Parents expressed that career resources either met or exceeded their expectations. Responses included praise and satisfaction. It is important to note that there were subthemes of desire for inclusion and students needing to be encouraged or prompted to attend or seek out by an advisor embedded within the praise. Advising was the second-largest theme described next.

#### **Parents' direct quotes exemplifying theme 1 include:**

- I think there are good resources. I've advised my son to seek them out, but unless a professor or advisor advises him to do it, he probably won't. So, personal recommendations from professors or advisors to seek out career-related resources are needed.
- It has given several opportunities for students to get involved in a variety of ways.
- She had tremendous support because of her outstanding grades. I hope those with average grades also receive the encouragement they need to improve to the next level.
- The career center helped my student feel more validated when she changed her major and future career path.

### **Theme 2: Career advising**

Parents had a lot to say about career advising. Examples of topics covered related to career advising included: resume development and improvement, communicating with advisors, being assigned a career mentor, advice around on-campus job opportunities and recruitment, preparing for interviews, options and decision-making related to a gap year, and the graduate school search process.

#### **Parents' direct quotes exemplifying theme 2 include:**

- It provided opportunities to attend well-planned job fairs. An improvement could be assigning students to a particular career mentor in the university's placement office to provide a more personalized job search experience.
- Managing finances would be helpful. And career lessons and tips for those that don't have that perfect job. I would recommend free webinars or seminars for students to attend to learn.
- The career resources have not helped my student. They have given input on a resume but no guidance on actually finding a job or internships.
- There are very good opportunities, but I wish there was more push and better times to fit in the student schedules.
- They lack individual attention and time because there are so many students. This leads to them sometimes being unorganized or untimely.
- Longer appointment times- 15 minute time blocks are not good enough.
- I would like the university to host companies who would come to campus to interview and recruit students for available positions.

### **Theme 3: Not meeting expectations**

Parents expressed how career-related resources were not meeting their expectations. While approximately 1/3 of parents felt the services were meeting or exceeding expectations, the quarter of parents who felt services were not meeting expectations is striking. Parents were interested in seeing their child's college provide more resources. In particular, parents lacked confidence that the college would help their child find employment.

**Parents' direct quotes exemplifying theme 3 include:**

- Didn't meet expectations. Understanding that the student has to reach out, the school must do an active reach out to minority/students of color.
- I don't think my student was at all prepared for a career. She needs direct work-related instruction around how to behave in a professional workplace and how to take instructions from authority on tasks that don't always interest her.
- Services have not met expectations- not enough work reaching out and connecting with students throughout their tenure to provide guidance, insight, assistance, and connections.

**Theme 4: Internships**

The desire for better resources, advising, and assistance to secure internships, regardless of pay was a very salient theme across responses. Parents wanted their children to be exposed to professional settings, gain experience in the workplace, and learn the skills pertinent to their field of study.

**Parents' direct quotes exemplifying theme 4 include:**

- Better resources & assistance with securing internships
- Handshake is very useful, but it could tailor internships to better fit the student.
- NO, struggling to find internships with little to no help from university besides one virtual career fair where my child had only 5 minutes with company representatives – this is not enough time at all! Very disappointed!

**Theme 5: Academic advising, tutoring, office hours**

Parents also expressed the importance and necessity of quality academic advising – in addition to career advising – including tutoring resources and encouragement to attend office hours.

**Parents' direct quotes exemplifying theme 5 include:**

- I think there are good resources. I've advised my son to seek them out, but unless a professor or advisor advised him to do it, he probably won't. So, personal recommendations from professors or advisors to seek out career-related resources.
- I would like to see more conversations between students and department-level advisors re: future plans.
- My son is struggling to get counseling advice on his degree program, much less career advice. Availability of counselors seems to be short or they don't want to engage.
- I believe that my daughter has worked with her advisor on career-related resources.

**Theme 6: Did not utilize career center or I am not aware**

This theme acknowledges parents are unaware of career resources or expressions that their child(ren) did not utilize the career center.

**Parents' direct quotes exemplifying theme 6 include:**

- I have not heard of or been told that there are any career-related resources.
- I have limited understanding of the career resources available to my student.
- Unsure. I would have thought there would be more emphasis/support on a junior into senior year internship in the student's discipline.

**Theme 7: COVID**

It was common for parents to acknowledge the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the college experience including the shift to remote instruction and the ability to access career services and events in-person (e.g., career fairs).

**Parents' direct quotes exemplifying theme 7 include:**

- Due to the pandemic, I haven't seen much. However, my student has participated in research projects and has reached out to professionals in his field to establish connections. I would like to see him get an internship in his field to prepare him for his career.
- It seems that career-related resources have been limited due to Covid. The shift and continued policy of primarily online courses has been extremely detrimental to the learning process and related professional development
- Right now everything is virtual & services are limited. She is unable to get help with resumes & looking for internships which were originally available.

**Theme 8: Database, Career fairs, Technology (Handshake, LinkedIn)**

Parents expressed the value and utility of career fairs and technology to support the job search process. This includes utilizing a university database on opportunities with resources on resume writing, interview preparation, and other relevant topics, Handshake and LinkedIn for networking and connecting students to alumni working in their field of interest, and prospective employers.

