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Creating Value

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Creating Value

U.S. universities dominate world rankings (World university rankings 2019, 2019), producing unsurpassed levels of research (National Science Board, 2018; Trimble, 2017), and they support the economy with graduates, jobs, and ideas. Graduation rates have risen steadily over the past 25 years (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017a, 2017b). Studies consistently find a positive return on higher education, even as tuition increases have outpaced inflation since the 1980s (Committee on Education and Labor Report, 2019; Gallup, 2015). Graduating from a liberal arts college leads to meaningful economic mobility (Hill & Pisacreta, 2019). College graduates typically lead longer and healthier lives, are more

engaged civically, and generate more economic output (Committee on Education and Labor Report, 2019).

Despite these facts, there continues to be widespread doubt about the value of a college degree. One must wonder—who are these doubters? As *Change* readers know, the doubters include students, employers, and citizens. Only half of graduates report, unequivocally, that their degree was worth the cost (Gallup, 2015). Only 28 percent of liberal arts majors are confident they will be ready for workplace success (Gallup & Strada Education Network, 2017). Less than one in 10 U.S. business leaders believe that graduates are well prepared (Gallup, 2016). These and other concerns contribute to troubling declines in public confidence (Jaschik, 2018).

By Penny MacCormack,
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In Short

- Doubts about higher education's value are a clarion call to *create* more value, more equitably, for millions more Americans.
- We can expand the value we generate simply by retaining and graduating more well-prepared and career-ready students.
- The Gallup-Purdue Index finds that faculty can double the odds of graduates thriving in their work and lives (Gallup, 2014), but too few faculty members are prepared to implement the evidence-based teaching practices associated with student success.
- The Association of College and University Educators (ACUE), through the CIC Consortium for Instructional Excellence and Career Guidance, is credentialing more than 500 faculty members at 26 institutions on how to embed career guidance and skill development into their courses.

We believe the doubts about higher education’s value are a clarion call to *create* more value, more equitably, for millions more Americans. Higher education’s value is typically enjoyed among *graduates*. This calculation of the value of a degree leaves out the millions of students who will not complete their studies. The National Center for Education Statistics (2017a, 2017b) reported that only 28 percent of the nation’s community college students earn an associate degree or certificate in 3 years; only 60 percent of baccalaureate students earn a degree in 6 years. Although averages vary by type of institution, the national portrait is clear: We must improve student outcomes.

To date, the nation’s “student success” agenda has largely focused on out-of-class interventions such as advising and supplemental academic support, structural reforms such as pathways of study, the elimination of noncredit-bearing courses, and the use of diagnostic technologies that aim to identify students in need of extra help. This leaves a “glaring ‘donut hole’ in many colleges’ plans: what happens in the classroom,” notes George Mehaffy, vice president for academic leadership and change at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (see McMurtrie, 2018, p. 35).

Much more attention must be given to the role of faculty and the quality of instruction—especially the use of evidence-based teaching practices—in efforts to improve student retention, degree completion, and learning. The degree to which students learn to think critically, work productively with each other, communicate effectively, solve complex problems, and develop a passion for a field of study or work depends on a faculty member’s ability to teach well. Excellent teaching will create the learning conditions that promote the outcomes employers prize and represent a quality, *valuable* education.



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THE CRITICAL ROLE OF FACULTY

We begin with some observations. First, the vast majority of freshmen indicate that “getting a better job” is a critical factor in their decision to go to college (Gallup, 2016, p. 1). Second, only about 50 percent visit a career center while enrolled in college, with mixed reactions on the experience (Gallup, 2016, p. 2). Third, many of today’s students are managing personal, employment, and family responsibilities. With such significant demands on their time, if students do one thing, they go to (or, increasingly, log onto) class. These hundreds of hours of class time far exceed the hour or two spent, on average, with an advisor or at a career center (Education Advisory Board, 2015, p. 42).

Students’ time together with professors is our best, most consistent, and sometimes only opportunity to create and make our value clear. The 2014 Gallup-Purdue study of 30,000 college graduates confirms this. Graduates are twice as likely to be engaged in rewarding work and lead fulfilling lives when they had a professor who cared about them as a person, made them excited about learning, and encouraged them to pursue their dreams (Gallup, 2014). The odds more than doubled when graduates were assigned meaningful semester-long projects. Most students also look to faculty as mentors and find professors’ career advice even more helpful than guidance from career services (Gallup & Strada Education Network, 2018).

