

# Multiple Academic Credentials for Workforce Competencies

*Focus: Career readiness across and beyond the curriculum*

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## **Focus of Proposal**

This Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) focuses on integrating career readiness across and beyond the curriculum to better prepare students for life after college. Unlike the previously successful QEP focusing on undergraduate research, this proposal intends to address workforce competencies at all levels including undergraduate, graduate, and non-degree seeking students. It is also fully integrated into the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) key indicators of assessment: 1) content/discipline knowledge; 2) communication skills; 3) critical thinking skills; and 4) diversity, equity, and inclusion (which was just recently added by FAU in 2021). By focusing on career readiness skill development, this QEP will improve student outcomes from recruitment, retention, persistence, and completion to eventual placement in the career of first choice. As Florida Atlantic University continues along its race to excellence and builds upon the recent accomplishments of developing a culture of student success and excellence in research and inquiry, we must continue to lead the State of Florida in cultivating discovery, diversity, and distinction. Implementation of this QEP will allow FAU students to become more successful in securing meaningful careers or pursuing continuing education such that FAU graduates will become the most sought-after talent, while also enhancing the reputation of FAU in the community and beyond.

To understand the underlying factors responsible for producing graduates capable of thriving in the workforce, a multitude of local, regional, and national surveys have been conducted, which found that only 11% of business leaders and 14% of the public felt strongly that university graduates emerge with the skills needed for workplace success<sup>1,2,3</sup>. Furthermore, the Florida Council of 100 (composed of the top business leaders in the state) surveyed 550 businesses in Florida in 2018, and 80% of respondents said that it is difficult to find recent graduates who are qualified for jobs at their companies, while nearly half spent additional time and money re-training skills that should have already been learned in school, which is trending worse from previous surveys.

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<sup>1</sup> Peck, A. (2017). Engagement and Employability: Integrating Career Learning through Cocurricular Experiences in Postsecondary Education. *NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education*.

<sup>2</sup> Lumina Foundation. (2016). Goal 2025. [https://www.luminafoundation.org/goal\\_2025](https://www.luminafoundation.org/goal_2025)

<sup>3</sup> Peck, A., and M. Preston. "The value of engaged students." *NACE Journal* (2017).

Employers expect new hires to possess key 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce skills. These have been identified by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) as the 8 career readiness competencies<sup>4</sup> listed as follows and defined in Appendix A:

- |                                      |                                 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Critical Thinking/Problem Solving | 5. Leadership                   |
| 2. Oral/Written Communications       | 6. Professionalism/Work Ethic   |
| 3. Teamwork/Collaboration            | 7. Career Management            |
| 4. Digital Technology                | 8. Global/Intercultural Fluency |

These 8 NACE career readiness competencies completely align with the SACS learning outcomes:

- Content/Discipline Knowledge and Skills [3,4,5,6,7]
- Communication [2. Oral/Written Communications]
- Critical Thinking [1. Critical Thinking/Problem Solving]
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion [8. Global/Intercultural Fluency]

**Data Collected from the QEP Website**

Summaries of the FAU QEP survey data conducted in Fall 2020 of employers, recent alumni, and faculty reveal an achievement gap in the 8 NACE career readiness competencies between the level of importance assigned by employers/faculty and the perceived abilities of FAU graduates in their hire.

Competency	Employer Rating*	Faculty Rating*	FAU Graduates Achievement*
1. Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	1.06	1.29	1.70
2. Oral/Written Communications	1.09	1.33	1.68
3. Teamwork/Collaboration	1.05	1.64	1.47
4. Digital Technology	1.32	1.51	1.65
5. Leadership	1.46	1.93	1.92
6. Professionalism/Work Ethic	1.04	1.36	1.52
7. Career Management	1.00	1.35	1.73
8. Global/Intercultural Fluency	1.27	1.45	1.58

*\*Rating of 1 = "Very important" on a 4-point Likert scale*

It is interesting to note that all 8 NACE competencies were ranked in the top 10 out of 18 choices for employers, but leadership and teamwork were not in the top 10 for the faculty. Also striking is that some of the largest achievement gaps, such as teamwork, leadership, professionalism, and career management are areas in which FAU faculty are not aligned with employers in assigning the same value of importance. For example, teamwork/collaboration was ranked 3rd

<sup>4</sup> National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2016). Career readiness defined.

by the employers but only 13th by faculty, and career management was ranked number 1 by the employers but ranked near the bottom of the top 5 for faculty.

