



Career Services Strategies to Advance Equity

Findings from Four Institutions in the ACE-UP Community of Practice

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As an effort to advance equity in community colleges, the Urban Institute is documenting how colleges in the Advancing Community Equity and Upward Mobility (ACE-UP) community of practice address disparities in outcomes for students. By “equity,” we mean fair treatment and intentional strategies that eliminate disparities for historically marginalized and underserved students and ideally result in equal academic and career outcomes for all students. The goal of ACE-UP is to build capacity among participating institutions to design and implement best practices and emerging strategies to resolve institutional and workplace barriers contributing to inequity. This brief describes findings from interviews with staff and partners at four participating institutions and a review of documents about their efforts to advance equity through the provision of career services. It is part of a larger series of briefs examining institutional leadership and structures that support equity, data and metrics, engagement with employers, and career and supportive services.

Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW) leads the ACE-UP community of practice, providing participants with a range of supports, including individual team coaching sessions, bimonthly virtual meetings providing professional development opportunities related to advancing equity, an in-person meeting for community of practice members, and other topical small group meetings.¹ The initiative was launched in January 2023 and will run through June 2025. Our primary source of data in this brief comes from interviews with team members, partners, and employers from 4 of the 14 institutions participating in the ACE-UP community of practice.² Specifically, this brief highlights staff and partners’

descriptions of their college's equity goals and strategies related to career services offered to students at four institutions:

- Arkansas State University – Newport (ASUN)
- City Colleges of Chicago, a community-college system of seven independently accredited colleges
 - » Interviewees included system-level staff and staff members at two colleges within the system, Malcolm X College and Harold Washington College (along with partners)
- J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College (Reynolds Community College)
- Grand Rapids Community College

For profiles of each institution, see the appendix.

We interviewed 17 staff members and 6 individuals at partner organizations, including 2 employers, to understand colleges' equity goals, data and metrics, strategies implemented, key internal and external partnerships, and institutional supports for advancing equity. We also aimed to identify factors that helped or hindered progress toward their equity goals. The number and types of people we interviewed for each college varied, but across all colleges, we spoke with 5 individuals who identified themselves as career services staff.³ In addition to interviews, we reviewed applications to the community of practice and information about career services offerings available on college's websites. We also conducted surveys of institutions participating in ACE-UP, which yielded additional insight that will inform an upcoming interim and final report. In interviews, college and partner staff shared examples that shed light on the work that they are prioritizing in ACE-UP. They also shared examples of other work, which is related to their equity goals but extends beyond their ACE-UP priorities.

Key Takeaways

Many college staff and partners we spoke to described specific strategies for providing, revamping, or implementing new career services for students in alignment with their institutions' equity goals. Below in box 1 are key takeaways from our conversations with college staff and their partners about the career services strategies they use to advance equity. Following a brief discussion of the literature, each strategy is described in more detail followed by challenges and opportunities to promote equitable outcomes.

BOX 1

Career Services Strategies to Advance Equity: Key Takeaways

Connection to Equity Goals

- College staff shared that career services are important to their efforts to advance equity for students, especially those who may be underrepresented in targeted sectors or careers, to provide them with exposure to career options, improve access to desired careers, and increase students' job readiness and advancement.

Strategies and Insights

- Career fairs, employer speaker series, resume workshops, and job listservs are among the methods college staff used to improve, revamp, or implement new services to increase understanding of career options and provide opportunities to interact with employers for students who might have more limited professional connections or knowledge of how to effectively search for jobs.
- College staff provide career navigation support to increase access to desired careers through career coaching and reconfiguring their career services offerings (e.g., opening new standalone offices and creating new roles for career services staff).
- Online platforms are being leveraged to increase staff capacity to provide career services and support students' job readiness and career advancement.

Challenges and Opportunities

- To address limited student awareness and knowledge of career services available to them, some college staff implement flexible options, such as hybrid (both in person and online) service delivery, and offer opportunities to participate in events in the evenings.
- Resource-intensive investments in career services support equity goals, but funding and capacity constraints can limit the potential for impact and affect sustainability.
- Strategies to expand capacity include providing faculty with professional development support focused on student career development and leveraging partnerships across the college (e.g., with academic advising staff) and with employers and community partners.

Background: Career Services as an Equity Strategy

Limited studies have documented the *effect of* career services on college students and their eventual career outcomes, leaving a gap in evidence about the impact of career services. Data have traditionally been about the volume or amount of services offered rather than how those services affected students and their outcomes.⁴ However, research shows a correlation between career services and job offers (attainment), the role career services can play in fostering a connection to the institution, which may impact persistence, and the importance of career navigation for increasing access to desired careers.⁵ For example, results from a National Association of Colleges and Employers survey of 2,022 graduates found that seniors from four-year institutions who used at least one career service received an average

of 1.24 job offers, and for every additional service, the average number of job offers increased by 0.05.⁶ However, graduating seniors who did not use career services received an average of 1.0 job offers.

