

Engaging Grads with Career Programming

Identifying the risks, career barriers, and issues grads face and evaluating emerging opportunities the alumni association has to help them launch successful careers.

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It's impossible for your grads to pick up the knowledge and skills they need for their first professional job search with one to two visits to the career center!

Executive Summary

These are TOUGH times for graduates!

In 2007, over 60% of grads had jobs by graduation day.

Today, depending on the survey source, as few as 30%-40% of grads have jobs lined up by graduation day. Further, according to National Association of Colleges and Employers 2012 survey, even 6 months after graduation as few as 63.6 % will have jobs. Even more distressing news is evidenced by a survey of recent grads conducted by the Associated Press that showed 53% of those under 25 are either unemployed or underemployed!



Why are your grads having such a hard time finding employment?

We live in different times, with different technologies, behaviors and an economy that has not only seen a reduction in blue collar jobs, but is seeing a severe squeeze on white collar jobs. It's a much more competitive employment environment today and organizations are able to employ competent global talent for one tenth of the cost of employing domestic workers.

And there are more reasons!

Companies today are taking advantage of new technologies to handle and automate white collar and entry level jobs. The software that powers Apple's SIRI and IBM's Big Blue Project are capable of handling jobs that once required warm-blooded humans. But now, one piece of software can do the jobs of thousands of people, and that software never needs a day off, never gets sick, and never needs a raise, health care, or even office space. The automation of the white collar job is slowing down the job creation engine that faithfully created an average 138,000 jobs per month from 1970 until the economy tanked in 2008.

On top of that, graduates today are not only competing with 1.7 million fellow graduates, but also the 24 million unemployed and under-employed. They are also competing with people who had temporarily dropped out of the job market and are exploring coming back to work as the market improves. They are competing for jobs with the 8 million people who were displaced in the economic downturn in 2008. Then, to make matters worse, many boomers who thought they would be retiring are finding they must keep their jobs because their retirement assets have been negatively affected during the economic downturn. This is preventing workers in positions below them from moving up, which normally would have opened more opportunities for entry-level college graduates.

The job search process has changed!

While hiring managers still review resumes, albeit through software that searches for unique keywords and phrases, they are increasingly using social media to find and evaluate prospective employees. Today, a graduating student needs to have a sharp resume, a clear understanding about how to build his or her network and interview well, and the knowledge to master and professionally use LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.

For those lucky graduates who *do* land a job--according to the people who hire them-- most don't have the soft skills they need to successfully transition from the college dorm to corporate cubicle.

Any one of these changes can have a lifelong effect on a graduate, but taken collectively, they present a significant barrier to relevant employment and a successful careers.

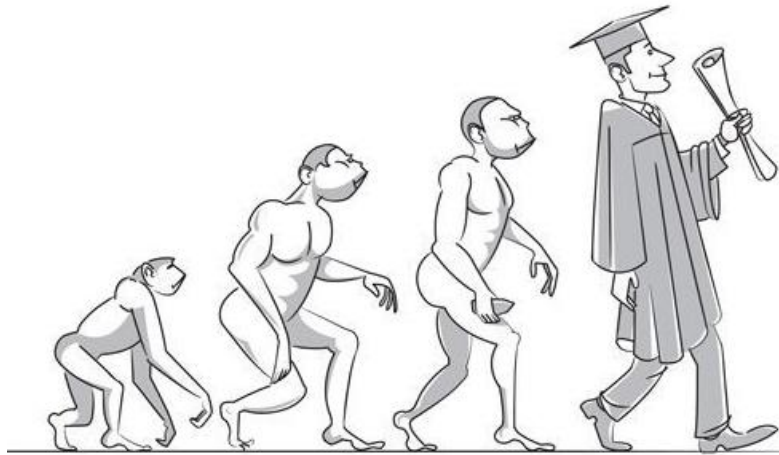
It's not going to get any better!

According to the Department of Labor Statistics Employment Projections: 2012-2022 Summary released in December 2013:

- Two-thirds of the 30 occupations with the largest projected employment increase from 2012 to 2022 typically do not require postsecondary education for entry.
- Nearly two-thirds of the job openings are expected to be in occupations that typically do not require postsecondary education for entry.

What does this mean to the 1.7 million college graduates each year? In the next decade, they will continue, like today's graduates, to struggle not only to find jobs, but to find jobs that are relevant to their interests and majors.





Research shows grads are clueless on how to look for a job

Contrary to what some people think, man was not born with the right skills to look for jobs.

To my knowledge, no geneticist has found the job-search gene in human DNA.

Career exploration, job search and career planning are learned skills and activities, that are getting more complicated and competitive, yet few students invest any time to acquire them.

Based on the lack of institutional investment in the career centers and the diminutive role they play on campuses around the country, I can only assume that administrators and parents are assuming that students and grads will figure the increasingly complicated and competitive job search process, on their own!

But it isn't happening!