In the recent FAU alumni survey comments, terms like *career preparation*, *real-world skills*, *professional competencies*, *job-related coursework*, etc. were mentioned 268 times out of the 416 responses. Alumni felt that curricula should, “include more real-world application to prepare students to excel in their careers, not to just pass an exam.” Others felt that, “FAU did not give me the tools I needed for my career.” Some stated that they, “would like to see more partnerships with industry early on in a college career to provide undergraduate fellowships and authentic (not theoretical) experiences. Companies would receive access to great talent, and FAU would be more competitive for top tier recruits.” **A theme of modernizing the curriculum for better alignment with workforce expectations was evident.** Although some work has been done to address career readiness skills, currently FAU lacks a fully integrated approach to infusing these core workforce competencies into the curriculum. This QEP proposal intends to enhance and build upon existing efforts while developing new programs and providing new tools to help FAU graduates achieve successful career outcomes.

### **Scope of the Plan**

To address the lack of alignment between employer expectations and perceived skills of FAU graduates, we propose this QEP initiative that targets cross-functional interdisciplinary employability skills in curricular and co-curricular frameworks, faculty professional development, well-integrated utilization of career services, and community outreach focused on strengthening academic and NACE career readiness competencies. Integrating employability skills across the curriculum in the various degree programs will provide students with the core job skills not only necessary for academic success, but also to excel in the workforce, to become productive members of society, and to be more engaged alumni in a stronger financial position to support future initiatives with their alma mater. To that end, we will implement a holistic model for delivering quality career preparedness that prioritizes early engagement, exploration, and in-depth industry knowledge delivered via technology-driven services with multiple touchpoints in the curriculum. The goal is to expand upon the newly organized thematic clusters of the Intellectual Foundations Program (IFP) as a stepping stone to accumulate multiple academic credentials in parallel to the conventional degree program pathway by synergistically engaging in the following evidence-based high impact practices:

- **Leveraging the FAU Career Center**
- **Curricular frameworks**
- **Professional development**
- **Community engagement**

## Leveraging the FAU Career Center

The 2016 Gallup-Purdue Index<sup>5</sup> showed that graduates who rated career services as “very helpful” were nearly 3 times more likely to strongly agree their education was worth the cost and more likely to recommend their alma mater. The FAU Career Center provides dynamic and comprehensive career services to help students and alumni navigate the intersection of interests, skills, values, and passions and how they relate to successful employment. The Career Center supports FAU’s core identity of providing a practical, future-focused education by offering a wide range of learning opportunities, career development resources, and real-world experiences to help students and alumni develop the skills and meaningful connections they need to work, succeed, and contribute in the global marketplace. Strategically aligned within the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, the Career Center is innovative, data-driven, and student-focused. It provides critical insight into post-graduate employment, hiring trends, and employer and alumni engagement. In addition to addressing critical career skills in advising and planning sessions, the Center launched a “*Classroom to Career*” initiative, designed to more broadly increase student awareness and development of core career skills based on the 8 NACE career readiness competencies. Further, the Center has developed curriculum and provided a variety of turn-key Canvas-ready modules for career-related assignments. These efforts are a good start to creating a broader career ecosystem; however, there is much more to do.

What is missing here is better integration into the core academic mission of the University. To accomplish this, a cross-connection must be made with faculty to provide a means for academic programs to align curricula to meet learning outcomes related to the 8 NACE career readiness competencies. The 2016 Gallup-Purdue Index<sup>5</sup> also showed that graduates who worked on long-term projects taking a semester or more to complete and those who had internships where they could apply what they learned in the classroom doubled their odds of success in their work later in life. The goal is to leverage the existing FAU Career Center’s strengths and resources to enhance career mentoring, increase numbers of students who are career-ready, increase the overall number of internships/co-ops/student employment, and improve assessment of those experiences while enhancing the reputation of FAU with our expansive and growing employer partners in the community. This will be achieved by increasing the involvement of faculty as follows:

- Create a faculty liaison program (“Career Champions Network”) modeled after successful similar programs in OURI and Community Engagement to direct development of career focused course designations and faculty-driven curriculum incentive programs to meet students’ career development needs in each major and college. This network will identify ways to increase opportunities for new students and transfers to build connections with faculty in cornerstone, keystone, and capstone courses as well as co-curricular activities such as student organizations, prestigious scholarships, and competitions.

