

ENHANCING CAREER SERVICES THROUGH CAMPUS PARTNERSHIPS

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Abstract

Many students approach graduation with a career preparation plan that involves two steps; get a degree, then get a job. To improve this situation, a joint venture, involving the campus Career Development Center, the School of Business, and the student marketing club, was forged to encourage students to be less "passive" in their development of a personal career preparation plan. This joint venture has established a four-point program to make students more aware of the need for career planning, to assist them by providing career information and guidance, to provide greater access to career preparation experiences, and to expand job development and recruitment efforts.

THE PROBLEM

All too often, educators and counselors are confronted by graduating seniors who are still unclear about their employment opportunities or their career goals. These students are approaching graduation without proper career preparation and with their only plan being a simple two-step process; get a degree, then get a job. Unfortunately, such a lack of planning frequently results in a career path that begins by accepting the most attractive job that is readily available. That first job often defines a person's qualifications and sets the conditions for the next job. Before they realize it, these graduates may find themselves locked into the wrong career path, a path they did not consciously select and one that offers very little *career-life satisfaction*.

The quality of a college or university is often measured by the success of its graduates. To ensure their initial employment success and to establish their career in today's competitive environment, graduates must demonstrate more than a good scholastic record and a willingness to work. They must also possess personal qualities, marketable skills, and a sense of purpose that separates them from their contemporaries. Those most successful in their

classroom pursuits, in obtaining an appropriate post-graduation job, and in realizing their career potential are often those who have integrated some type of systematic career preparation into their academic program.

As educators and counselors, we know that a well planned career should reflect individual interests and provide the opportunity to perform the types of work that best compliments a person's talents. We also know that planning for a career, one that ultimately provides a lifetime of financial stability, emotional satisfaction, and intellectual fulfillment, requires early self-assessment and an ongoing process of career exploration.

There is no question that most college and university career centers stand ready to assist students through this process. However, any level of success fully depends upon the students' appreciation for career planning and their awareness of services available to them. It sometimes seems that no matter how hard educators and counselors try, we are still confronted by graduating seniors who say something to the effect of: *"I've never heard about career services before" or "If only I had known about career services when I was a freshman."* A significant number of students still passively progress through their curriculum of classes without recognizing the need for career planning or making the effort to seek career counseling, assimilate career information, or engage in career preparation experiences.

At most institutions, especially larger colleges and universities, it is an ongoing challenge to develop and maintain effective ways to communicate the importance of career planning and the related services available to students. While we cannot force them into this process, a major goal of an effective career center should be to at least inform every student about the importance of integrating a career preparation program early in his or her educational experience.

Memos to department secretaries, selected faculty, and student organizations are common communication practices. Career Centers may also use campus newspapers, career fairs, and bulletin board posters. Most recently, technologies such as e-mail, *internet*, and electronic bulletin boards are being used to disseminate information. While some or all of these methods can be effective, they are still passive in nature. As a result, they often do not reach, or have little impact upon, a large number of passive students who, for one reason or another, are simply not attuned to receiving this type of information.

ESTABLISHING A PARTNERSHIP

In an attempt to improve their communication efforts, the Career Development Center at California State University, Fresno (an institution with over 16,000 students spread among 8 different schools and over 60 academic departments), recently entered into a working partnership with the Sid Craig School of Business (CSB) and its student marketing organization, Pi Sigma Epsilon (PSE). The vision that inspired this partnership was to create a method whereby all business students would have the guidance, instruction, awareness, and services necessary to develop a personal career preparation plan. By combining the efforts of the Career Center staff, the PSE students, and the CSB faculty, this joint venture set out to accomplish four major goals:

- To provide career information to a larger segment of business students by establishing a more efficient and effective communication network.
- To make students more aware of the need for career planning and to assist them by providing systematic career preparation guidance and instruction.
- To increase student involvement in a comprehensive career preparation process, including career exploration and career development "work experiences", by providing easier access to these experiences.
- To enlarge the pool of internship, cooperative education, and other undergraduate career preparation experiences for CSB students by expanding job development activities and expanding on-campus employer recruitment efforts.

THE PROGRAM

The program begins with the assumption that a large

number of undergraduate business students seem to be unaware of the Career Development Center and its services. To increase their awareness and involvement, the PSE students agreed to establish and maintain a "Job Network" which is basically a student-to-student delivery system for actively communicating and promoting these services. A key element of this system was the creation of a job board, a listing of current work experience opportunities, established and maintained by PSE and located on a highly visible site in the Sid Craig School of Business building.

As a way to increase outreach to all students, particularly the more passive types or those part-time, working students who do not have much time to peruse job boards, PSE assembled a student team to make periodic visits to classrooms. These 5-10 minute presentations are scheduled through the instructor and have been developed to orient students to career planning; educate students about the "Job Network" and the services of the Career Development Center; and announce current work experience opportunities.

This proactive, student-based communication mode reaches more students and tends to be more effective in capturing their attention and interest than the more traditional and passive methods previously employed. During these visits, each student is given a flyer with an overview of the career development process and information about the Career Development Center, including its 24-hour job hotline.

The Sid Craig School of Business operates an active internship program where students are placed in a supervised work experience and given three units of university credit, certifying they learn as much in their internship as they would in a three-unit class. Until recently, however, responsibility for the School's program was not centralized. With no single point of contact or coordination, many employers complained about the bureaucratic run-arounds and multiple requirements they encountered when trying to locate potential interns. There were no common standards, prerequisites, or instructional plans and no systematic recruiting or screening of students, or jobs. As a result, the program was "invisible" to many students and potential employers; and the quality of some of the participating students, and their jobs, was questionable.

