

Case Study-Conducting a Needs Assessment

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BACKGROUND/OVERVIEW OF TOPIC:

This topic was chosen because a gap has been identified in transition for various student populations at the college level to both academic and professional workforce transitions, especially that of First Generation, Low Income and Minority (FGLIM) students. Further exploration of this area is necessary to identify needed areas of intervention and change for higher levels of success for transition in both the academic and professional arenas.

ORGANIZATION:

Any institution of higher education

NEEDS ASSESSMENT TOPIC:

The needs assessment topic for this case study is Academic and Career Development and Preparation of First-Generation, Low Income, Minority College (FGLIM) Students for successful transition to the workforce.

ORGANIZATIONAL/INDUSTRY PROFILE:

The industry focus for this study is higher education in the state of Pennsylvania. Higher education consists of credential schools, vocational/technical schools, community colleges, colleges and universities who offer post-secondary educational options to students. Each state requires a different focus, access, equity and requirements. For this case study, we will concentrate on the state of Pennsylvania for academic requirements and outcomes. We will focus on four year colleges and universities and their access to services, diversity and policy in higher education and the impact of the marketplace on those colleges and universities. Personal

incomes and educational levels of attainment are linked to a state's economic competitiveness, so the improvement of retention rates and graduation rates for a university will have a direct impact on not only their organizational goals but also those of their state economic goals.

PURPOSE:

To identify areas for improvement when working with FGLIM students for academic and career development to develop concepts to work together with faculty, campus services, and employer-based entities to connect students to services needed to develop a career plan and transition to the workplace.

PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS/ISSUES/CONCERNS:

All institutions of higher education encounter students who are not prepared for the level of study and intensity of work at this level. Students come to institutions of higher education from such varied levels of academics in their high school careers that it is often difficult to tailor a curriculum to the various levels of educational acuity. Some students arrive on campus ill-prepared for the reading, writing and testing that is required for this level of education, while others are well-prepared and able to function at a higher level for success in the classroom arena. In order to retain a greater majority of students at the college level and then transition them successfully to the workforce upon graduation, it is necessary to review, identify and adjust the curriculum and services available to the student populations throughout their four years of higher education, specifically the FGLIM population.

Some issues to address include the fact that FGLIM students often have no family ability to support and guide them in their educational process. They depend on the college or university to provide services for academic success, career planning and transition to the workforce. The

issue remains that many students don't avail themselves of the services until too late in their educational process.

The concern is that FGLIM students hesitate to approach services, feeling like they are lacking in some way in what is needed to succeed at this level. Identifying the challenges, and implementing models to address those challenges will make this a set part of the academic process, and not rely on the student to initiate the services needed for success.

The institutions of higher education depend upon higher levels of retention, statistical analysis of transition to the workforce and success of their graduates for future admissions, economic stability and overall reputation of said institution for their future organizational success. The implementation of this process to engage students early in their academic progress will give students access to the services, without hindering their emotional support.

KEY PLAYERS/DECISION MAKERS:

The key players and decision makers (stakeholders) in this process are identified as:

- Tier I: Chancellor, Provost or President of the university – to approve release of funding
- Tier II: Financial Officers – to release funding and coordinate grants, budgets, etc.
- Tier III: Supervisors and academic department coordinators – to assist in the creation and implementation of academic and curriculum changes/additions
- Tier IV: Offices on the campuses including career services, development, alumni relations, continuing education, development and learning/support services – to assist with the creation and implementation of academic and curriculum changes and to provide support for the overall change structure to the academic and mentoring areas.

TARGET POPULATION:

The target population is the FGLIM student population who lack the skills necessary to succeed in the higher educational arena without added support and mentoring services.

However, this case study and the results will be able to be utilized for all populations of students who need that extra assistance to succeed and transition to the college/university level and then to the workforce/professional level.

LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS:

The learner characteristics include the ability to focus on the transferrable skill sets necessary to succeed in a classroom arena and then transfer those skills to the professional workforce arena upon graduation.

Students should be taught basic transferrable skills that can be utilized in a classroom but will then be used as they transition to a professional workplace. These skills include but are not limited to:

- *Ambition* – it must be aligned ambition where students recognize the need to possess certain knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA's) required to succeed in their chosen curriculum and career. Students must be open to change in their ambition, and be able to adjust their focus as they learn.
- *Attendance* – the need to commit to attending classes to learn the material being taught. They must be punctual in their attendance and engaged during the class time.
- *Curiosity* – students must be interested in what they are studying, ask questions, don't be afraid to make a mistake and use the services available to correct those mistakes and be

willing to research what they don't understand and work with professors and services for a greater level of understanding.

