

What the Future Holds: Career Expectations of Students in the Colorado Helps Advanced Manufacturing Program

Overview: The Colorado Helps Advanced Manufacturing Program (CHAMP) was a four-year, U.S. Department of Labor Trade Adjustment Act-funded project under which seven community colleges, a technical college, and a four-year university worked with employers to develop a pipeline of qualified advanced manufacturing workers.

The Rutgers University Education and Employment Research Center (EERC) participated in CHAMP as a third-party evaluator, assessing how the program worked and how successful it was in meeting its goals. As part of its evaluation, EERC surveyed about 245 students at eight of the nine CHAMP schools to find out: 1) Do students prioritize short-term or long-term economic outcomes when choosing an academic program? 2) Do they have an accurate understanding of how graduates in their chosen field fare in the labor market? 3) Does providing students with information about career pathways change their understanding of their own career prospects?

About Career Pathways: A career pathway is a step-by-step sequence of education and training programs, support services, and work experience that a student can follow in order to secure a job and advance in a particular industry. Career pathways were an important part of CHAMP. A website developed for the program provided information on career pathways, and each school hired an advisor to help students navigate them. Before the survey, however, little was known about how students did—or didn't—use this information.

Survey Results: Key findings from the survey include:

- The students prioritized short-term economic outcomes over long-term. They rated getting a job immediately after graduation as more important than getting a job with opportunities for advancement.
- The students were reasonably accurate in their estimates of how much former students in their chosen field typically earn immediately after graduation. But they significantly overestimated the long-term earnings of former students in the fields of production/assembly and welding.
- The majority of students expected to earn more than the typical graduate in their field.
- The majority of students also expected to find a job within a year of graduation, advance to better jobs in their chosen career pathway, and have long-term job security.
- Career pathways information had little effect on how much students expected to earn. Machining students were the exception; once informed, they lowered their expectations.
- The students, particularly those studying engineering and machining, did lower their expectations for getting a job after receiving career pathways information.

To find out more about the survey and EERC's evaluation of the program, visit <http://smlr.rutgers.edu/content/colorado-helps-advanced-manufacturing-program-champ-evaluation>.