Career navigation support can also bolster students' social networks, which is important for career development, especially for first-generation and historically underrepresented students (Thiem and Dasgupta 2022). College students' limited knowledge of career services options is a well-documented challenge. Increasing awareness of career services offerings is important, given that recent survey research from Inside Higher Ed and the Generation Lab found that 3 in 10 (31 percent) of 30,000 two- and four-year students surveyed said they never interacted with their college or university career center.⁷ Due to structural barriers, this lack of connection and engagement with career services might pose a particular challenge for students who lack the employer and social networks to obtain the careers they want (Thiem and Dasgupta 2022). Underrepresented students lack access to key drivers of career progression, such as accurate information about career pathways, skills and credentials, social capital, and wraparound services.⁸ Further, systemic inequities perpetuate occupational segregation, making it difficult for students from underrepresented communities to build financial stability in their careers.⁹ Career services are important for building social capital and providing opportunities for career exposure, which can help students identify new career goals and promote their professional development (Fuller et al. 2023).

College staff described goals related to advancing equity through the provision of career services and their motivation for participation in ACE-UP as part of their interviews. Their goals included the following:

- Improving retention and access to desired careers in college for underserved students, and ensuring they succeed once they get employed
- Providing career exposure and experiences while students are at college and a seamless transition to a career or university to promote socioeconomic upward mobility for underserved students
- Tracking the success of students (e.g., retention or employment) by subgroup, such as race and ethnicity, Pell-eligible status, or gender, after connecting them directly with an employer
- Strengthening colleges' relationships with employer partners to support future recruitment of underrepresented students

In the remainder of the brief, we discuss strategies related to the colleges' goals.

Strategies and Insights

College staff we interviewed considered career services an important approach for advancing their equity goals. Strategies implemented included providing exposure to career options and connecting students with employers, providing career navigation support to increase access to desired careers and leveraging online platforms to increase staff capacity to provide services and support students' job

readiness and advancement. College career services staff members we spoke with also shared their recent reconfigurations of their career services offerings, including opening new standalone offices and creating new roles for career services staff in alignment with their equity goals.

Provide Exposure to Careers and Connections to Employers

CAREER FAIRS

Career fairs are one method the colleges use to expose students to career options and expand connections to employers, especially for those with more limited networks. ASUN hosts one career fair per semester on each of its three campuses. A staff member affiliated with ASUN shared that the setup of the career fair promotes organic conversations as students walk between hallways and classrooms, rather than hosting the event in one formal event space. The staff member described how this helps alleviate nerves and allows people to hear one another by spacing out the employers so that they are far enough apart. ASUN campuses are in rural areas, and staff emphasized the importance of offering career fairs that include the opportunity to interview with employers on campus, thus improving participants' ability to participate in interviews.

The career fairs are probably the biggest thing that is exciting for the students.

—ASUN staff member

To encourage employer and student participation in career fairs, ASUN staff use several strategies. The career services staff reach out to their email group of nearly 300 employers to share opportunities to participate. Staff leverage data from the department about what days most students are on campus to schedule career events in alignment with busy times and use surveys and sign-in sheets to track students that attend workshops. In addition, career events are shared with students and staff via email and during meetings. The college is intentional about conducting outreach about career events to current students and students participating in other programs, including secondary students and those in adult education.¹⁰

Reynolds Community College and Malcolm X College staff also offer career fair opportunities for their students. Reynolds Community College hosted a hiring fair in April 2024 and had a month of programming in March for students leading up to the event, including resume writing, developing an “elevator pitch,” and mock interviews. A career services staff member shared that the hiring fair was very successful, with over 50 employers in attendance. Malcolm X College offers job fairs at varying times and modalities to encourage participation. This includes hosting both in-person and online job fairs, and scheduling job fairs at alternating times in the morning and the afternoon to ensure students can access those opportunities. Additionally, many of the college's partners are in the health care sector,

and staff bring employers to campus for a health science job fair. Malcolm X College staff track student engagement and found that the sector-specific job fairs are highly effective, often leading to second-level interviews and job offers because they target students who are completing their health care programs and bring in employers who are eager to participate.