- *Preparation* – students must do their assignments including reading, writing and discussion forums while paying attention to details, inconsistencies and overall performance of themselves and classmates.
- *Attitude* – this must be a positive one, with determination and self-discipline to show initiative in completing assignments and going beyond what is asked in the classroom.
- *Talent* – students should work to identify and recognize their talents, using the classroom and outside activities to cultivate and grow those talents, while always creating new talents related to their interests in the classroom and career paths.
- *Flexibility* – students must be able to work together with others to recognize areas of both success and failure, working to correct those areas and be flexible in their handling of both. In the workforce, it is imperative to be able to “juggle all the balls in the air” or in more direct terms, to be able to perform a variety of functions in the professional position.
- *Group/Team Work* – students must be taught the proper protocol to work together as a team, sharing different areas of a task to get the job done, and working well with various personalities, levels of skill and talents. This includes delegation of duties, setting deadlines and recognizing goals of the job at the outset for a better outcome.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT MODEL:

The approach model used should be a job and task analysis to focus on the scope, responsibilities and tasks of each area in regards to the overall preparation and education of FGLIM students in the academic process to prepare students for transition to the workforce.

Identification of a curriculum addition, creation of said curriculum and implementation will require the efforts of combined areas within an institution of higher education for best efficacy.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS, INSTRUMENTS AND ANALYSIS

The data collection tools to utilize include surveys and interviews of FGLIM students and regional employers to identify needed areas of improvement for preparation and transition to the workforce. This could include areas of mentoring, networking, access to employers, writing skills, presentation skills, etc.

Phase 1: Gather preliminary information about the present academic skill set of FGLIM students, willingness of employers to work with this population to create more internship and mentoring opportunities and discussions with key people in the process (chancellor/provost, financial officers, faculty, staff) to determine their level of knowledge and willingness to participate in the needs assessment process.

Phase 2: Examine the external environment to identify and isolate the external factors affecting the performance of the FGLIM student population in the academic and professional arenas.

Phase 3: Examine the internal environment to document current performance of the FGLIM student population and identify the causes of performance gaps and how to create a business strategy to address those gaps.

Phase 4: Chart the future environment to document the desired processes needed to improve performance within the FGLIM student population. Include any changes needed in academic plans, career planning, and employer-student internship and mentoring arenas.

Phase 5: Develop a performance improvement plan to assess readiness for change of the organization and select interventions and actions needed to improve the environment. Include any and all offices on campus including Chancellor/Provost/President, Alumni Relations, Financial Officers, Continuing Education, Faculty, Staff and student groups to interact with to create and implement the agreed upon changes and improvements for results. Assess the willingness and readiness for change of each group for the best overall result.

KEY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The results include the identified gap of FGLIM students for transferrable skill sets and mentoring opportunities needed to develop an academic success plan which will lead to a more successful transition to the professional workforce.

COSTS AND BENEFITS:

The costs for the project are minimal, with the higher education consultant conducting the needs assessment as a part of employment with the institution of higher education. Administrative duties of preparing, scheduling and conducting interviews will be done in conjunction with the Office of Career Services serving as a base location for the duration of the project.

The proposed solution of adding to the curriculum for FGLIM students and further networking with employers should provide the following results:

Financial Benefits

- **Result #1:** Increased internship/job opportunities for students with regional employers who will integrate professional education into the internship learning objectives.
- **Result #2:** Increased support of employer-based entities with advisory boards and councils on campus, especially adjunct professors already involved with our student population.
- **Result #3:** Increased alumni support through identification of FGLIM alumni for scholarship for students focused on professional development related to career preparation and guidance.

Technical Benefits

- Result #1: Connection with technological employers to share knowledge with interns.
- Result #2: Increased/streamlined use of technology on campus for students and employers.
- Result #3: Students and graduates with a higher educational base regarding existing and new technology advances including computer, engineering, medical and business, especially as it relates to the 15 four year degrees offered at the institution of higher education.

Other Benefits

Other benefits include improved communication between the college and community it serves, better knowledge of the employer base, and increased awareness for the community of the 15 four-year degrees offered by the campus and the need for internships and keeping talent local. An exchange of talent and information between students and employers for increased productivity, internships and jobs, with resultant improved economy.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

The recommendations to address the identified gaps include:

Recommendation #1: Develop and integrate an assessment tool to determine level of need prior to the first semester standing of each student. One does not exist at the present time.