The important role of faculty comes as no surprise to experts in career guidance. Jeremy Podany, chief executive officer and founder of The Career Leadership Collective and

former executive director of career and corporate services at Colorado State University, noted, “We’re moving into a new shift. It used to be that students would ask ‘Who’s the expert? Where’s the career expert I can go to?’ But now they say, ‘Who do I trust? Who am I in front of the most? Who have I built a relationship with?’” (as cited in Candio Sekel, 2019, para. 3).

It is encouraging that Gallup (2014) found that 63 percent of graduates strongly agreed they had at least one professor who made them excited about learning. But only 27 percent felt as if a professor cared about them, and only 22 percent had a mentor who encouraged them to follow their dreams. Only 14 percent had all three (Gallup, 2014).

Moreover, the more that faculty assign academically challenging work, the better. Graduates were more than twice as likely to believe their education was worth the cost, and over three and half times more likely to feel prepared for life after college, when faculty made material relevant, had high expectations, and challenged students to push themselves academically (Gallup & Strada Education Network, 2018).

Every college student should find and benefit from the intentional learning conditions and experiences associated with successful lives and careers. To fulfill this vision, we must ensure that all 1.5 million collegiate educators are prepared and supported to teach well using evidence-based practices associated with stronger student engagement, persistence to graduation, and deeper levels of learning.

Achieving this level of instructional quality requires investment in our current faculty members, redesign of doctoral requirements for future faculty, and realignment of professional incentives. Failing to do so ignores the needs of today’s students, the discoveries of the learning sciences, and our expanded mandate to graduate many more students.

THE CIC/ACUE CONSORTIUM

Last year, The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) and ACUE, with generous support from Strada Education Network, formed the CIC Consortium for Instructional Excellence and Career Guidance. CIC’s 600-plus institutional members pride themselves on being student-focused teaching institutions, so the notion that their students, once enrolled, might still doubt the value or relevance of a liberal arts education was alarming. Most private liberal arts colleges do not have large endowments, are tuition dependent, and are particularly vulnerable to negative perceptions of their value.

The coalition formed to address this issue head on, with and through faculty and their effective use of evidence-based teaching practices. Today, over 500 faculty members at the 26 inaugural members of CIC’s consortium are earning ACUE’s new Certificate in Effective Instruction with a Concentration in Career Guidance and Readiness. Collectively, this effort is benefiting over 60,000 students.

At each institution, cohorts of faculty are enrolled in ACUE’s online course in effective teaching practices. This strengthens faculty members’ ability to redesign courses and classes, create inclusive and motivating environments,

About ACUE

The Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) believes that all college students deserve an extraordinary education and that faculty members play a critical role in their success. In partnership with over 100 institutions across 37 states, ACUE prepares, credentials, and provides ongoing support to faculty members in using the evidence-based teaching practices that drive student engagement, retention, and learning. Faculty members who satisfy the requirements of ACUE courses earn certificates in effective instruction endorsed by the American Council on Education. ACUE’s Community of Professional Practice connects college educators from across the country through member forums, podcasts, and updates on the latest developments in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

facilitate active and higher order learning experiences, assess student progress and achievement, and succeed in online and blended modalities. All of these techniques serve to advance the intellectual and preprofessional learning outcomes we want to see students achieve.

Over the course of an academic year, consortium faculty are completing 25 learning modules, which were recognized by Quality Matters for their exemplary learning design. Each module consists of core components that immerse faculty in the recommended teaching strategies, demonstrate respect for their prior knowledge and expertise, deepen learning through rich videos of authentic classes and nationally recognized teaching experts, promote collaboration with peers, and prompt reflection on the implementation of evidence-based practices.

Faculty receive real-time feedback from their campus facilitator and ACUE faculty developers. To satisfy course requirements, faculty must implement recommended instructional practices, reflect in writing on their experience in light of student outcomes, and determine how to refine their approach going forward. This intensive experience provides faculty with an in-depth opportunity to strengthen their teaching in meaningful ways and sustain their use of effective practices.

Consortium faculty members are learning about and applying the core competencies in ACUE’s teaching framework, with a particular focus on the relevance to students’ career aspirations. Faculty are also learning specific ways to embed career guidance into their courses, demonstrate the relevance of learning outcomes to larger life skills, and design and implement semester-long group assignments that cultivate students’ job-ready skills.