MOCK INTERVIEWS, JOB TOURS, AND EMPLOYER SPEAKER SERIES

Broadening students' professional networks and experiential learning opportunities can be part of the solution to link students' education experiences with desired careers (Thiem and Dasgupta 2022). College staff provide opportunities for students to interact with employers via mock interviews, job tours, and employer speaker series. Creating opportunities for direct connection can help students build social capital, creating ties for students that span socioeconomic groups. For example, Reynolds Community College set up its career services office as an open space where recruiters from an employer can come and set up shop to do mock interviews. Recently, an Air Force recruiter hosted mock interviews at the college. Employer partners affiliated with Malcolm X College offer mock interviews with students in classroom settings to prepare students for their interviews, and they engage their marketing team to increase appeal for these events (e.g., allowing students to “join [them] for deadly, deadly interviews during the Halloween season”). Malcolm X College staff also described holding two employer tours last semester, including to Bank of America corporate offices and Argonne National Laboratory, which offers two internship programs for students.¹¹

We took students to Argonne National Laboratory to learn about the Minority Serving Institution [partnership program] internship that they qualify for. They did a tour of the facility; they networked with other scientists. Students highlighted [by survey] we need more of these...we've had a lot of positive feedback from students.

—Malcom X College staff member

In addition, Malcolm X College hosts an employer speaker series focused on sharing with students the possibilities within STEM careers. See box 2 to learn more.

BOX 2

Malcolm X College “STEMulate” Talks

Leveraging grants focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), Malcolm X College hosts “STEMulate” talks where professionals in different areas of STEM come to talk to students about their career trajectory and possibilities within the STEM field. The talks are also hybrid, so students can engage even if they are not on campus. The initiative was executed in fall 2023 and has featured 11 speakers as of July 2024. The February 2024 STEMulate talk featured an employer from Discover Financial Services and described how she leveraged an internship opportunity and turned it into a career.^a

^a“Malcolm X: STEMulate Talk – Sara Elkasevic,” City Colleges of Chicago, accessed July 16, 2024, <https://colleges.ccc.edu/event/malcolm-x-stemulate-talk-sara-elkasevic/>.

PROFESSIONAL SKILL-BUILDING WORKSHOPS

In interviews, we also learned how college staff provide exposure to career options and connect students with employers through professional skill-building workshops. For example, Malcolm X College hosts workshops focused on professional skills, such as how to write a resume and cover letter, how to be an independent contractor, and how to establish a professional identity. These workshops are typically provided by the career center staff but sometimes will include external speakers depending on the topic. A Reynolds Community College staff member shared that she assists entire groups of students, and one professor sent her entire medical laboratory technician class to get help. Through the Reynolds Community College Career and Transfer Services Center, students can also get their resumes reviewed. Professional skill-building workshops at Reynolds Community College are provided by in-house experts and some are provided by employer partners. These workshops are open to any student, do not require registration, and most are offered in person and online. ASUN recently hired a staff member in career services in August of this year to provide opportunities for students to explore their career options and develop resumes. A career services staff member described how they go to each campus once a month to host student workshops, which include activities such as resume building and practicing interview skills with the students in an interactive format. To increase student awareness about these opportunities, they send emails at the beginning of the semester, letting students know about workshop opportunities.

Career Navigation Support to Increase Access to Desired Careers

CAREER COACHING

College staff we spoke with also described the importance of career navigation support for opening doors to desired careers. One strategy used by colleges is career coaching. This includes career coaching at the postsecondary and secondary level. Staff at ASUN shared how they leverage state grant funding to support a career coaching program in Arkansas that provides exposure to high school

students about their career options. Box 3 has more information about the Arkansas Career Coach program.

BOX 3

Arkansas Career Coach Program^a

Established in 2010, Arkansas's career coach program involves embedding college and career staff facilitators employed by ASUN at area partner high schools in the Delta Region to assist students with their next steps by exposing them to different career pathways to help ensure their success. The staff are not recruiters for the college but extend career guidance services for students moving from high school into postsecondary education. Key goals of the program include the following:

- increase the number of students who enter and remain in postsecondary education
- provide knowledge and participation in internships, apprenticeships, and exposure to postsecondary career training and certifications
- improve the effectiveness of postsecondary and career information given to high school students and their families
- provide high school students with information about career opportunities in Arkansas
- encourage individuals to learn about, prepare for, and finance a postsecondary education

ASUN's director of workforce coordinates with the career coaches on industry events and tours of the college for high school students, many of whom come from low-income backgrounds. ASUN also partners with a local nonprofit organization, I'm Making a Difference, to host career exploration activities. The partnership with I'm Making a Difference has been written into grant funding to support summer education efforts to introduce K-12 students to careers in advanced manufacturing, with support from the career coaches. Career coaches are available to any Arkansas student, with special interest given to youth and adults from low-income backgrounds.

^a "AR Career Coach," Arkansas State University - Newport, accessed July 16, 2024, https://www.asun.edu/career_coach.

City Colleges of Chicago staff also shared information about career coaching opportunities at their affiliated institutions. Within the City Colleges of Chicago, career development services vary by college but can include a student career coach assigned to students completing a workforce experience. Student career coaches support check-ins with students, share grade reports with employers, and ensure students have the supports and professional development needed to succeed. The system also leverages coordinators who do outreach to help educate people about available technical programs, recruit potential students into the programs, offer professional development, and prepare materials for students to apply for jobs.

