

Outcomes of a Liberal Arts Education
*A response on career preparation from the
Consortium of Liberal Arts Schools and Independent Colleges (CLASIC)*

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Contributors

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Foreword

The Consortium of Liberal Arts Schools and Independent Colleges (CLASIC) established an ad hoc committee on outcomes in fall 2013 to assess career outcomes that influence or further drive conversation around perceived value of a liberal arts education. Contributing committee members bring specific experience with WASC and program reviews within their institutions and volunteered in the interest of further dialogue on outcomes in higher education. This following response was composed with specific attention to financial and economic drivers, implications of enrollment and retention in higher education, and the role of accreditation.

Contributing committee members represent Azusa Pacific University, Biola University, Harvey Mudd College, Pepperdine University, and Scripps College.

Introduction

As assessment and outcomes become rapidly growing influences in higher education, pressure continues to weigh heavily on career services. The Consortium of Liberal Arts Schools and Independent Colleges (CLASIC) is committed to offering specific guidance by giving context to developing trends and existing research. As such, this response is intended to initiate further dialogue on the practical side to an otherwise well-researched topic area. By translating existing theories and practice, liberal arts institutions and career services professionals should seek to establish a shared expression of student success. While student learning outcomes (e.g. modeling how to develop, implement, and assess these properly) are especially critical for this type of storytelling, institutions must first investigate what career preparation models are being adopted by leading liberal arts schools today. CLASIC therefore poses this question: *What career preparation models are being adopted by leading liberal arts schools today, and how are those models supported by the use of student learning outcomes?*

Addressing this research question encourages liberal arts institutions to first consider how career services strategically choose and develop these models and what support (or resistance) they find within their institutions. The intersection of these two critical institutional dynamics might then create a framework in addressing stakeholders' (e.g. parents, donors, alumni) post-graduation expectations.

Background: Defining Outcomes in Liberal Arts institutions

Post-graduation success is typically defined in terms of employment or continued education, though service (military or community) and entrepreneurship, are also viable outcomes according to the new first destination standards recently released by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). Despite the fact that definitions of success may vary, typically institutional stakeholders who inquire about a school's outcomes are looking for a return on the investment attributed to the cost of a liberal arts education. In some cases, they are expecting that a liberal arts foundation will pave the way to successful advanced education through graduate degrees.

This means that students (and their parents) are expecting that their investment in a liberal arts education will afford them greater and more diverse professional opportunities (despite economic trends) and in many cases, they expect that this will yield increased financial resources in the way of pay, benefits, career advancement, and money made over the span of one's life. As an alternative, they might perceive their training to empower them in making a greater societal impact (rather than increasing their paycheck). In some cases, they are expecting that a liberal arts foundation will pave the way to successful advanced education through graduate degrees.

While a salaried job might not necessarily be the coveted ROI that *all* stakeholders of liberal arts institutions seek, they do expect access to professional opportunities that would otherwise not be available to them. There is also an expectation (particularly from within the academy) that the well-rounded, critical and creative thinkers that ascertain a liberal arts education will be nimble, flexible, and adaptable ensuring graduates will continually be equipped to apply their skills for the good of themselves or society despite economic shifts or changes in market demands.

Liberal arts institutions pride themselves on educating the whole person, incorporating a generalist approach that exposes students to foundational and diverse topics while developing transferable skills like written and verbal communication, analytical skills, team work, and critical thinking. These same institutions, however, are often conflicted by specific performance indicators that might include an advanced level of learning, acquiring specific skills to perform specific jobs, increased professional opportunities, and increased pay, benefits, or career advancement. It becomes difficult, therefore, for liberal arts institutions to provide hard evidence for outcomes. Moreover, recent research indicates¹ that liberal arts students also struggle in articulating their liberal arts degree or demonstrating their abilities well in the job search process. This is often combatted by career services training students in various transferable skills such as personal branding, interviewing and practice interviews, and by highlighting known leaders with liberal arts degrees. (See appendix A.)