- Surveys by John J. Heldrich Workforce Development and Adecco show students regret that they didn't spend more time networking with alumni and searching for jobs prior to graduating.
- Surveys by TalentMarks show that 95 percent of grads do not have a clear understanding about how to get a job, and as a result, they waste hours on job boards.

Why is this?

Research by the National Association of Colleges and Employers showed that in their senior years:

- 27 percent of seniors don't even visit the career center.
- 18.1 percent visit once.
- 16.2 percent visit twice.

That represents more than 61 percent of graduating seniors! Use of the career center by freshman, sophomores and juniors is even more anemic!

Why are students not taking ownership of their careers while in college?

The answer is simple:

The culture on campus does not focus on careers!

As a result, students invest their time in the activities, curriculum and assignments that are required to get them to graduation day. The career center is not a required activity. It's just like any other club on campus that has to market to students to build awareness about the need to take ownership of their careers and inform them about the many events and activities the career center offers.

This is contributing to thousands-- no, hundreds of thousands-- no, millions-- of grads who start their professional careers without the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to launch their career.

Research proves it!

- A 2012 study commissioned by the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, shows that many hiring decision-makers believe that the post-secondary education system could do a better job in preparing students for the workplace. The study showed 39% of hiring managers believe higher education is doing a fair or poor job preparing grads for their careers.

In a shocking survey (*Effectively Counseling Graduating Students*) of nearly 600 career center directors, the Career Advisory Board found:

- 48.1 percent felt their grads did not have the knowledge and skills needed to get a job.
- 83 percent thought their grads' resumes were not ready to share.
- 77.4 percent did not think their students grasped what it takes to get jobs.

It's clear that system is broken, yet career center professionals are powerless to fix it!

How does this affect your graduates?

Your graduates end up wasting time doing the wrong things. And it results in lost wages too.

A National Association of Colleges and Employers survey found that it took the average grad from the Class of 2011 7.4 months to get a job. Few students, nor those in leadership positions at their colleges and universities, understand the financial impact of not having jobs by graduation day.

Think about it.

A graduate that is paid \$3,000 to \$4,000 per month during his or her first professional job would have earned \$22,200 to \$29,600 more than the average student if he or she landed a job by graduation day.

That's enough to pay back most students loans!

Let's take this to the next level and see the effect on an entire graduating class of 500 students. Collectively, the students will lose out on \$13,500,000 in salary! The 1.7 million grads each year lose out on 50 BILLION dollars in salary, partly because they didn't start exploring career options, networking, and learning how to execute and manage the job search process from their arrival on campus.

This is a lose, lose situation!

These are very difficult times for your graduates, but this is also a critical time for your college. Without a plan or overall strategy to fix the problems graduates are facing, your organization is certain to see decreasing enrollment, retention, graduation rates, and contributions.

The end result could be catastrophic for even decade-old institutions. In a December 2013 New York Times essay, Clayton M. Christensen, a Harvard Business School professor and champion of disruptive innovation, suggested that the "bottom 25 percent of every tier" of colleges will disappear or merge in the next 10 to 15 years.

What can be done to fix this situation?

It's clear these problems and issues are not going to go away anytime soon.

So what can your college do?

We see three primary solutions:

1. Require students to take ownership of their career

2. Invest more resources in the career center
3. The alumni association takes on the responsibility of providing career curriculum

Based on current political, philosophical and fiscal conditions, the first two options are not going to happen in the next 3-5 years. Our research has shown that only a small number of colleges require students to invest a minimum amount of time and effort into their careers.

At a time when students need more services from the career center, most are being forced to cut them because of budget cuts. In fact, *The National Association of Colleges and Employers 2011-12 Career Center Benchmark Survey* reported the average career center took a 15.5 percent budget cut in the 2010-11 academic year.

Your alumni association may be your grads' last hope.

Research by the Olson Zaltman Associates, the Alumni Attitude Study, TalentMarks, and numerous studies conducted by alumni associations across the country prove without a shadow of a doubt that alumni are looking to the alumni association to help them with their career.

- A study by the **Olson Zaltman and Associates** showed that alumni viewed their college experience as a transformative stage in the journey of their lives. The research indicated alumni wanted the alumni association to help them in the transitions in their lives. The firm suggested that alumni associations use this information and find a way they could provide information and guidance and help alumni as they passed through career, health, family and even retirement phases. Alumni indicated they would value this information as they have a high degree of trust in the information the college provided them in their undergraduate years.
- The **Alumni Attitude Study** is conducted by 200 college and universities every 5 years. As many as 500,000 alumni participate. I had an opportunity to analyze the results from the CSU system that included 19 colleges and 21,000 responses.

When asked, How important were career skills and training to you as a student and how well did the University do at providing it?, every generation from the Boomers, to Generation X, Millennials, and today's Generation Z gave the university VERY poor marks.

When asked, How important is it to you and alumni in general in identifying job opportunities for graduates, mentoring students, and networking with other alumni and how well did the University do at supporting these?, alumni again indicated the University did very poorly. It might not surprise parents of recent grads that the most recent graduates gave the University the worst rating.