Some colleges combine career coaching with other support for student success. For example, in addition to the career coaching program supporting high school students, ASUN career services staff will also help students complete an Occupational Information Network (O*NET) assessment to work through a career interest inventory to determine if a career interests them. Reynolds Community

College’s workforce development division, the Community College Workforce Alliance, has three career coaches who meet with jobseekers. A staff member we spoke with shared that the network of resources that those coaches have access to is broad, including access to basic needs supports. The staff member shared, “The fact that we’re really addressing barriers to employment is also furthering equity.” Grand Rapids Community College has student success coaches for every student, whether in a credit-bearing or noncredit field. Although the coaches offer support for academic navigation, they also provide career support, asking students questions about their interest in particular careers, providing information about what a job in an industry really looks like, and providing information about employment opportunities (e.g., labor market data) and chances to interact with employers in that industry. There are also metrics tracked for job placement. The coaches encourage students to attend sessions at Grand Rapids Community College with local employers and recommend students participate in talent tours sponsored by the local workforce board. Further, the coaches work closely with Grand Rapids Community College Job Developers, who meet with employers weekly, take students to visit employer sites, and provide resume and interview assistance to students. Grand Rapids Community College staff shared that Job Developers play important roles in helping students find employers that are a good fit.

From our perspective, when we start talking to you [students] because you're interested in a career field or you don't know what you want to do in a career field, having those success coaches [ask], “What are those barriers? You’re interested in this career. Great, so here's what this career really is. And here's who the employers are. And here's a shadow experience. Or here's a tour you can go on to see.” [It helps students understand if] this is what they want to do.

—Grand Rapids Community College staff member

RECONFIGURING CAREER SERVICES OFFERINGS TO INCREASE NAVIGATION SUPPORT

As part of supporting students’ navigation and increasing access to information about their careers, college staff we spoke with shared they recently redesigned their career services offerings, including opening standalone offices or creating new roles for career services staff in alignment with their equity goals. Reynolds Community College recently opened a physical Career Center for students. It used to be available by advance appointment only, but now anyone can drop in to access support from career center staff. When the center opened in January 2024, staff wanted it to be as accessible to students as possible and began offering walk-in appointments. Grand Rapids Community College offers career services for noncredit students and work-based learning opportunities in partnership with employer partners. The college has a proposal for the new budget year to increase services across the career

services division. Additionally, Reynolds Community College is creating a shared office at their downtown campus where the Community College Workforce Alliance will have its own office. The Community College Workforce Alliance functions as the college's workforce development division and is a workforce partnership between Reynolds Community College and Brightpoint Community College.¹² A Reynolds Community College staff member described the shared office as a “one stop shop” where jobseekers can connect with employers, meet with career coaches, and access funding through Reynolds Community College, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) services, or one of the state's tuition assistance programs.

Beyond launching new career services offices, the colleges we spoke with are also thinking about how to make current career services supports more accessible for students. For example, one staff member at ASUN we spoke with shared that she makes sure she is highly visible with student foot traffic, setting up in campus dining locations or at the libraries across different campuses to make herself available to students needing career service support.

I send out a lot of student emails that say, “Hey, I'm going to be on your campus next week doing this workshop in the Delta Grill, stop by...” I'm not one to sit inside my office. I'm out there in the hallways, in the food court, stopping by, talking with students sitting at tables, things like that.

—ASUN staff member

Leverage Online Platforms to Increase Capacity to Provide Career Services and Support Students' Job Readiness and Advancement

Online platforms can supplement career services staff's capacity to assist students and provide more opportunities for students to learn about various career pathways. Reynolds Community College is using technology to enhance the college's advising and career services capacity and to connect jobseekers to career opportunities.

COACHING PLATFORM

To help students navigate their college and career choices, Reynolds Community College uses an online platform called Career Coach, which is run by Lightcast,¹³ an employment data platform. Career Coach supplements advising and career services capabilities and helps staff better support students' job readiness and enrollment in programs of interest. Advisors at Reynolds Community College have begun to use Career Coach during their advising sessions with students. A Reynolds Community College staff member was hopeful that data pulled from Career Coach would eventually reveal information about student uptake of career services and graduation metrics but indicated that they have not been

collecting data for long enough. At the time of interviews, career services staff were still in the process of expanding the use of the platform across the college. One staff member shared a goal of expanding Career Coach usage by 20 percent each month.

NETWORK2WORKRVA PLATFORM

Reynolds Community College also leverages technology through the Network2WorkRVA platform. Network2WorkRVA connects jobseekers to employment opportunities through an employer, jobseeker, and service provider network and is an important complement to Reynolds Community College's career services (box 4). Network2WorkRVA, a "technology-based networking platform,"¹⁴ originated in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2015 to provide access to training and job-readiness opportunities for individuals who face barriers to employment, including nontraditional students. It is supported by state funding and has been piloted in several places in Virginia, including Richmond, where Reynolds Community College is located. The organization tasked with implementing Network2WorkRVA in Richmond is the Workforce Coalition RVA, which comprises multiple partnering organizations involved in workforce development in the region.