**Parents' direct quotes exemplifying theme 8 include:**

- Career fairs provided by the college have been great in helping guide my child to choose a great path.
- My student has utilized the university database to find interview opportunities on campus and apply to jobs in his area of interest.
- Handshake is very useful, but it could tailor internships to better fit the student.
- His college does a great job of communicating with students. They help with resume and social media presence (Handshake and LinkedIn), have professional clothing on hand for those that may need it, plus they do role-playing for interviews. This is in addition to the database of employment opportunities to which the students have access.

**Theme 9: None, not qualified to offer a recommendation, not involved**

Some parents did not have any recommendations to offer.

**Parents' direct quotes exemplifying theme 9 include:**

- I currently don't feel qualified to offer improvements.
- I believe my child is getting an excellent liberal arts education, which I believe is essential for career success. He isn't far enough along in his education to seek career-related resources.

**Theme 10: Career pathway**

This theme describes the importance of introducing students to career-related resources as early as their first year, and then recommending additional resources geared toward each year in college.

**Parents' direct quotes exemplifying theme 10 include:**

- My student is new to Emerson (Sophomore) and has not used these services yet. I would recommend reaching out from the start to establish a relationship with the student. Perhaps being assigned a career person for the four years similar to an advisor.
- My student knew what they wanted to do prior to enrolling and continued on that same path.
- Needs to be more proactive and an expectation for students.
- There hasn't been any yet! The process should begin in terms of preparation during freshman year, then with actionable items starting sophomore year (including internships)

**Theme 11: Webinars and workshops**

Parents recommended offering webinars and workshops on career-related topics (e.g., professional etiquette, financial independence)

**Parents' direct quotes exemplifying theme 11 include:**

- Managing finances would be helpful. And career lessons and tips for those that don't have the perfect job. I would recommend free webinars or seminars for students to attend to learn.
- I don't think my student was at all prepared for a career. She needs direct work-related instruction around how to behave in a professional workplace and how to take instructions from authority on tasks that don't always interest her.
- There should be mandatory career readiness events/sessions

Finally, less common responses include as follows: feedback on in-person instruction, improvements on teaching, lab-based learning, participation in student professional organizations and networking with alumni, and the need for improvements on University communication to parents on career education.

### Recommendations

The *Parental Views on Career Readiness* survey conveyed parents' vested interests in their college students' employability and success in the workplace. Colleges and universities provide high-quality and necessary career education and readiness skills and resources, yet the current services are neither meeting expectations of parents nor employers. While it is important to acknowledge that for over a year, the world has been in an unprecedented public health crisis, the degree to which parents are requesting more and better career resources would have likely been communicated similarly before the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic may have intensified parent's feedback; however, it is more likely that the need for expanded and improved career resources existed even before the pandemic. While many parents gave their student's college a pass when responding to the open-ended question, there is a greater likelihood parents would have been more critical had this survey not been administered during a global pandemic.

While most colleges and universities are planning for a return to in-person operations in the fall 2021 semester, colleges and universities have not fully realized the devastating impact of the pandemic on fiscal resources. To reduce the gap between resources offered by career services offices, parents' expectations, and the services utilized by students, universities must seek partnerships with parents and third-party services, such as Student Playbook, that can aid in the development of the skills college graduates need to succeed in the workplace.

Employers expect deeper skills from college students. Students and parents have higher expectations for the resources and services received from colleges related to college readiness. Parents have a vested interest in seeing that students gain the *soft* skills that employers desire. Colleges and universities recognize that employers and parents are placing increased demands on college student career readiness, and campus administrators are rethinking the mode and delivery of career education, including what services to offer and how to engage students. The results of this survey provide colleges and universities with a description of the level of importance parents place on career-related competencies and the level of importance, familiarity, and satisfaction with career-readiness resources. Furthermore, the analysis illuminates key differences based on institutional type, class year, and major to help colleges and universities prioritize resource allocation and improvement.

An important lesson learned from the results was the need for career education to be introduced to students earlier in their college experience. At present, career resources are targeted during the junior and senior year, or the service is promoted at the time of need. In other words, interview skills, resume workshops, and employer information sessions are geared towards those students presently seeking internships and their first job after college. This approach does not provide students with opportunities for advanced preparation. For example, if a student attends a resume workshop, learns about resume writing, and is exposed to sample internship and position descriptions in their subject or field of interest during their first year of college, perhaps students would be more intentional about seeking out particular leadership involvements, employment experiences, and internships that would equip them with the desired skills necessary to be successful in the application process when they are nearing graduation. It is recommended for colleges and universities to design a career pathway for students that describes the resources available in alignment with specific career competencies and the recommended semesters and years to seek out these services.

Given the apparent differences between class year and career interests by major, colleges and universities need to account for the unique needs of students when creating a career pathway program. Parents of Arts and Humanities majors were less satisfied with career resources; therefore, tailoring resume workshops, interview skills training, and internship access to these students is important. Across all majors, parents deemed career coaching as an essential service; yet they were largely dissatisfied with the coaching available. Designing a career coaching program or outsourcing coaching services tailored to career goals based on major is a vital opportunity to supplement and enhance collegiate career support.

Finally, across all career resources listed on the survey, more than half of parents were either dissatisfied or not familiar with the resource. Amplifying communication to parents about career resources will better engage them in the process of supporting their college student's career search. Given parents' greater investment and involvement in the college student experience, colleges and universities taking a more proactive approach to educating and communicating with parents will likely save administrators from responding to an abundance of reactionary calls or complaints. This is an opportunity for career education services, parent and family program offices, and development to partner with entities such as Student Playbook when designing career education and career education outreach campaigns for parents and family members.

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