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<sup>5</sup> The Gallup-Purdue Index (2016) <https://www.gallup.com/services/176768/2014-gallup-purdue-index-report.aspx>

- Enhance student preparation for meaningful internship/co-op experiences through case management career advising that is not just a service but part of curricula with more faculty participation in assessment tool development and continuous improvement.
- Assist faculty by providing trained peer consultants and expanding the career skills development badging program (learning modules for canvas) through the curriculum enhancement grants program described in “Curricular frameworks” to reduce workforce skills gaps
- Secure and integrate innovative artificial intelligence tools to expand access to student career readiness services such as resume/interview skills, negotiation, conflict resolution, multicultural awareness, as well as capturing more comprehensive career outcomes data from alumni and current students who are employed to provide insights on the important skills sought by employers

### **Curricular framework**

The proposed QEP will provide resources to assist programs in developing multi-semester, cornerstone experiences that emphasize career preparedness for 1st-year and transfer students. In addition, we propose to develop industry-recognized micro-credentialing pathways that do not interfere with but instead provide synergistic support for academic programs by working with faculty liaisons (“Career Champions Network”) in curriculum mapping and creatively using the IFP thematic clusters and technical/free electives to achieve the QEP goals without adding credits to degree programs or lengthening time to graduation. Thus, students can build workforce-centric portfolios by accumulating certificates for example.

- Curriculum mapping and course audits will help faculty identify where curriculum enhancement grants can be used to develop long-term projects as part of the class. Faculty liaisons in the Career Champions Network selected from across the colleges in conjunction with the peer consultants program can assist faculty in providing opportunities for career-readiness pedagogy to be infused into multiple touchpoints in the curriculum.
- The Career Champions Network will spearhead development of supportive multi-semester 1st-year experiences that provide mentoring, advising, curriculum alignment, and emphasis on career preparedness with cornerstone coursework (1st-year capstone) such as SLS1301 which has shown to increase a student’s self-efficacy and learning skills. It is important to note that 1<sup>st</sup> year denotes FTIC, bridge programs, new transfer students, first generation, new graduate students, new non-degree seeking students, and non-traditional students.
- The liaisons will also create a menu of industry-recognized mini-credentials that students can achieve during their flight plan at FAU.

### **Professional development**

We propose to institute faculty learning communities to share best practices in various and related disciplines as well as partner with industry whenever possible.

- Comprehensive faculty and staff professional development that focuses on institutional culture change related to inclusive instruction, student development theory, and equity/inclusion using a faculty learning community model that engages faculty at all levels including instructors, adjuncts, guest lecturers, industry experts/employers, teaching assistants, and student instructors.

### **Community engagement**

The FAU survey of recent graduates and alumni indicated a striking achievement gap in global/intercultural fluency (despite the fact that FAU is one of the most racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse institutions in the country). To address this issue, we propose to create a pool of diverse alumni and community leaders/employers that can give guest lectures or serve as project mentors to show students (and faculty) of diverse backgrounds what employers who look like them are looking for in future hires. This foundational pillar will solidify community engagement partnerships, provide a sense of pride in the institution, and strengthen collaboration with employers to develop the innovative workforce of the future that serves the needs of society.

- Create a guest speaker clearinghouse to engage employers and alumni from diverse backgrounds to provide meaningful experiences, mentoring connections, and industry knowledge directly into the classroom.
- Create industry-focused career learning communities led jointly by career specialists, faculty, and employer engagement professionals from diverse backgrounds.

### **Timetable for Implementation**

#### **Pre-Planning and Year 0 Planning**

After this program is selected for the QEP, the first order of business is to establish a leadership team including the Faculty QEP coordinator, Career Center Assistant Vice President, QEP professional coordinator/Assessment coordinator, QEP web designer, and the Career Champions Network faculty liaisons from each college. We propose to create the Career Champions Network, the Curriculum Enhancement Grants program, the Professional Development Communities, the Guest Speaker Clearinghouse, a recognition awards program, and the peer consultants program as a phased approach. In the first year of implementation, we will be working with at least 3 colleges and up to 10 departments for targeted curricular and co-curricular efforts, and then add two additional colleges reaching up to half of the departments in each new college added each year for the next two years as we ramp up to full implementation.

