

Enhancing Students' Experience in On-Campus Jobs – Improved Career-Readiness for Post-Graduation Employment -

White Paper Submitted by Ann Herrmann, Career Services

Scott Carlson of The Chronicle of Higher Education, recently published a special report, called *The Future of Work: How Colleges Can Prepare Students for the Jobs Ahead*, and highlighted critical issues about current and future needs in the job market, and employers' perspectives on students' lack of preparation for the work force. There were two key sections, "Jobs of the Future" and "Voices of Employers."

Highlights from *Jobs of the Future*:

- Students who graduate in the STEM fields will continue to be in high demand, but not all employers seek candidates with STEM backgrounds. Many employers assert that "subject-matter expertise is highly trainable, and that employees with robust soft skills are the most desired candidates for any job."
- The students who will be the most competitive in the job market will have both technical skills (data analytics, basic coding, social media, web design, etc.) and soft skills - they need to be able to present well, communicate clearly, and be able to work with a wide range of different people. They also need to be able to articulate their transferrable skills to employers.

Highlights from *Voices of Employers*:

- The pace and skills required to hit the ground running in a new job have changed. Students need "work attitudes and work behaviors like resiliency, initiative, and grit – things that generally aren't taught in coursework." Students need to know how to accept, learn from, and bounce back from mistakes and constructive feedback, and how to solve conflicts through communication. Additionally, they need to learn how to anticipate and see problems, and take ownership in finding and implementing solutions to problems.

Additionally, The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) reported in December 11, 2017, that 99.2 percent of 201 employer survey respondents indicated Critical Thinking / Problem Solving as essential, while they viewed students' proficiency level in these areas as 55.8 percent. One hundred percent of employers considered Professionalism / Work Ethic essential, and rated students' proficiency at 42.5 percent. 95.9 percent of employer respondents indicated Oral / Written Communication as essential, with only 41.6 percent of students demonstrating this proficiency.

Both Ryerson University in Toronto and Clemson University have created innovative programs to address some of these gaps. See this article in the October 29, 2017, Chronicle of Higher Education, *Making Students' Jobs More Meaningful* <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Making-Students-Jobs-More/241576>.

Ryerson University has enhanced on-campus job descriptions to ensure that students are learning skills valued by Canadian employers. They have attached learning outcomes to each position, and supervisors meet regularly with student assistants to discuss their goals and learning.

Clemson University has addressed students' skill gaps by creating an on-campus paid internship program, an idea developed by the President of the University. Hosting departments pay half of the student intern's salary, and the University pays the other half. A requirement of each internship is that it must provide critical skills for the workforce and at least one expected learning outcome – with the goal of providing such skills as critical thinking, presentation skills, ability to take constructive feedback, etc. Supervisors / mentors for these student employment positions conduct structured interviews with students to ensure students are meeting learning outcomes and are able to articulate their learning for future job interviews.

These programs have been born out of the well-known and trademarked program at the University of Iowa, called Iowa GROW – developed by George Kuh and colleagues in 2009: <https://vp.studentlife.uiowa.edu/priorities/grow/>. The key element of this program, as well as Ryerson's and Clemson's programs, is the structured interview between the supervisor and student – what is the key learning happening in this particular on-campus job and / or internship? And how are the student's responsibilities in the job connected to what he/she is learning in class? Additionally, encouraging the student to articulate what he/she is learning, and how these skills will be utilized in his/her career of interest, is a critical component of the conversation.

CU Boulder Proposal: Using a Strengths-based Approach in Enhancing On-Campus Employment Experiences for Students

Hundreds of students are already working on campus. We propose modeling after Iowa, Ryerson, and Clemson, to make the CU Boulder on-campus job experience a stronger learning experience, so that students develop the technical and soft skills that are in high demand in the job market and are therefore more prepared for their professional careers.

Making student assistant positions into more professional-level experiences, in the form of internships, or simply modifying the job descriptions to incorporate more professional-level skills (both with learning outcomes) would enhance students' work skill development.

Additionally, given our students have free access to CliftonStrengths, incorporating the CliftonStrengths program into on-campus employment supervision conversations would be a unique approach to implementing the Iowa GROW program on the CU Boulder campus.

CliftonStrengths is an online assessment that results in students receiving their top five natural areas of talent that they then can further explore and develop as a path to self-discovery and personal and professional growth. As students gain academic and work experience, and incorporate their top five CliftonStrengths into conversations with trusted supervisors, mentors, faculty, etc., these natural areas of talent can develop into full-fledged skills. Students gain greater confidence in themselves as they consciously incorporate and process the use of their top five CliftonStrengths in their day-to-day work. See more about the benefits of using Clifton Strengths: Career Development Network Journal, Winter 2017-2018 Chapter 7, *The CliftonStrengths: Focusing on Strengths as a Predictor of Success* by Cori Shaff & Emily Hoyt:

<http://files.constantcontact.com/56f4bf3f301/32e57c4f-0490-4b33-b6b8-9461ff27cdad.pdf>

“Clifton Strengths can be a vehicle to help students achieve goals in a more enjoyable, efficient, and seamless way (Asplund, 2012); when they apply their natural talents, students will likely work efficiently and enjoy the process. As they identify positive and helpful behaviors, they can choose to replicate these actions to move toward consistent work performance. Changes may be subtle and seem inconsequential. However with each small change, the student can move towards excellence (Maurer, 2004).”