Network2WorkRVA's career coaching services, including three career coaches who work directly with jobseekers, are offered to any student at Reynolds Community College. At the time of interviews, Network2WorkRVA focused on connecting jobseekers to jobs within high-growth, high-demand industries in the region, including health care, information technology, manufacturing and logistics, and construction and trades. In addition to working alongside Reynolds Community College staff, Network2WorkRVA partners with other local organizations that provide access to supportive services, which help bolster students' ability to persevere in the workforce.

BOX 4

Network2WorkRVA's Employer, Jobseeker, and Service Provider Network

The Network2WorkRVA platform has three networks: the employer network, jobseeker network, and service provider network, which provides access to around 260 resources that support job readiness and help jobseekers overcome barriers to employment. The Network2WorkRVA service providers offer resources, assistance, and aid to individuals to help connect them to employment. To access these resources, a jobseeker fills out a survey and is electronically connected to these service providers, along with a customized resource plan that is tailored to their survey responses. The customized resource plan provides access to job-readiness services, including resume assistance, mock interviews, and soft skills classes, and provides information about how to receive assistance for certain basic needs such as housing, transportation, child care, or health care.

Challenges and Opportunities

College staff and partners described several challenges they faced and highlighted opportunities for improving career services to promote equitable outcomes and career pathways for underserved and underrepresented students.

Limited Student Awareness and Knowledge of Career Services Options

Ensuring historically underserved students have access to career services helps them overcome structural barriers, such as more limited connections to good jobs or lack of knowledge about how to search for those jobs. Career services can empower students by giving them access to tools and resources to navigate careers. Yet, students may not be aware of which supports are available.

In response to this, colleges are expanding and improving how they disseminate career services options to reach more students. As described earlier, Malcolm X College offers hybrid workshops and job fairs to increase engagement with career services staff because many students take online courses and are not physically on campus. A staff member at Malcolm X College indicated the flexibility to join hybrid workshops and job fairs helped increase student engagement with career services opportunities. At ASUN, career services staff work closely with the institutional research department to collect student contact information, which is used for developing and distributing surveys to better understand students' academic and career goals, such as transferring to a four-year institution or getting a job. However, the surveys do not always yield complete responses: one recent survey of 171 students produced 47 responses, which is a 27 percent response rate. To address low response rates and overall limited participation, career services staff are developing degree-specific outreach messages, so students are more likely to read and engage with the emails.

Twice a month, I pick two different technical programs and shoot [the students] an email that says, "Did you know all of these employers are hiring in your area for the role that you're going to get your technical certificate for?" I work with institutional research really closely and get that kind of information...so that I'm not just blasting everybody with every email.
—ASUN staff member

Limited Funding and Bandwidth

Grand Rapids Community College, Network2WorkRVA, and Reynolds Community College staff shared how funding constraints, limited bandwidth, and communication challenges impact career services staff's ability to effectively support students. A Reynolds Community College staff member indicated

that, although the college has talented fundraising staff, they face challenges effectively communicating the availability of resources to staff and students. A staff member affiliated with the City Colleges of Chicago also shared challenges related to funding for student career programs and shared that staffing is a challenge, and that most of the team members they work with are grant-funded. They expressed concerns about what will happen when the grants end, and highlighted that this is a challenge for diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Online platforms are one avenue to supplement career services staff's ability to assist students. As mentioned above, Reynolds Community College's Career Coach and Network2WorkRVA technology platforms complement staff capacity to strengthen students' job readiness and advancement.

I don't know what's going to happen [with the new budget year proposal]...all the COVID dollars are going away, but our argument is that if we want to have adult learners, that they're going to need these services as much or more than the 18-year-old.

—Grand Rapids Community College staff member

Multiple colleges described reorganizations of their career services offices and approaches. Although these changes can be helpful in increasing staff capacity and efficiency, they can also lead to lags in service and confusion about where to direct students. This can also create trade-offs regarding capacity versus hands-on career navigation provided. As described earlier, credit and noncredit students at Grand Rapids Community College have success coaches who work closely with the students to help them advance in their academic programs. Other colleges shared that they cannot provide personalized assistance, rely on term-limited grant funding, or rely on academic faculty to do so.

Supporting Faculty's Role in Student Career Development

Providing information and resources to faculty is one strategy to increase their capacity to support students' career development. At Reynolds Community College, faculty receive professional development workshops from career services staff to supplement their understanding of career service opportunities and better support students receiving them. One career services staff member at Reynolds Community College indicated that, at workshops, they ask faculty to bring their syllabi to discuss how they are preparing students in the classroom. Conversations with employers also inform these workshops, as career services staff can share with faculty the skills employers seek in their candidates.