In order to improve this situation, a centralized internship program was established and a coordinator has been identified to administer it. Key faculty, representing each of the business school departments, will work with the coordinator under a

common set of standards. Students will go through a screening process to qualify for a "pool of interns". Employers and job descriptions will be evaluated against a set of criteria to qualify as "training stations" for the student interns.

The Career Development Center has agreed to assist in qualifying students for the "intern pool" and to serve as an initial point of contact for employers. In addition to providing students with career counseling and an library of career information, the Center staff will give each intern applicant instruction on resume writing and interviewing techniques. The Center also will identify any business-related job listings it receives which might qualify for internship or cooperative education status. These identified listings are then sent to the Craig Business School. The internship coordinator and participating faculty will review and qualify these job listings and take responsibility for enrolling, supervising, and evaluating the "student interns" who are accepted for these positions.

Another important part of the agreement was the establishment of a student "Ambassador" position. A student is appointed by the PSE Chapter and assigned to the Career Development Center to work on a part-time basis. This is a paid position and the job duties have been structured to meet the eligibility standards for a CSB internship. Among other duties, the Ambassador is responsible for disseminating current job and service information from the Career Center to the CSB; and assisting the Center staff with job development and the coordination of special events. The Ambassador is also one of the PSE officers, and serves on the PSE Executive Board.

RESULTS

Although this partnership has only been in effect for a few semesters, a number of positive results in quantity and quality are already beginning to surface. In 1992-93, before the initiation of this program, there were 53 recorded internships within the School of Business; 21 in the Fall semester and 32 in the Spring. In the Fall semester of 1993, the number of internships remained stable, at 23. This program was instituted in the Spring of 1994. PSE students began the process of making classroom presentations on behalf of the Career Development Center and business students began to respond. A typical example of this was highlighted when a business-related internship was listed with the Career Center. Until the position was disseminated through PSE (several days after it initially became available), there was no student response. Almost immediately after being advertised by the student group, at least three students inquired

about the position and two excellent candidates were referred to the employer. The number of internships that semester climbed to 42, creating an annual total of 65 (an annual increase of 22%). In 1994-95, there were 33 internships in the Fall and 42 in the Spring for an annual total of 75 (an annual increase of 15%). The annual total for 1995-96 was 89 (an annual increase of 18%), 46 in the Fall and 43 in the Spring. Although it was evident that more students were becoming aware of the need for career planning and more were beginning to participate in internships, part of the formula was still missing. Without some centralized coordination within the School of Business, the number and quality of available internship positions was problematic. Students often had to find their own placements and, with no standardized criteria, the screening of these placements and the quality of the internship experiences varied. It was during the Spring of 1996 that the School initiated its centralized internship program under the direction of a faculty coordinator. With the help of PSE's promotional efforts, the first orientation session for the School's centralized internship program, held in the Spring of 1996, attracted 84 students. During the Summer of 1996, 29 internships were taken for credit. In the previous four summers, only 2 internships had been completed. This semester, 188 students have filed applications and 54 students have been placed.

In addition to increasing the quantity of internships, some quality improvements have also been realized. Students are being exposed to the concept of career planning and are considering internships earlier in their college careers. The job development efforts of CDS, PSE, and the internship coordinator are generating better quality internship positions. Fewer job opportunities are being developed by the students themselves and those that are must meet higher standards of acceptance. As a result, the "job pool" offers more responsible jobs demanding more skill and offering more decision authority. In short, they are better learning experiences for the student.

Finally, with larger numbers of students applying for internships, competition for available positions has increased and student selection criteria have been raised. The bottom line is that we now have greater awareness on the part of students, more responsible internship positions, and better qualified student interns.

Maintaining good faculty relations is another important factor in operating a successful career center. This can be a challenge, particularly in what seems to many of us as an endless period of declining resources. By formalizing this partnership, the Career

Center at California State University, Fresno can now focus its efforts on establishing a few key relationships with each department within the Craig School of Business. Then, by utilizing the student team, indirect relations can be established with a larger percentage of the business faculty.

OUTLOOK

Several immediate and long-term plans are underway to fulfill all the goals of this partnership and to enhance the connection between the Career Development Center and the Sid Craig School of Business. Earlier this year, the PSE team worked with the Center to jointly sponsor a career fair which was specifically tailored to the needs of business students. Although the Career Center already sponsors a number of campus wide events, most of the logistics for this particular business school program were handled by students from PSE. It is hoped that both partners will build on the success of this event and that a PSE/Career Development Job Fair will become an annual event. Other plans include the possibility of jointly sponsored "mixers" with the local business community and the establishment of a PSE job development team to visit local businesses.

This Spring semester, the Center is housing one of its counselors in the School of Business building. In addition, the School has donated a suite of rooms so that recruiting teams and company representations can conduct their placement interviews within the School of Business. This gives the School greater visibility with the business community and provides business students with greater access to potential employers.

This formal agreement has only been in place for a few semesters but, based on what seems to be a very positive beginning, we believe this partnership has already proven its success. The Career Development Center looks forward to building similar partnerships with student groups and faculty from other academic departments. By doing so, it will not only enhance campus communications and involve more students in the career development process, but overall, it will be able to meet today's overriding challenge of *doing more with less*.