Use of CliftonStrengths in providing structured learning interviews with students would require supervisors and departments to rethink their current student assistant positions.

- Supervisors would review their student assistant job descriptions - to determine how to make these positions more robust, allowing the student to gain professional-level skills in the areas of critical thinking / problem solving, work ethic, oral / written communication, etc.
- Supervisors would become familiar with the skills in demand in the workforce.
- Supervisors would work with the student to co-create the position so that the student has some ownership in his/her work experience, and discuss how the student's strengths could be utilized in the position.
 - What would those who know you best say you are good at?
 - What have your professors / peers complimented you on?
 - What activities do you seem to pick up quickly and easily?
 - What activities give you the most satisfaction?
- Additionally, this process would require guidance and structure provided by supervisors to work with students in being able to articulate their learning – using the Iowa GROW structured interview questions as a guide, while also incorporating CliftonStrengths questions. How are you using each of your top five CliftonStrengths to manage the responsibilities of this job?

Elements of the Program:

- A consultation team consisting of various CU Boulder staff and faculty knowledgeable about career development, CliftonStrengths, and the current job market, could provide consultation with supervisors of student assistant positions to help them enhance their job descriptions to ensure students are developing critical professional level skills that are in demand in the workforce, while also meeting the work needs of the department, by proposing:
 - A career-relevant project
 - Leadership skills the student can develop as a part of the work role

- Meeting professionals in the student's field of interest
- The consultation team could also consult with supervisors on how to use CliftonStrengths as a tool for coaching student assistants in their roles. Supervisors can utilize the student's top five CliftonStrengths to not only modify a job description position but also have conversations with the student about his/her career goals; what he/she would like to gain in the student assistant position; and how to use the student's top five strengths to be successful in the role.

Potential enhanced student assistant projects / responsibilities, or internships:

- Assessing, evaluating, recommending changes to, and redesigning campus websites
- Crafting marketing messages
- Conducting student learning surveys, analyzing the data, and making recommendations in a written report, and presenting these results to office members
- Using graphic design skills to create edgy flyers/posters and web material
- Visiting local high schools to discuss college admissions and planning
- Developing presentation skills while conducting outreach on campus to various student organizations
- Providing peer-to-peer advising support

Benefits to Students:

- Students would take responsibility for their own learning in their job/internship, and they would learn valuable job skills that would help them be more competitive for professional positions in the work force
- Additionally, they would be more prepared for and able to contribute when they start their jobs, making the onboarding process that much easier on the employer
- The student would work closely with the supervisor to develop learning outcomes for the position, so that the student participates in his/her own learning.
- They would meet regularly with their supervisor to receive ongoing feedback about performance and skill development.
- Additionally, students would gain greater confidence in bridging their experience as a student to their professional career.

Benefits to the Department:

- Student workers are held to a higher standard of performance, so they are providing more professional-level skills and services, and therefore are providing better service to the employing office as well as office customers.
- With support from a consultation team and a supervisor template, supervisors gain experience working closely with students to enhance their experience, provide coaching and feedback. This guidance and support may enhance supervisors' experience as well.

Resources:

The Chronicle of Higher Education. Special Report: *The Future of Work: How Colleges Can Prepare Students for the Jobs Ahead*, Scott Carlson, 2017.

The Chronicle of Higher Education. *Making Students' Jobs More Meaningful*. Kelly Field, October 29, 2017.

Career Development Network Journal, Winter 2017-2018 Chapter 7, *The CliftonStrengths: Focusing on Strengths as a Predictor of Success* by Cori Shaff & Emily Hoyt: <http://files.constantcontact.com/56f4bf3f301/32e57c4f-0490-4b33-b6b8-9461ff27cdad.pdf>

Asplund, J. (2012, September 27). When Americans Use Their Strengths More, They Stress Less. Gallup. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/157679/americans-strengths-stress-less.aspx>

Maurer, R. (2004). *One Small Step Can Change Your Life: The Kaizen Way*. New York, NY: Workman Publishing Company, Inc.

University of Iowa, Iowa GROW Program: <https://vp.studentlife.uiowa.edu/priorities/grow/>

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), Spotlight for Career Services Professionals – *Employers Rate Career Competencies*, New Hire Proficiency. December 11, 2017. NACE Staff.