Accrediting bodies such as the American Association of Colleges and Universities, the National Association of Colleges and Employers, and the National Career Development Association are relying on post-graduation data to address this dichotomy on behalf of liberal arts institutions. A recent article in *Inside Higher Ed*² reports “liberal arts majors may start off slower than others when it comes to the postgraduate career path, but they close much of the salary and unemployment gap over time, a new report shows.” (January 2014)

Schools who have adopted successful career preparation models can successfully leverage their own evidence (through student learning outcomes, skills assessment, graduation data, and alumni profiles) to build upon this research.

Changing Expectations: Assessment and Accreditation

Career service teams are often called upon to support the institutional accreditation process. The 2013 WASC Handbook of Accreditation, Criteria for Review (CFR) under Student Learning and Success states: “[a WASC] institution offers co-curricular programs that are aligned with its academic goals, integrated with academic programs, and designed to support all students’ personal and professional development.” (p.16) Within Standard Four, Creating an Organization Committed to Quality Assurance, Institutional Learning, and Improvement, WASC charges the leadership at all levels to continually assess and improve programs. Career professionals who seek to enhance the integration between academics and professional development offerings, will be more successful when they use assessment to improve services and increase positive outcomes.

A successful career preparation model will mimic the guidelines set forth by WASC to create “well-established policies and practices... that create a culture of evidence and improvement.” It further notes that institutional stakeholders be involved in the assessment process. Accrediting bodies are responding

¹ Chan, Andy and Tommy Derry. “A Roadmap for Transforming The College to Career Experience.” May 2013.

² Grasgreen, Allie. “Liberal Arts Grads Win Long-Term.” *Inside Higher Ed*. January 2014.

to the change in career services with a similar challenge. Career centers must ensure their goals are aligned with the institutional mission. They must respond to the notion of “student success” by equipping students – not placing them – with the skills necessary to succeed post-graduation.

A Review of the Career Center Paradigm

We can trace the development of Career Center Paradigms back to Donald Casella, PhD (Career Networking – The Newest Career Center Paradigm, 1990), Roger Wessel, PhD (Networking Paradigm Revisited, 1996) and Youngblood, Nichols and Wilson (Adaptation Model of Cassella’s Paradigm, 1999). Farouk Dey and Matt Real published yet another paradigm shift in 2010 that incorporated global networking.

Recent trends involve support services that leverage professional development opportunities, encourage and facilitate mentoring and networking, and focus on new forms of employment like entrepreneurship. The one-stop shop career center model offers a comprehensive menu of career services, including counseling and advising, for-credit courses, outreach and programming, career fairs and networking opportunities, online and library resources, and on-campus recruitment activities.

Career preparation models most commonly consist of two or more teams or types of career services professionals; the first group is oriented around career counseling and advising and the second group is oriented around employer relations and recruiting. Increasingly, the outliers include mentoring and networking roles, industry specialists, and technology specialists and platforms.

According to a 2013 NACE survey, 85% of career centers are centralized (98% for Baccalaureate Arts & Sciences) and only 2% are still using “placement” in their name (a trend illustrating the move from traditional recruitment to networking strategies). 59% currently report up to student affairs and 19% to academic affairs. Others vary in their reporting structures including institutional advancement and alumni relations. On average, career services offices employ three to five professionals and two support staff for a student to staff ratio of 1,181:1 at baccalaureate level institutions.

Structural Changes – Innovative Approaches to Career Center Models³

In a September 2013 article from the Chronicle on Higher Education, “Career Centers Stretch to Fill New Roles”, Beckie Supiano cites six schools who have restructured or refocused their career centers to meet current demands. This is an emerging trend worth following as liberal arts colleges make adjustments to reach a higher ROI.

Colleges are realizing that the old model—arguing that an education is about more than getting a job, and expecting the career center to help students figure out the job part right before they graduate—is no longer enough.

The career preparation model at Wakeforest University, as pictured, is designated as “Personal and Career Development”. Its innovative approach and leadership captured national media attention and has heightened awareness of other liberal arts schools following suit.

³ Please note that the organizational charts depicted below are not exact illustrations of existing staffing models at the named institutions, but rather are offered by way of visual examples for varying career center models. Reporting structures and implied FTE have not been verified.

