University-Employer Partnerships
Best Practices

As part of the Task Force on Academic and Workforce Alignment's recommendations, Board staff facilitated a workgroup to develop System-wide guidance for stronger partnerships between the state universities and Florida employers. This document outlines the best practices developed by the workgroup and addresses the following topics.

Mutual benefits of university-employer partnerships

Guidelines for effective employer advisory councils

Best practices for effective partnering with employers

STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF FLORIDA

Mutual benefits of university-employer partnerships

Students & Workforce

- Employers engage with universities to help prepare students to meet industry needs, as employers are at the forefront of the ever-changing developments in their respective industries. Partnering ensures institutions are teaching relevant skills and competencies in their programs of study and increasing graduates' employability. In turn, employers better understand student competencies across different degree programs upon graduation.
- Students engage with employers to gain work experience and insight into employers' expectations and skills-based needs, the work environment, and career opportunities related to their field of study. Likewise, employers engage with potential employees who can be trained in their businesses prior to entering the workforce post-graduation.
- Partnerships between employers and universities create a pipeline connecting graduates to job opportunities.

Research & Professional Development

- Employers provide opportunities for faculty and student research. For example, companies can help with faculty research agendas by funding research projects that help advance their industries.
- Student and faculty research can inform cutting-edge employer practices. For example, a school of business can share the latest human resources or supply chain management practices with their employer partners.
- Employer partnerships can enhance faculty professional development. For example, industry partners can provide opportunities for faculty to visit their facilities for professional development. Faculty can also receive training via fellowships and share what they learn with others at their institutions.

University Support

- Employer partners often sponsor different university initiatives. Examples include grants, scholarships, resources, and career and professional development programs and events.

Employer Advisory Boards

Best Practice

Convene advisory boards at different levels targeted to various functions & initiatives

- Create and implement advisory boards representing universities' colleges and research centers
- Focus working initiatives and key performance indicators on important areas such as curriculum enhancements, experiential learning, corporate relations, fundraising, and branding/marketing
- Employers can cover multiple industries for college-wide boards, or be more industry-specific for boards that serve a college, department, or research center

University-Wide Advisory Boards
- Focus on high-level strategic issues, such as how the university serves the various communities where it is located, such as employers, nonprofits, community groups, or important trends impacting the university's future
- Typically composed of broad partnerships that involve multiple colleges and provide technical advice on complex operational issues of broad partnerships that involve multiple colleges and provide technical advice on complex operational issues
- Members are usually executives or key community leaders

Dean's Advisory Boards
- College-level advisory boards advise deans on strategic priorities for the college
- Example topics include exploring new academic programs for the college, college foundation activities, fundraising, and opportunities to raise the college's stature regionally and nationally
- Members typically include the CEO or a C-suite member to focus on high-level strategic initiatives
- Deans often engage partners through meetings and other intentional touch points, such as lunches and informal conversations

Department-Level Advisory Boards
- Academic department and career services office-related advisory boards further increase working relationships between institutions and employers
- Strategic focus of these advisory boards should include curriculum enhancements based on the latest trends, desired skills employers seek, sponsorship opportunities, and the overall goal to increase first-destination percentages into respective industries on an annual basis
- Address the development of experiential learning opportunities for students within the field and early-academic career internship opportunities
- Typical members include front-line professionals attuned to current industry needs who can advise curricular changes based on the most relevant practices in their field

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UNIVERSITY-EMPLOYER SPOTLIGHTS

The following examples describe institution advisory boards at three different levels. The employers highlighted are of various types and sizes, demonstrating the range of partners institutions work with to ensure positive workforce outcomes for their students.

University-Wide Advisory Board

UF | UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

The University of Florida's (UF) Career Connections Center leads the institution's Employer Advisory Board comprised of employers prioritizing UF as a top destination for talent acquisition across disciplines. The advisory board meets bi-monthly to provide the university with workforce development insights, labor market trends, and employer feedback for recruitment. Board members give the career center guidance related to recruitment best practices, talent needs and desired offerings in support of employability and career readiness of UF candidates. In addition, board members commit their organization to increasing their institutional presence at UF by partnering with the university to advance goals for student success.