Supporting Existing Career Services through Partnerships and Improved Data Tracking

Colleges have also leveraged external and internal partnerships to expand their capacity to provide career services. For example, partnerships with secondary institutions, such as ASUN's career coaches' collaboration with middle and high schools, help support students earlier in the education pipeline and introduce them to numerous career pathways before they even apply to college. Working with employers to increase access to job opportunities and elevating these opportunities with students is another example of effective partnership. City Colleges of Chicago is part of the Chicago Apprentice Network that connects students to employers, and City Colleges of Chicago also has a program called Xchange Chicago in which they engage local organizations to hire students as apprentices. The program recruits specifically from underresourced neighborhoods to promote equitable outcomes and career pathways. ASUN's career fairs also intentionally connect students with employers, and employers reach out to the career services staff when they have job openings.

One strategy some colleges are implementing to expand their capacity internally to provide career services is integrating their career and academic advising approaches, allowing for more coordinated service delivery. A 2021 landscape analysis by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities describes how strategies to integrate career and academic advising are more likely to improve outcomes for students “the more intentional the goal of equitable student success is at the outset of a career advising integration effort” (Career Leadership Collective 2021, p. 16). This integration can also help with cost savings and reducing redundancies in the overall advising experience (Ibid.). One example of integrated advising is Grand Rapid Community College's student success coaches, which provide support for both academic and career navigation.

Colleges' internal partnerships with institutional research offices also present an opportunity for staff to improve data tracking related to career services. Specifically, college staff expressed a desire to track student receipt of services and outcomes. While they are starting to understand more about student uptake of career services opportunities as data collection and analysis becomes more consistent, challenges remain. Reynold Community College leadership prioritizes tracking data and metrics related to career services. A Reynolds Community College staff member shared that the college keeps an “amazing” enrollment dashboard and is working on creating a dashboard for career services. However, because there is no existing benchmark to compare the data to, it is difficult to quantify the number of students benefiting from career services.

Conclusion

College staff described career services as important for each college's approach for meeting their equity goals. The value of career services was reinforced during a convening of ACE-UP colleges in June 2024. One participant described career services as the "holy grail" because of their importance in student success but noted that students do not necessarily have adequate access to them. The college staff we interviewed implemented career services strategies that increased exposure to and networking opportunities with employers, provided career navigation support, and leveraged online platforms to increase capacity and support students' job readiness. These strategies increase the success of first-generation and historically underrepresented students, especially students of color.

Opportunities exist to continue building knowledge for the field about the impact of high-quality career services on student outcomes, which service delivery models work best for students, and how targeted funding and investments can improve career services capacity and data infrastructure. This knowledge will help colleges better understand student receipt of career services and their impact on related academic and career outcomes, including academic persistence, retention, job attainment, wages, and career advancement.

Appendix: College Profiles¹⁵

Arkansas State University – Newport

Arkansas State University – Newport (ASUN) has three campuses located in the Delta Region of Arkansas. The main campus is in Newport, Arkansas, and other locations include campuses in Marked Tree and Jonesboro.¹⁶ ASUN campuses serve three counties (Jackson, Poinsett, and Craighead),¹⁷ covering a largely rural area with low levels of employment, especially in Jackson County (42.6 percent). 11.9 percent of Jackson County residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.¹⁸

In spring 2024, ASUN served 1,860 students enrolled across all three campuses. Most students (64.3 percent) were white, and Black students (17.6 percent) also made up a substantial portion of the student body. Six percent of students were Hispanic or Latino and 1 percent were Asian; 65.3 percent of students were female, while 34.4 percent were male. Most students (70.2 percent) were 18 and older. About two-thirds (67 percent) of students were enrolled part time at the college, and 33 percent were enrolled full time.¹⁹ From 2022 to 2023, 56 percent of students received Federal Pell grants, and 86 percent received any type of student financial aid, including federal work study aid.²⁰

ASUN offers degree and certificate programs across sectors. Staff described a particular focus on advanced manufacturing, but other key sectors include industrial safety and leadership, business, and computer applications. Health care programs have the fastest growth at ASUN, and examples of expanding programs include emergency medical technician, radiologic technology, surgical technology, and licensed practical nursing. Additionally, the high voltage lineman technology and data analytics programs are anchors of a new emphasis on energy and grid resilience for the institution.