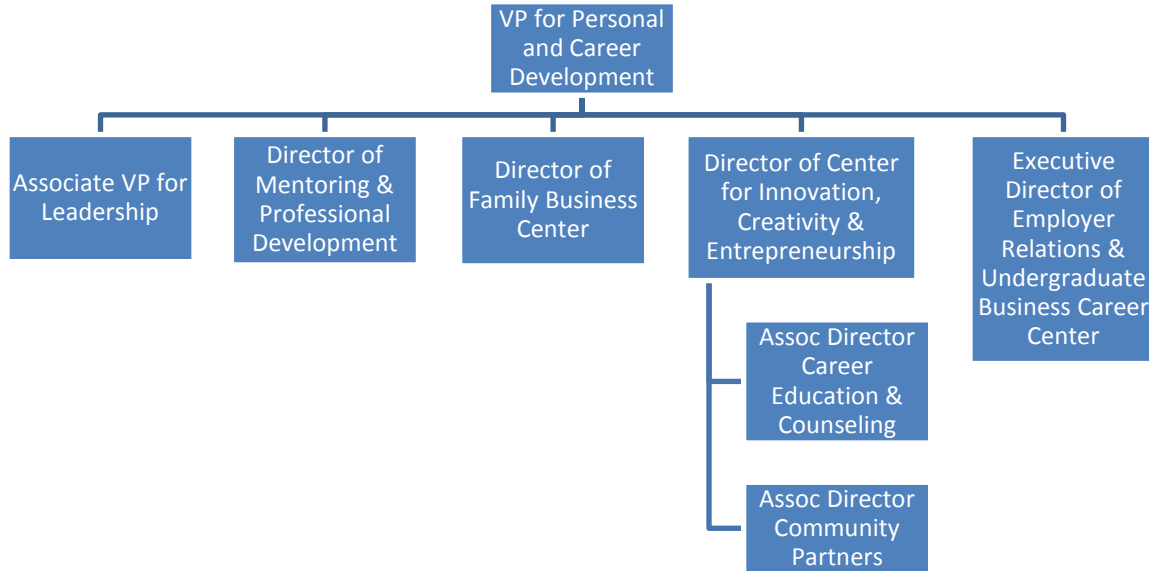


Figure 1 Wakeforest University

Some institutions are incorporating change by overhauling the reporting structures for career services. At Biola University (4,132 undergraduate enrolled), for example, career development is moving from Student Development to a new division called “Student Success” under which reside academic advising and career development. Likewise, the career development office at Occidental College (2,100 enrolled) reports to the VP of Creativity and Innovation. Amherst and Scripps Colleges (1,800 and 950 enrolled, respectively) have moved career services from Student Affairs to Institutional Advancement.

Yet other institutions have focused on reframing or altogether transforming their career services offered or their staffing model. For example, St. John’s University (15,840 undergrad enrolled) positions career services staff within the institution’s individual schools and colleges. Woodbury University (1,700 enrolled) hired an architect to serve as an industry specialist for students who is housed in the School of Architecture and works alongside faculty.

Franklin & Marshall (2,365 undergrad enrolled) converted its development model under new leadership as well, establishing the now-named “Office of Student and Post-Graduate Development” with a staff of 11 FTE, pictured on the following page. F&M is teaming with leaders of Willamette University and University of Oregon to present on their innovative models of change in an upcoming symposium.

