Higher Education Labor Market Alignment – Using Data to Strengthen Programs of Study

Michelle Van Noy
Associate Director,
Education and Employment Research Center
Rutgers, The State University Of New Jersey

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The next Guided Pathways frontier in Michigan
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Overview

• Conceptual framework for understanding higher education labor market alignment to provide background and framing

• New research project to examine use of LMI by colleges and universities, preliminary observations from case study exploration
Increasing Concern About Pathways

• Rising student debt and economic pressures on college grads, combined with the uncertainty of the pandemic

• Higher skill expectations from employers, and changing nature of work

• Increased focus on role of community colleges in creating clear pathways to the workforce
Yet, Alignment is Not Well Understood

• Community colleges have a long track record of workforce development

• Yet, alignment is not well understood in terms of:
  • The goals of alignment, and how they reflect stakeholder needs
  • The range of approaches to alignment
  • Link between alignment approaches and outcomes

• Need for information on “what works” and how to improve outcomes.
What is Higher Education Labor Market Alignment?

Activities and outcomes to ensure that higher education institutions graduate the correct numbers of graduates with the necessary skills for the job market in a way that supports students’ career goals and is consistent with institutional mission and labor market conditions.

**Job Vacancy Alignment**
“Getting the numbers right”

**Skills Alignment**
Ensuring competency
Alignment Involves Balancing Multiple Interests

- Students
- Employers
- Institutions
- Labor markets
- Policymakers/funders

The Result: No “one size fits all” approach but rather a broad continuum of alignment activities & outcomes
Alignment Can Occur at Multiple Levels

Partners needed at all levels to achieve systemic change.
Alignment is a consideration at all points in the program life cycle!

- Support & Follow-up Services
- Work-based Learning
- Employer & Student Needs
- Competency Assessment/Self-Paced Learning
- Instructional strategies
- Curriculum development
- Program selection & enrollment

Contextual Factors
- Institutional Factors
- Program/Institutional Structure
- Labor Market Dynamics
Three Core Activities Promote Alignment

• **Collecting/validating** information on employer and student needs

• **Incorporating** information into program components

• **Relationship-building** alignment activities are also important throughout
Multiple Measures of Alignment Outcomes Exist

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Job Vacancy Alignment</th>
<th>Skills Alignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attainment of credential with labor market value</td>
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<td>Graduate production compared to job openings</td>
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<td>Earnings, employment, and retention rates</td>
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<td>Direct assessment of student/employer experiences</td>
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<td>Real time jobs data on turnover</td>
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However, Assessing Alignment Outcomes is Not Precise or Easy

• Need to consider:
  • Time horizon
  • Balance of stakeholder goals

• Challenge of linking alignment activities and outcomes
Use of Data - Job Vacancy Alignment

- Career advising – alumni
- Career advising - current students
- Employer engagement
- Guided pathways
- Identification of equity issues
- New program development
- Program reviews
- Enrollment management/recruitment
- Strategic planning
Use of Data - Skills Alignment

- New program development
- Program reviews
- Skill mapping/awareness
- Instructional strategies
- Work-based learning activities
Types of Data / Data Sources

Types of Data:
• Real time jobs data
• Federal and state statistical data
• State wage records data
• Surveys and interviews with industry

Data Sources:
• Vendors – EMSI, Burning Glass, Chmurra/JobsEQ
• State offices – departments of education or labor
• College system offices
• In-house data collection
Structures to promote use of LMI

• Office on LMI (other than IR)
• Committees
• Training
• Tools
• Dashboards
Recommendations/Conclusions

• Recognize a range of LMA approaches and metrics exist; use multiple metrics

• Recognize that LMI data use is art and science

• Promote a dialogue across stakeholders to develop consensus about goals, approaches, and metrics

• Integrate data into operations to promote sustainability
For more information, contact:

Michelle Van Noy, Ph.D.
mvannoy@rutgers.edu
http://smlr.rutgers.edu/eerc