City Colleges of Chicago

City Colleges of Chicago is the largest community college district in Illinois. City Colleges of Chicago is composed of seven independently accredited colleges: Harold Washington College, Harry S Truman College, Kennedy-King College, Malcolm X College, Olive-Harvey College, Richard J. Daley College, and Wilbur Wright College. The system also includes five satellite sites: Arturo Velasquez Institute, Dawson Technical Institute, South Chicago Learning Center, Malcolm X College West Campus, and Wright College Humboldt Park,²¹ and dozens of adult education instruction off-sites citywide.²² Chicago has an employment rate of 62.8 percent, and 43.7 percent of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.²³

As of fiscal year 2024, 66,258 students were enrolled at City Colleges of Chicago. More than half (51 percent) of enrolled students were Latine. Black students made up over a quarter of the study body (27 percent). Thirteen percent of students were white, and 6 percent were Asian;²⁴ 58 percent of all students are female. Two-thirds of students are taking credit classes, another 28 percent are taking free adult education (high school equivalency or English as a Second Language), and 9 percent are taking personal or professional development noncredit continuing education courses. Among credit students, 50 percent are Pell eligible.

City Colleges of Chicago employs a sector-based strategy through which programs in the highest-demand, fastest-growing industry sectors—like health care, IT, manufacturing, transportation, distribution and logistics, culinary and hospitality, engineering and computer science, education and scientific technology and innovation, construction technology, health care, and business and professional services—are organized into centers of excellence. Centers of excellence offer employers and other partners in each of these industry sectors a central point of contact that coordinates employer and industry partner engagement, customizes training facilities, provides leadership for the rest of the system as sources of best practice and curricular innovation, and connects students to work-based learning, apprenticeships, and other career opportunities.

Grand Rapids Community College

Grand Rapids Community College's main campus is in downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan, which is the second-most populous city in Michigan. Grand Rapids has an employment rate of 68.4 percent, and 41.4 percent of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.²⁵ Classes are also offered at the Lakeshore campus in Holland, Michigan.²⁶

In fall 2023, Grand Rapids Community College served 12,157 students. The majority (59.4 percent) of students were white, 18.4 percent of students were Hispanic or Latino, 10.4 percent were Black, and 3.8 percent were Asian; 55.1 percent of students were female and 44 percent were male. Most (87.2 percent) students were 18 and older. Most (70.6 percent) of students were enrolled part time, and 28.7 percent were enrolled full time.²⁷ From 2022 to 2023, 38 percent of students received Federal Pell grants, and 63 percent received any student financial aid, including federal work study aid.²⁸

Grand Rapids Community College currently offers 12 academic pathways, and each academic pathway houses a variety of programs.²⁹ Staff highlighted a particular focus on the health care industry and described key partnerships with local health care employers. The college provides training to employers to promote employee retention through a sector-based industry partnership that convenes health care employers.

J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College

J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College (Reynolds Community College) has four campuses, including a downtown campus in Richmond, Virginia, the Parham Road Campus in Richmond, Virginia, The Kitchens at Reynolds in Richmond, Virginia (which houses Reynolds Community College's culinary arts, hospitality, and entrepreneurship programs³⁰), and the Goochland Campus in Goochland, Virginia. Reynolds Community College serves the City of Richmond, as well as Goochland County, Hanover County, Henrico County, Louisa County, and Powhatan County.³¹ The City of Richmond has an employment rate of 64.9 percent, and 45.8 percent of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.³²

Reynolds Community College served more than 11,000 students during the 2021–22 academic year and assisted more than 5,500 learners through the Community College Workforce Alliance, which is the college's workforce development division.³³ In fall 2022, 7,527 students were enrolled. Almost half (46 percent) of the students were white, and a substantial portion (29 percent) of students were Black, 9 percent of students were Hispanic or Latino, and 6 percent were Asian. Most (61 percent) students were female, and 39 percent were male, and 65 percent were 24 years old and under. Most (69 percent) students were enrolled part time, and 31 percent were enrolled full time. Forty-nine percent of students were awarded Federal Pell grants, and 76 percent received any student financial aid, including federal work study aid.³⁴

Reynolds Community College offers 103 unique programs of study,³⁵ and staff highlighted a few particularly strong programs, including automotive technology, health care, and biotechnology.