Highlighted Employers   Google   NVIDIA   Goldman Sachs   ALDI   NEXTera ENERGY

Dean's Advisory Board

UNIVERSITY of WEST FLORIDA

The University of West Florida's (UWF) Hall Marcus College of Science and Engineering has an advisory board that advises the dean on immediate goals and long-range planning and supports the college in fulfilling UWF's mission. The advisory board is composed of up to 12 individuals who meet three times during the academic year. Member responsibilities include making recommendations or providing key information to the dean regarding external affairs, development, and programming, assisting with donor activity to the college, and providing technical assistance.

Highlighted Employers   leidos   NAVY FEDERAL Credit Union   GE   Peraton

Department-Level Advisory Board

FIU | FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Florida International University's Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing & Health Sciences facilitates a Nursing Advisory Council that provides advice and feedback to the dean and nursing faculty regarding academic programs, employers' perceived performance and quality of graduates, collaborative research opportunities, collaborative service opportunities, clinical practice activities, and employers' perceived educational program issues and concerns. The board recently stimulated the college's activities related to increasing the Nurse Educator Program to help prepare more nursing faculty to address the nursing shortage and to enhance the clinical teaching of nursing students.

Highlighted Employers   Memorial Healthcare System   BROWARD HEALTH   HCA Florida Healthcare   Baptist Health

Best Practice — Advisory boards should meet at least once a semester

- Most boards meet at least two to three times yearly, with committee meetings occurring throughout the year
- Regular board meetings typically happen in person, either on campus or at employer partner offices, and committee meetings may be conducted virtually to accommodate the schedules of the advisory board members
- Some boards may form smaller workgroups to address a particular issue, such as fundraising, and may meet more frequently than the whole advisory board

Best Practice — Select board members based on college or department needs & board members' expertise

- Once the mission and role of the board are determined, board members should be invited based on the board's goal
- Members' titles and roles will vary based on the level of the institution's board and its desired outcomes
- Depending on the advisory board's needs, colleges and departments should develop an invitation process for board members that identifies the firm size, location, type, and level/title of the potential advisory board member
- Colleges and departments should also consider having a mix of corporations and industries represented on their boards to expand partnership opportunities
- Institution alumni can serve as an important source of advisory board members because of their knowledge, ability to network with other alumni, and their commitment to their alma mater. They also bring knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the institution and its policies, which can be invaluable to employer partners

Best Practice — Outline expectations of the advisory council at the outset

- Institutions should clarify their expectations to potential advisory board members before securing their membership
  - This can include outlining the advisory board's mission, the time commitment expected of members, specific responsibilities, and desired outcomes
- Deans, department chairs, or other individuals leading an advisory board can consider putting these expectations in writing to distribute to potential members to ensure that all members of the advisory board are working to fulfill its mission and goals

Best Practice — Communicate advisory board activities to university leadership

- Reports to top leaders typically focus on activities that may shape or impact broader university initiatives; for example, pilot projects that may serve as models for other parts of the university, such as novel, high-impact experiential learning initiatives
- Advisory boards should record their progress toward completing goals and outcomes achieved so they can readily communicate their activities to university leadership
- Reports should be written by institution staff with input from employers

Effective University-Employer Partnerships

Best Practice

Create individual partnership plans for engagement and collaboration with each major industry partner

- Some employers partner with multiple departments on a variety of initiatives, such as education and training, workforce development, research, and philanthropic support
- Institutions should create a comprehensive plan to engage with major industry partners on all of these components to ensure both the university and employer realize the full benefit of the partnership
- Partnership plans can include the overall partnership strategy, university programs implemented that require industry engagement, processes used to collaborate with the employer, and more detailed plans for each component of the partnership

UNIVERSITY-EMPLOYER SPOTLIGHT

Industry Partnership Playbook

The University of Central Florida's (UCF) College of Engineering and Computer Science created an Industry Partnership Playbook that details the process used to engage with employers on research, student access and education, and sponsorships and giving. The playbook describes the programs related to these components and the benefits to UCF and industries as a result of this collaboration. Additionally, the playbook describes a multi-year strategy to drive engagement, providing a timeline with goals for each state of the partnership.