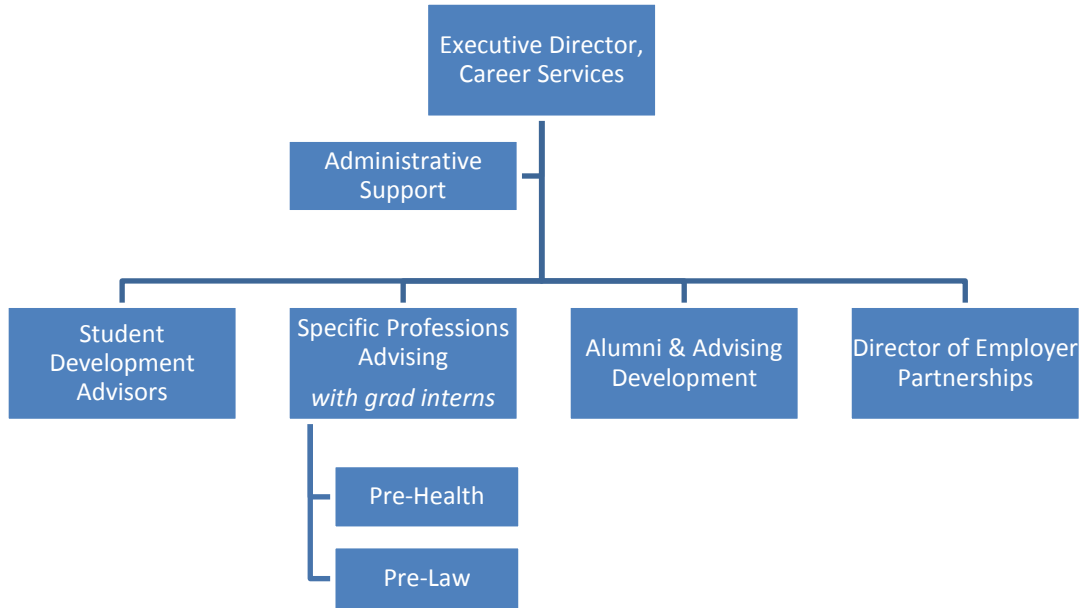


Figure 2 Franklin & Marshall

Clark University (2,352 undergraduate enrolled) has introduced Liberal Education and Effective Practice (LEEP) which links curricular and co-curricular efforts at the institution, while Messiah College (2,798 undergraduate enrolled) has taken this approach a step further by sharing major-specific plans for faculty. It is one of many colleges who have established a required career development course for students.

The career center at Emory University (7,836 undergraduate enrolled), for example, is housed within Campus Life and is composed of recruiting staff, two associate directors, and staff focused specifically on pre-health and law. (See illustration below.) Harvey Mudd College (783 enrolled) models an industry-focused career center as a liberal arts college for students in science, technology, engineering and math. This member of The Claremont Colleges is often recognized for the “biggest bang for its buck.”⁴

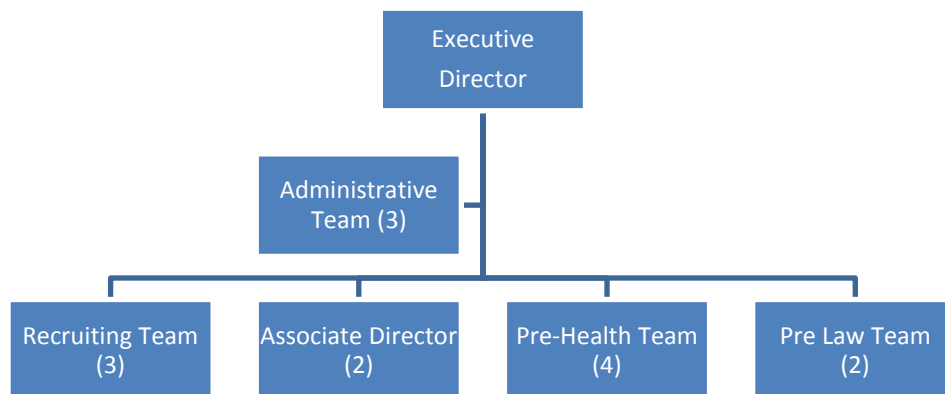


Figure 3 Emory University

⁴ Lobosco, Katie. “Colleges with the best bang for your buck.” CNN Money. April 2014.

Stanford University's (7,063 enrolled) career services staff is organized by types of degree and year in school or discipline clusters – special teams focused on mentoring/networking and employer services, as pictured below.