Notes

- ¹ For information on ACE-UP, see “About the ACE-UP Community of Practice,” Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://ace-up.org/about/>.
- ² The number of ACE-UP participating institutions is current as of July 2024.
- ³ One individual from Grand Rapids Community College was interviewed for this report.
- ⁴ “The Value of Career Services,” National Association of Colleges and Employers, accessed July 16, 2024, <https://www.nacweb.org/career-development/organizational-structure/the-value-of-career-services/>.
- ⁵ “The Value of Career Services,” National Association of Colleges and Employers.
- ⁶ “The Value of Career Services,” National Association of Colleges and Employers.
- ⁷ “Students Sound Off on Career Centers,” Inside Higher Ed, accessed July 10, 2024, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/student-success/life-after-college/2023/11/30/survey-what-college-students-want-career>.
- ⁸ “Report: Ensuring Students Find Jobs That Fit,” Inside Higher Ed, December 12, 2024, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/student-success/life-after-college/2023/12/12/study-how-help-students-reach-high-earning-jobs>.
- ⁹ “Report: Ensuring Students Find Jobs That Fit,” Inside Higher Ed.
- ¹⁰ ASUN staff shared that career events are disseminated to students participating in programs at Secondary Centers, which serve six area high schools and homeschool students.
- ¹¹ Malcom X staff shared that student internship opportunities affiliated with the Argonne National Laboratory include the Minority Serving Institutions Partnership Program as well as the Community College Internship (CCI) program.
- ¹² “About Us,” Community College Workforce Alliance, accessed July 15, 2024, <https://ccwatraining.org/>.
- ¹³ “Career Coach: Help Learners Discover Careers and Education Pathways,” Lightcast, accessed July 16, 2024, <https://lightcast.io/solutions/education/career-coach>.
- ¹⁴ “Network2Work = Job Ready,” Reynolds Community College, accessed July 15, 2024, <https://www.reynolds.edu/news/2021/12/network2work-job-ready-for-several.html>.
- ¹⁵ The data included in each college profile are the most recent data provided online or by the college.
- ¹⁶ “History and Mission,” Arkansas State University – Newport, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.asun.edu/history>.
- ¹⁷ “Arkansas State University – Newport (ASU-Newport),” Encyclopedia of Arkansas, accessed August 30, 2024, <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/arkansas-state-university-newport-5629/>.
- ¹⁸ “Jackson County, Arkansas – Census Bureau Profile,” United States Census Bureau, accessed August 30, 2024, https://data.census.gov/profile/Jackson_County,_Arkansas?g=050XX00US05067.
- ¹⁹ “ASU - Newport Enrollment and Demographic Data,” Tableau, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/elizabeth.wakefield5808/viz/ASUNEnrollmentDemographics/EnrollmentDashboard>.
- ²⁰ “Arkansas State University – Newport,” College Navigator, National Center for Education Statistics, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=arkansas+state+university+newport&s=all&id=440402#finaid>.
- ²¹ “About City Colleges,” City Colleges of Chicago, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.ccc.edu/menu/About-City-Colleges/>.
- ²² “City Colleges of Chicago at a Glance,” City Colleges of Chicago, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.ccc.edu/menu/city-colleges-of-chicago-fact-sheet/>.

- ²³ “Chicago City, Illinois – Census Bureau Profile,” United States Census Bureau, accessed August 29, 2024, https://data.census.gov/profile/Chicago_city_Illinois?g=160XX00US1714000.
- ²⁴ “City Colleges of Chicago FY22 Statistical Digest,” City Colleges of Chicago, accessed August 29, 2024, https://www.ccc.edu/wp-content/uploads/departments_Documents_FY2022-Statistical-Digest.pdf.
- ²⁵ “Grand Rapids city, Michigan, ” – Census Bureau Profile,” United States Census Bureau, accessed August 29, 2024, https://data.census.gov/profile/Grand_Rapids_city_Michigan?g=160XX00US2634000.
- ²⁶ “GRCC Fast Facts,” Grand Rapids Community College, accessed August 28, 2024, <https://www.grcc.edu/faculty-staff/institutional-research-planning/documents-reports/fast-facts#enrollment>.
- ²⁷ “Fall 2023 Enrollment Report,” Grand Rapids Community College Institutional Research, accessed August 28, 2024, https://www.grcc.edu/sites/default/files/docs/irp/reports/enrollment_report_fall_2023_ada.pdf.
- ²⁸ “Grand Rapids Community College,” College Navigator, National Center for Education Statistics, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?q=grand+rapids+community+college&s=all&id=170055#finaid>.
- ²⁹ “GRCC Fast Facts,” Grand Rapids Community College, accessed August 28, 2024, <https://www.grcc.edu/faculty-staff/institutional-research-planning/documents-reports/fast-facts#enrollment>.
- ³⁰ “About the Kitchens at Reynolds,” Reynolds Community College, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.reynolds.edu/kitchens/about-the-kitchens.html>.
- ³¹ “About Reynolds,” Reynolds Community College, accessed August 29, 2024, https://www.reynolds.edu/who_we_are/about/default.html.
- ³² “Richmond City, Virginia – Census Bureau Profile,” United States Census Bureau, accessed August 29, 2024, https://data.census.gov/profile/Richmond_city_Virginia?g=050XX00US51760.
- ³³ “About Reynolds,” Reynolds Community College, accessed August 29, 2024, https://www.reynolds.edu/who_we_are/about/default.html.
- ³⁴ “J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College,” College Navigator, National Center for Education Statistics, accessed September 10, 2024, <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/?id=232414#finaid>.
- ³⁵ “About Reynolds,” Reynolds Community College, accessed August 29, 2024, https://www.reynolds.edu/who_we_are/about/default.html.

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