For example, one recommended practice is to create opportunities for students to engage with upper level peers and alumni, so students understand the applicability of current

ACUE's core teaching competencies

Designing an Effective Course and Class

- Establishing Powerful Learning Outcomes
- Aligning Assessments With Course Outcomes
- Aligning Activities and Assignments With Course Outcomes
- Preparing an Effective Syllabus
- Planning an Effective Class Session

Establishing a Productive Learning Environment

- Leading the First Day of Class
- Promoting a Civil Learning Environment
- Connecting With Your Students
- Motivating Your Students
- Engaging Underprepared Students
- Helping Students Persist in Their Studies
- Embracing Diversity in Your Classroom

Using Active Learning Techniques

- Using Active Learning Techniques in Small Groups
- Using Active Learning Techniques in Large Classes
- Delivering an Effective Lecture
- Planning Effective Class Discussions
- Facilitating Engaging Class Discussions
- Integrating Civic Learning Into Your Course

Promoting Higher Order Thinking

- Providing Clear Directions and Explanations
- Using Concept Maps and Other Visualization Tools
- Teaching Powerful Note-Taking Skills
- Using Advanced Questioning Techniques
- Developing Self-Directed Learners

Assessing to Inform Instruction and Promote Learning

- Developing Fair, Consistent, and Transparent Grading Practices
- Developing and Using Rubrics and Checklists
- Providing Useful Feedback
- Checking for Student Understanding
- Using Student Achievement and Feedback to Improve Your Teaching

Career Guidance and Readiness

- Embedding Career Guidance Into Your Course
- Developing Students' Career-Ready Skills

coursework to future goals. Module content includes videos of colleagues at institutions across the country who are successfully including alumni and upper level peers in class activities and assignments. Consortium faculty learn from experts on the topic like Podany and are provided with a variety of planning guides, resources, sample activities, and assignments from which to choose and use to connect current students with upper level peers and alumni.

Within every ACUE module and course, faculty also have a unique opportunity to collaboratively observe and analyze classroom demonstrations. These video tutorials provide enrolled faculty with an opportunity to see recommended practices done well and to identify areas of improvement. These facilitated, online discussions and analyses help faculty avoid common mistakes as they prepare to incorporate new approaches into their teaching.

Faculty earning ACUE's credential with this concentration in career guidance and readiness are better equipped to develop students' ability to think critically, solve complex problems, and work together in teams. They are making more explicit the connections between coursework, career readiness, and engaged citizenship.

As a result, faculty are helping students to more effectively articulate how the knowledge and skills they develop in their courses will transfer to workplace settings, enhancing students' ability to write compelling descriptions on their résumés, and persuasively articulate in interviews how their coursework has equipped them with the proficiencies employers are seeking. These faculty are also extending the work of career centers by implementing approaches in ways that are still true to their academic identity and respectful of their subject-matter expertise, disciplinary traditions, and research interests.

At some consortium institutions, like Maryville College, the partnership with CIC and ACUE has initiated a new "integrated, intentional, and strategic" collaboration among faculty, career center staff, and academic affairs administrators (McDonald, Yeaple, Taylor, & Colter, 2018, para. 5). According to Maryville College leaders, the consortium "gives us a common framework as well as a motivating reason to get together and talk about how we might best craft our processes, systems, classes, and programs in ways that serve our students" (McDonald et al., 2018, para. 5). This integrated approach across the consortium directs more faculty to support and extend the work of their career center colleagues and provides a more robust support system.

Program evaluators from the Center for Advanced Study in Education at the CUNY Graduate Center have already found that the hundreds of participating faculty members are enthusiastic (CIC, 2019). There is a hunger among faculty members to improve teaching in ways that will help students engage more deeply in their studies while simultaneously guiding them toward career pathways that will lead to success after graduation. This reaction is particularly notable given that the coalition institutions already pride themselves on the quality of undergraduate teaching.

A participant from Husson University commented, "I find that I have to pry myself off the [ACUE] modules. This experience has improved my outcomes substantially. I wish we could have done this before now" (as cited in CIC, 2019, para. 3). At Regis College, a faculty member said, "I love the discipline of reflecting on what I have been doing and thinking about what I should experiment with, and then devising practices for my own teaching" (as cited in CIC, 2019, para. 3).