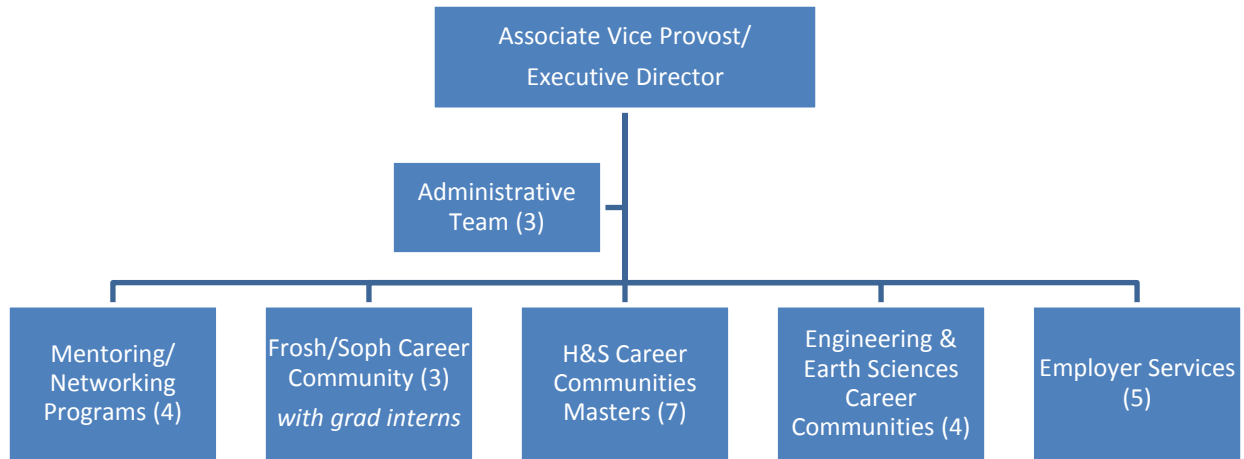


Figure 4 Stanford University

Some career development offices focus primarily on connecting students to employers. This model tends to rely heavily on recruitment strategies such as job fairs and resumes books and develops staff functions in administrative roles to best support current market trends and economic climate. Activities and events often incorporate job-readiness and skill-building.

Counseling, however, also remains a key focus area for many career centers in liberal arts institutions. These centers employ staff in counseling roles and practice student development through engaged counseling methods. At Scripps College (950 enrolled), three of five full-time staff work with students in a counseling capacity. The center's goal is to help students explore their post-graduation options to make informed decisions.

Among the newest trend is the blending of career services with academic advising where primary staff is in advising roles as opposed to more traditional counseling roles. Colleges like Marymount University (3,500 enrolled) are taking a deliberate approach to advising and utilizing both faculty and professional staff in this common goal. This alignment with academics is also increasingly common among larger state schools like Washington State University with their "Center for Advising and Career Development."

Regardless of the approach, it seems clear that institutions invested in a higher return on investment for their liberal arts majors are actively pursuing opportunities to embed careers services in the greater college experience. It seems clear that successful models effectively incorporate assessment and outcomes that speak to that ROI directly.

Modeling Student Learning Outcomes

Regardless of the organizational structure of a career center, student learning outcomes are a critical component to an effective career preparation model. The newly released first-destination survey

standards presented by the National Association of Colleges and Employers can provide a tangible starting point for more uniform terms of assessment. Identifying benchmarks within that might include:

- a. Graduation Statistics (first-destination metrics)
 1. Number of Grads with Jobs
 2. Number of Grads going to graduate school
 3. Average Starting Salary
 4. Starting Salary vs. debt load (new one emerging)
 5. Alternative plans – service, fellowships, entrepreneurship, military service, gap year program, travel, skills-certification
 6. Percentage who Interned in College
 7. Percentage who leveraged mentoring/networking opportunities
- b. Empowerment, Demonstrated Learning, and Lifelong Employability
 1. Resume, Cover Letter, and Interview Rubrics
 2. Student Reflections and surveys
 3. Employer Feedback
 4. Pre/Post assessments from counseling services
- c. Employer Engagement, Professional Preparedness & Student Success
 1. Number of engaged employers involved in on-campus recruiting
 2. Employer feedback regarding student preparedness to compete in market
 3. Hires/Offered from on-campus interview practices

By way of example, Seaver College Career Center at Pepperdine University (3,488 undergraduate enrolled) recently retooled student learning outcomes (SLOs) to summarize in easily-understood departmental terms in conjunction with its recent program review related to WASC. Their SLOs were then vetted and re-worked with Associate Dean of Students for Assessment and Dean of Students and a curriculum map was built to identify how these SLO's would be measured through services and programs throughout the year. These outcomes were then intentionally aligned with the institutional mission. Although evidence is collected every year about learning that occurs through various services and programs, one SLO is chosen each year as a point of special focus and refinement. In the fifth year, the department undergoes a five-year program review which looks at all four SLO's among other indicators of organizational and programmatic success.