Recommendation #2: Create and implement a required curriculum with three levels (Early, Intermediate and Advanced) made available to all students who are identified as first-generation college to allow them access to the training and tools for career planning

- Phase this curriculum to follow the student through first year, second year, third year and graduation year.

Recommendation #3: Create a staff position of (1) one Alumni/Employer Representative to establish a formal mentoring program, and serve as a conduit for all employer interactions on the campus. This person will work interactively with the Chancellor/Provost/President Office, Career Services, Alumni Relations and Continuing Education departments to allow access for employers to the campus for increased interaction in the classroom, internships, job opportunities and training for the employer as needed.

CONCLUSION:

The conclusion of this needs assessment is that there are identified gaps in the education and preparation of FGLIM students to properly prepare them to perform in the academic setting of a college classroom and to transition to the professional workforce upon graduation. This gap greatly affects the retention rates of institutions of higher education, as well as their overall graduation rates. By working together with academic services, career services, the financial officers and Chancellor/Provost/President offices to create and implement academic and professional curriculums, instituting formal mentoring programs and a range of services to address this gap, there will be an increase in the graduation rates of institutes of higher

education as well as the more positive transition to the professional workforce for this group of FGLIM student population.

The solutions presented in this report, integrated with the wide range of proposed services offered on and off campuses, will allow institutions of higher education to realize the benefits of improved retention, graduation and employment rates for the student/alumni population. They will partner with campus administration, Career Services, Employer Relations and Alumni Relations departments, along with faculty and staff to deliver an effective solution to the improvement of workforce transition for students on the campus.

LESSONS LEARNED/TIPS FOR OTHERS

The lessons learned from this process are to gather data in the cleanest manner possible for best analysis results. Utilize the proper data collection tools for best efficacy and responses. Make sure you have the stakeholders of an organization involved early in the process, especially since they control the funding necessary to conduct the needs assessment and approve any additional training or funding needed for changes suggested as a result of the assessment process. And, finally, allow the needs assessment process to be performed with honesty and integrity, for a more positive outcome overall for the process, the identification of gaps, and the training programs developed to address and close those gaps within an organization.

References

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY – First-Generation College Students

_____ **Year of High School Graduation** _____ **Male** _____ **Female**

What high school curriculum did you participate with?

_____ Vocational Technical School _____ Magnet or Charter School
_____ College Preparatory _____ GED
_____ Other

Describe your college search process:

_____ Worked with high school guidance counselor to research, review and complete applications
_____ Attended College Open House Presentations – Please indicate number attended _____

What challenges did you face in choosing a career path?

_____ Financial
_____ Family Support
_____ Homesickness
_____ Transition to college life – lack of appropriate preparation in high school
_____ Guidance related to college life/fields/majors/professionalism
_____ Other _____

EXPLAIN: _____

What challenges do you believe you will or did face in entering the workforce after graduation?

Did you or do you have a mentor who assisted you with the process of finding a college and/or transitioning to college life both socially and academically?

_____ Yes _____ No

Please rate the importance of a mentor in your success in college and beyond.

Rate 1 to 5 with 5 being the most important 1 2 3 4 5

Does your level of success in college relate to mentoring or another area?

EXPLAIN: _____

Do you believe there are/ were sufficient services to assist you with job search: _____ Yes _____ No

Please note any services and how often you used them in your college career:

Career Services: _____ **Financial Aid:** _____ **Learning Center:** _____

Aspire Program: _____ **Tutoring:** _____

Professor Office Hours: _____ **Other:** _____

Do you believe you will be or were prepared for your search for employment upon graduation?

Explain.

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Employer Participants

1. Do you currently employ interns from ABC Campus at your organization?
_____ Yes _____ No

2. If yes, has the relationship been a positive one and will you continue to hire interns?

3. If no, please explain why you have not considered internships with the students of ABC Campus.

4. Are you aware that ABC Campus has a student population of 2800 students and 15 four year degrees? _____ Yes _____ No

5. Are you an ABC campus alumni? _____ Yes _____ No

6. If yes, what was your major at ABC Campus? _____

7. Do you know what a first generation student represents? _____ Yes _____ No

8. Would you be willing to participate with a mentoring program for a student from ABC Campus related to your business? _____ Yes _____ No