Both new and experienced faculty members are engaged. A participant from Albion College remarked, “I wish I had taken this course in my early teaching years” (as cited in CIC, 2019, para. 4), while another, from Lebanon Valley College, noted, “As a first-time instructor, this is all new to me. I feel better prepared to lead a lesson and facilitate a discussion thanks to techniques I learned in the course. And because of that the students have benefited” (as cited in CIC, 2019, para. 4).

Faculty also see the value of integrating career guidance into their courses, despite some initial skepticism. As a professor from Alderson Broaddus University put it, “Connecting current students with alumni from our program was beneficial in beginning to build a network of professionals” (as cited in CIC, 2019, para. 5). Similarly, an educator at Albertus Magnus College was delighted to see how interested her students are in hearing about possible career opportunities in psychology and in hearing how the skills they are developing will transfer to other courses and to their future careers (ACUE, 2019a).

Regarding group assignments requiring teamwork, a key demand in the workplace, one Mount Saint Mary’s University instructor saw new levels of enthusiasm among students as they talked about the results of their research and how they better understood the requirements necessary for their desired careers (ACUE, 2019a).

Overall, 97 percent of participants in the consortium have found recommended teaching approaches relevant to their work (CIC, 2019, para. 6). They are each learning, on average, two to five new techniques and implementing one

Inaugural members of the CIC Consortium for Instructional Excellence and Career Guidance

Albertus Magnus College (CT)
Albion College (MI)
Alderson Broaddus University (WV)
Bloomfield College (NJ)
Briar Cliff University (IA)
Butler University (IN)
Concordia University Texas
Dillard University (LA)
Elmhurst College (IL)
Goshen College (IN)
Husson University (ME)
Lebanon Valley College (PA)
Lourdes University (OH)
Lynn University (FL)
Maryville College (TN)
Mills College (CA)
Mount Saint Mary’s University (CA)
Nebraska Methodist College
Regis College (MA)
Roanoke College (VA)
Sacred Heart University (CT)
Stillman College (AL)
Talladega College (AL)
Tiffin University (OH)
University of La Verne (CA)
Wesleyan College (GA)

“Students are learning more, seeing the relevance of their studies, and benefiting from faculty members’ use of evidence-based instructional practices . . . An independent review of these and additional ACUE evaluations found that the studies’ range, depth, and rigor. . .reinforce the link between faculty development, teaching improvement, and student learning.”

or two new practices in each of 25 course modules (ACUE, 2019a). As a result, they have meaningfully expanded their use of evidence-based approaches.

Beyond the early positive feedback from the consortium, treatment-comparison studies examining the impact of ACUE-credentialed faculty indicate that investments in faculty are a powerful and economical way to create more value for more students. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University found statistically significant increases in student satisfaction and course engagement at Miami Dade College (MDC) across 6,100 student course evaluations (Morrison, Ross, Morrison, & Reid, 2017; Morrison, Wilson, Ross, Wolf, & Latham, 2017); a second MDC study found increases in grades across 220 courses (ACUE, 2019c).


Other evaluations are also very positive. For example, researchers at Delta State University observed higher grades and fewer withdrawals among 4,600 (nonunique) students across 314 sections (ACUE, 2018). At Texas Woman’s University, ACUE-credentialed faculty have closed the course completion gap for African American students across 113 course sections with 3,741 student enrollments (ACUE, 2019b).

Students are learning more, seeing the relevance of their studies, and benefiting from faculty members' use of evidence-based instructional practices (ACUE, n.d.). An independent review of these and additional ACUE evaluations found that the studies' "range, depth, and rigor . . . reinforce the link between faculty development, teaching improvement, and student learning" (ACUE, 2019d, p. 9).

NEXT STEPS

Efforts are underway to expand the consortium to include additional CIC member institutions, and ACUE is now offering this new career credential through existing and new college and university partners to faculty nationwide. We do so fully recognizing that career preparation is by no means

the sole purpose of higher education or the sole objective for our faculty. The value that higher education provides goes well beyond mere instrumental aims to more broadly guide our students to examine and achieve a life well lived. Who actually creates and delivers this value? When well prepared and supported, it's our faculty.

We create value every time that students and faculty are learning together. These powerful moments of insight, discovery, and self-awareness are the genesis of our value in this consortium and with ACUE-credentialed faculty at partner campuses nationwide. Together we can better prepare faculty to create the conditions for great teaching and learning, more often and with greater intentionality, so that many more students share in the value of our enterprise. 

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