Selective independent colleges such as Westmont College (1,400 undergraduate enrolled) and others represented in the Consortium of Liberal Arts Colleges and Independent Schools believe a 5-year out survey is a better indicator of student outcomes to account for an exploratory process common among liberal arts and humanities students. On-going efforts are being made to increase the forms of "direct evidence" (rather than indirect evidence) being collected in various areas of career services. The greater the tie between career center outcomes and institutional outcomes, the more effective the program becomes.

Conclusion

One might say change is upon us. Regardless of how models of professional preparation are changing, there is a general movement in the career services industry for change, which is motivated by the need for increase institutional transparency and support that provides evidence of professional options, learning, and ultimately positive outcomes for undergraduate students. These changes have direct implications on admission, retention, and anticipated return on investment. How career services at

liberal arts institutions respond to that change is heavily dependent on the institutional leadership and their reaction to current trends.

Trends seem to lend themselves toward high touch, highly collaborative models that require the involvement and support of various constituents across campus communities in partnership with career services, yet also urge institutions to consider the implications of technology and an increasingly accessible global network. It also demands the development, clarification, and implementation of student learning outcomes and the establishment of feasible methodologies which produce direct evidence of these outcomes. Most importantly, these latest trends in changing career preparation models impress upon liberal arts schools the need to redefine “student success” and incorporate more concrete tracking of outcomes. The story, however, shouldn’t be led by career services. It must begin by presidential mandate and end with presidential initiative.

The inherent value and future of a liberal arts degree will be dependent on an institution’s ability to produce evidence of student learning and success transparently, evidence which is then used to reassure families’ financial investment in higher education and more specifically in their students’ liberal arts degrees.

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**Appendix A:
Leader profiles with a liberal arts degree⁵**

- a. Sheryl Sandberg – CEO @ Facebook, (formerly of Google, chief of staff for US Sec of Treasury) – Harvard grad in Economics (then Harvard MBA)
- b. Condoleezza Rice – Former US Secretary of State (former Provost of Stanford) – University of Denver (Political Science)
- c. Hilary Rodham Clinton – US Secretary of State, (former presidential nominee, former first lady) - Wellesley College
- d. Peter Thiel, 20th century philosophy major at Stanford – co-founder and CEO of Paypal
- e. Carly Fiorina, Ex-HP CEO and medieval history and philosophy major at Stanford
- f. Ken Chenault, CEO at American Express and history major at Bowdoin College
- g. Carl Icahn, activist investor and philosophy major at Princeton University
- h. Eric Shinseki, Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs with a Master's in English literature from Duke University
- i. Michael Eisner, former Disney CEO and double major In English and theatre at Denison University
- j. Hank Paulson, Former Treasury Secretary and English major at Dartmouth College
- k. Lloyd Blankfein, Goldman Sachs CEO and government major at Harvard University
- l. Sheila Bair, FDIC Chair and philosophy major at the University Of Kansas
- m. Clarence Thomas, Supreme Court Justice and English major at Holy Cross College
- n. Harold Varmus, Nobel Laureate in medicine and English major at Amherst College
- o. Ted Turner, CNN founder and classics major at Brown University
- p. Anne Mulcahy, former Xerox CEO and English and journalism major at Marymount College
- q. Brian Moynihan, Bank of America's CEO and history major at Brown University
- r. Robert Iger, CEO of Disney and communications major at Ithaca College
- s. Oprah Winfrey – BA in Communication from Tennessee State University
- t. Mitt Romney – BA in English from Brigham Young University
- u. Sam Palmisano, former IBM CEO and history major at John's Hopkins University
- v. Andrea Jung, former Avon CEO and English literature major at Princeton University
- w. A.G. Lafley, former Proctor and Gamble CEO and French and history major at Hamilton College
- x. Judy McGrath, ex-MTV CEO and English major at Cedar Crest College
- y. Mario Cuomo, former Governor of New York and English major at St. John's University
- z. Jerry Brown, Governor of California and classics major at UC Berkeley

⁵ List of 30 leaders with liberal arts degrees (Mostly CEO's of large companies and government officials):
<http://www.businessinsider.com/successful-liberal-arts-majors-2012>