

Exploring the Parental Perspective on College Students' Employability

Executive Summary

Parents of current college students are very focused on the importance of college as preparation for entering the workforce. More importantly, parents now recognize that preparation for the workforce includes more than just appropriate coursework. Students must develop the soft skills that are critical for succeeding in a dynamic economy, and be able to navigate the complex relationships that come with an increasingly diverse workforce and a globally connected world. A new study commissioned by Student Playbook reveals insights into how parents think about these issues, what areas they consider most important, and how views vary across major, student year, and type of institution.

Method

Over 300 parents of college students and recent graduates completed the survey, *Parental Views on Career Readiness*. The survey included 14 measures of parents' knowledge of their student's college involvement, their expectations of the skills most important to attaining employment, and their satisfaction with collegiate career services. This analysis examines the differences between private and public colleges and universities, majors of study (Arts & Humanities vs. all other majors and Business, Math, Computer Science, and Engineering vs. all other majors), and class year.

Key Findings

Most importantly, it is clear that parents view it as very important that colleges provide students with the tools needed to obtain employment, including resume writing instruction, interview skills training, job fairs, mentoring with faculty and staff, and networking with alumni. More than two-thirds of parents view interview skills training, resume workshops, access to internships, and mentoring with faculty and staff as critical components of collegiate career services. The findings demonstrate that parents expect colleges to actively support and guide students' search for employment.

More broadly, parents expect their students' college education to set them on a pathway to a long-term career, enable them to determine their goals, and prepare them for graduate education. Parents ranked learning how to create a resume, access internships, interview for employment, and receive mentorship from faculty and staff as most essential for obtaining a first job out of college. The second level tier of skills parents expect from collegiate career services includes career coaching, on-campus interviews, job fairs, and employer information sessions. Some parents acknowledged the detrimental impact COVID-19 has had on in-person job fairs, employer information sessions, and on-campus interviews.

Disappointingly for college administrators, the higher that parents ranked the importance of a particular career preparation service, the lower they ranked their satisfaction with the delivery of that service. This finding was particularly pronounced in resume writing, interview skills training, and career coaching. Half of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the career services they were familiar with their student's colleges providing. Dissatisfaction was most pronounced for private colleges. When comparing private and public colleges, private college parents were less satisfied across all measures, especially with coaching, credential services, job fairs, employer information sessions, and career preparation.

As parents became more familiar with resources, their satisfaction ratings improved. Overall, parents were satisfied with the services they deemed essential; however, approximately 25% of parents were not familiar with what they considered to be essential services.

When comparing across class years, importance levels increased to essential as students approached their senior year. This was particularly apparent for digital technology, professionalism, interview skills, coaching, and job fairs. This suggests that as students near graduation, these factors become more important to parents, and parents become less satisfied. Meanwhile, many younger students' parents are unfamiliar with these services. Therefore, colleges should introduce these services to both parents and students significantly earlier in the college experience.

The survey results showed differences based on student major. Three-quarters of parents of Business, Math, Computer Science, and Engineering majors were satisfied with available career support. In comparison, only half of parents of Arts and Humanities majors were satisfied with their students' career support. Colleges would benefit from being clearer and more proactive in providing services that link humanities majors to career skills and opportunities.

Recommendations

Most colleges and universities are operating in a predominantly remote environment, with a majority of programs and services delivered virtually. As colleges and universities return to in-person instruction in the fall, they must also confront the drastic impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic on finances due to lower tuition revenues, returned or reduced fees and housing costs, and other impacts related to the change in the delivery of services. Even when operations return in-person, universities may spend years recouping losses, and some will be unable to recover. This creates an opening for colleges and universities to seek opportunities for supplementing and improving career support services. Colleges with career services that effectively help their students navigate this process stand to improve their standing and attract increased attention from parents and students alike.

Introducing students to career-related competencies during the first year of college is needed. At the same time, many services could benefit from enhancement, including resume preparation, interviewing skills, access to internships and employment opportunities, job fairs, coaching, and digital technology. Because parents explicitly stated that their students are unlikely to seek out career services on their own, encouragement from mentors, staff, or faculty is critical. Creating a career education pathway that describes competencies and resources applicable to each year in college would help increase knowledge and utilization of university resources and ultimately improve students' career readiness and success in the workplace.

When creating a career pathway program, colleges and universities should acknowledge the differences in career preparedness satisfaction by majors. Parents of Arts & Humanities majors were less satisfied with career resources. Tailoring resume workshops, interview skills training, and access to internships for these students is important. Across all majors, parents deemed career coaching as an essential service, yet they were most dissatisfied with the coaching available. Designing a career coaching program tailored to career goals based on major is a compelling opportunity to supplement and enhance collegiate career support.

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