- **TalentMarks** surveys of alumni participating in career webinars showed alumni were looking to the alumni association to provide additional networking opportunities, career coaching and help in job placement.

You don't have to do an exhaustive survey of your alumni to find out what they want. Your alumni need help building their connections and networks. They need guidance and advice from trusted sources, and they need help getting jobs.

So what can you do?

Don't wait another minute.

There are lives and careers at stake. Each spring your college sends a new crop of graduates into an uncertain future. Your alumni association has an incredible opportunity to insert yourself into the middle of this problem and change lives.

You have an opportunity to change the way alumni view the alumni association.

The Olson Zaltman Associate report mentioned above identified that alumni viewed the alumni association as a fundraising arm of the institution and was always reaching out with requests, never providing value in exchange. By adopting a career strategy for your alumni association you have an opportunity to correct this. Instead of thinking of the alumni association as the fundraising arm of the university, you can rebrand your alumni association to be among other things, focused on helping alumni build successful careers and lead meaningful and engaging lives.

So here are a couple of thoughts to keep in mind as you begin to build your strategy.

First of all, think scalability. We encourage you to develop a strategy that reaches the maximum number of alumni with the least amount of cost. The reality is, management is unlikely to hand you a bucket of money and you will need to be entrepreneurial to fill the gap. You've got to find ways to reach more alumni to provide value added career programming.

Second, we'd encourage you to be thinking about providing more services "in the clouds". By providing career curriculum and services via the web you can make them accessible anytime, anyplace, and through any device.

Plus, when you provide career services via the Internet, you will be able to access a burgeoning collection of third party providers who have developed things that may not be the core competence of your staff. Companies today are providing branded career videos, curriculum, webinars, career fairs, as well as coaching. You don't have to reinvent the wheel, look to outsource providers to help you get up to speed quickly.

TalentMarks, for example, provides a post-graduation career webinar series that meets weekly and gives grads access to career authors and thought leaders that give them the knowledge and job search skills they will need in their first professional job search. CareerCamp is branded to each college so students assume the alumni association created and hosted the program. Because of the turnkey nature of the program, it doesn't require any time of the alumni staff.

TalentMarks also provides a branded webinar series for unemployed alumni (CareerWebinars), working alumni, (CareerDiscussions) and even a series (CareerSkills) that features top "soft skill" experts who share with grads and alumni leadership, ethics, communication, teamwork and other soft skills employers say they are lacking.

There are dozens of strategies we could suggest you adopt as you begin to develop an alumni career strategy but in the interest of keeping things focused for now, here are three to consider.

1. Find better ways to utilize social media sites like LinkedIn and Facebook to connect alumni with each other
2. Use your annual giving telephone team to ask working alumni to mentor students in the job search process and look for positions for the students within their networks
3. Think of career services as a revenue generator

You've already had incredible success building relationships with alumni through your LinkedIn and Facebook pages. In fact, these free online tools have literally eliminated the need to have an alumni online community. The Alumni Attitude Survey mentioned above showed of the 21,000 alumni who were surveyed the average alumni barely used the online directory once.

That's not true with LinkedIn and Facebook. Consider using these tools to build participation in events, increase mentoring, helping alumni get jobs and helping alumni do business with each other.

This idea will take a little more effort, but it could be an extremely effective way to help grads get jobs.

Your annual giving callers could play an important part of your plan to help students land their first job. Think about having them call alumni in the spring to get their help in getting grads jobs. As you know, alumni have time, treasure, or talent to contribute, and those that have not been able to afford to contribute treasure will be thrilled to have an opportunity to rally around the graduating class and help them transition to their first professional jobs. Alumni can be

paired with grads, or join an online community that feeds opportunities and advice to the current graduating classes.

Lastly, as you evaluate the options and opportunities available to you, consider including a career strategy that will not only provide free basic services to alumni but also deluxe services alumni have expressed an interest in. Deluxe services could include career coaching, membership in an alumni career management community, job placement help, or even help building resumes.

Summary

Why should your alumni association provide career programming for grads and alumni?

Richard Bolles, author of the book, *What Color Is Your Parachute*, said it years ago, "Working alumni are giving alumni!"

All it takes is one insight, one idea or one piece of information to propel a career in the right direction. Your alumni invested their time and a sizable amount of the family treasury because they trusted your college would provide them the knowledge they would need to lead successful careers. They are looking to you now, more than ever for help in building a successful career strategy.



Colleges and universities that move in this direction will:

- Increase retention and graduate more students on time.
- Increase the number of students with internships and grads with jobs by graduation day.
- Hold down costs while providing more services.
- Generate revenue from the career center.
- Increase enrollment.
- Increase contributions.

Does that sound like something you'd like to do at your campus?

Make career programming a priority and your advancement office will reap the rewards for decades to come.

About

Don Philabaum is the President/CEO of TalentMarks, a worldwide provider of “in the cloud” career curriculum and e-learning platforms designed to help more students get internships, grads get jobs, and alumni lead successful lives. Don is also the author of a dozen white papers and the following books.