Highlighted Employers   **LOCKHEED MARTIN**   **NORTHROP GRUMMAN**

Best Practice

Collaborate and create opportunities for employers to engage students early in their college career and facilitate career education for students to develop professional and career readiness skills to enter the job market

- Employers can partner with universities to cultivate relationships with students as early as their freshman year and contribute to students' career education and skills-based professional development
- Students can begin thinking about their career journey early on and explore careers in various fields of interest
- University career centers offer key services to help facilitate this process
- Examples of opportunities for employers to foster this type of engagement include:
  - Participating in the mock interview program or resume review program
  - Participating in student mentoring programs
  - Offering one-on-one shadowing and student group, on-site company visit experiences where students can better understand how an office operates
  - Participating in or hosting professional development workshops, from professional etiquette to technical skills training
  - Sponsoring a cohort of students to shadow or work on a company problem/project to offer them hands-on experience; this could be tied to a specific class and its curriculum or an independent project external to an academic course
  - Serving as guest lecturers

UNIVERSITY-EMPLOYER SPOTLIGHT

FAMU FLORIDA AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL UNIVERSITY

School of Business and Industry Entrepreneur Course

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University's School of Business and Industry students take an entrepreneurship course during their program. As part of the course, students work on case studies with companies to solve real-world problems. Wakati Hair reached out to students to develop a brand design and business plan to market its products to consumers with naturally-textured hair. The students' work was ultimately used in Wakati's branding, and their story is featured on Wakati products, which are sold in Target, Walgreens, and Wal-Mart stores.

Highlighted Employers   wakati™   kao

Leverage employer partnerships to expand experiential learning opportunities for students

- Employers can engage with universities through experiential learning opportunities, which encompass various enriching experiences for students, including service learning, volunteering, faculty-led research projects, study abroad, cooperative education, and internships
- Experiences can occur outside of the traditional classroom experience or be embedded as part of a course. More detail can be found in the State University System's Experiential Learning Definitions.
- Recommended experiential learning opportunities for employer engagement include:
  - Capstone projects
  - Internships/Co-Ops/Externships
  - Micro-credentials and certifications
  - Sales competitions or case competitions
- A best practice when engaging employers in experiential learning opportunities is to document and collect employer feedback on the experiential learning processes and student performance
  - For example, having a standardized experiential learning performance evaluation made available to employers or an electronic feedback system

UNIVERSITY-EMPLOYER SPOTLIGHT

Tech Fellows

Florida State University's Tech Fellows Program introduces underrepresented populations to the entrepreneurship sector through internship opportunities. Students gain hands-on experience and connections through working with incubator staff, startup companies, and mentors. The program exposes students to the everyday work of product development, entrepreneurship, and ecosystem building. Students also take a course to learn about the work of business incubators and the startup launch process.

Employer Partners

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North Florida Innovation Labs

TAMPA BAY wave

StarterStudio

Best Practice

Enhance internal processes, training, and communications to facilitate efficient and ethical recruitment of students

University career centers partner with multiple types and levels of internal and external constituents to impact students' career development and professional preparation. Significant external constituents are employer partners, who desire more relational versus transactional engagement. Effective partnerships facilitate successful student engagement with employers across all industries to secure internship and job opportunities. Institutions should consult and adhere to guidelines and standards established through research conducted by national organizations such as the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) and the Network of Academic Corporate Relations Officers (NACRO). Findings from a recent NACRO report support adopting the following best practices to enhance employer partnerships.

- Ensure a designated employer relations team knowledgeable about current recruiting trends and empowered to facilitate informed conversations, and strategy development, and implementation.
- Establish a process to coordinate internal communications, needs, and goals across university departments, staff, and faculty to streamline engagement and organize recruiting activities. One strategy could involve the establishment of a university-wide employer engagement committee.
- Empower students with industry and job market knowledge, professional skills, and varied opportunities to engage effectively in the recruiting process.
- Communicate and adhere to consistent policies and practices to ensure ethical recruiting strategies and practices comply with local, state, and federal laws and guidelines.

Best Practice

Encourage collaboration between faculty and students with industry partners to bridge the gap between early academic research and commercial readiness and deployment

- One of the primary benefits of university-employer partnerships is the use of academic research in commercial development
- Faculty and students can contribute to their field through their academic research, providing students with undergraduate or graduate research experience
- Companies can benefit from institutional research by incorporating new findings in developing new products for commercialization
- Institutions should encourage faculty to facilitate collaboration with their respective industries to ensure that their academic research can be used early in this process