### **Assessment Plan**

This proposed QEP is focused on developing career readiness skills and then providing the resources, connections, and opportunities for FAU students to secure meaningful employment or continue their studies. These efforts also positively impact the State of Florida Board of Governor's metrics 1 and 2. Metric 1 is Percent of Bachelor's Graduates Employed (Earning \$25,000+) or Continuing their Education. Metric 2 is Median Wages of Bachelor's Graduates Employed Full-time. The FAU Career Center has dedicated staff that can assist in collecting this information and tracking student outcomes for the benefit of university metrics.

### **Measurement of Success**

The University is monitoring indicators of student success defined broadly as improvements in key student outcomes such as student retention, degree completion, time-to-degree, placement in field, or performance in "gatekeeper" courses, and many others to comply with Florida Board of Governors metrics and also for continuous improvement of our programs for accreditation.

Specifically for this QEP, we will track numbers of students participating in internships/co-ops/student employment but with improved assessment rubrics that can assist in targeted improvement of these career preparation programs. In addition, the employer surveys of FAU student success in internship, co-op, and part/full-time positions can provide another measure of achieving successful outcomes with valuable information for program improvement. Another metric involves collecting information of first-destination employment outcomes. Producing employable graduates will also support greater retention, faster degree completion, and more fruitful relationships with alumni and industry.

Assessment monitoring for the QEP will include the following performance indicators:

- Numbers of students that complete career-readiness designated coursework and micro-credentialing certifications
- Numbers of faculty participating in professional development
- Numbers of students taking advantage of enhanced career services
- Numbers of alumni/employers engaged with specific classes
- Numbers of students able to secure full time employment or continue education within 6 months of graduation as well as annual salary as tracked in the FETPIP reports

The FETPIP report provides placement statistics by CIP code and degree type. Typically, FAU compares compare favorably to other state universities in the SUS, and this report provides useful input and feedback about majors over time, particularly as a variety of changes are undertaken to strengthen the academic program and better align with employer expectations. Following is an example FETPIP report for one of the undergraduate programs in the College of Business.

University	Graduates	Employed	Employed Percent	Employed Full Time	Employed Full Time Percent	Full Time Average Qtr Earnings	Continuing Education	Continuing Education Percent
FAMU	86	52	(60%)	38	(44%)	\$9,916	17	(20%)
<b>FAU</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>(72%)</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>(63%)</b>	<b>\$11,054</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>(8%)</b>
FGCU	199	146	(73%)	126	(63%)	\$10,866	11	(6%)
FIU	394	284	(72%)	244	(62%)	\$13,107	54	(14%)
FSU	256	153	(60%)	121	(47%)	\$12,910	32	(13%)
UCF	175	128	(73%)	109	(62%)	\$11,051	****	(***)
UF	521	292	(56%)	235	(45%)	\$14,061	70	(13%)
UNF	182	139	(76%)	119	(65%)	\$11,587	19	(10%)
USF	124	100	(81%)	87	(70%)	\$11,657	****	(***)
UWF	32	21	(66%)	17	(53%)	\$10,967	****	(***)

The data table provided by FAU Institutional Effectiveness and Analysis (IEA) from the FETPII report shows that this FAU major has a medium-sized program with a relatively high number of graduates and above average employment outcomes in terms of percent full time, but full-time earnings are in the bottom half and percent continuing education is at or slightly below the average for the SUS. The 2019 FAU data most closely resemble UCF, which is a smaller program in this case. Because FAU has many unique characteristics such as being located in a strong economic service area with many employment options and having an important percentage of non-traditional students who are employed full-time prior to graduation, our degree programs should be leading the SUS in percent full time employment and quarterly earnings. That is the goal.

**Institutional Support**

The proposed QEP will be synergistic by leveraging curriculum-based and co-curricular high impact practical experiences that build on FAU excellence programs from classroom to community (e.g. undergraduate research, academic service learning, writing across the curriculum, student professional organizations, etc.). This proposal will also have broad-based support because all graduates in all colleges share in the desire to achieve high-paying career outcomes shortly following commencement. This topic is also of key strategic importance for the Florida Board of Governors metrics, so it is an institutional priority for all units<sup>6</sup>. Finally, unlike the previous and extremely successful QEP that focused on undergraduates, this proposal takes the next step to involve students in non-degree seeking and graduate programs to empower FAU students at all levels to successfully secure employment or entrance into the graduate, post-graduate, or professional program of their choice.

<sup>6</sup> Cruzvergara, C. Y., Testani, J. A., & Smith, K. K. (2018). Leadership competency expectations of employers and the expanding mission of career centers. *New directions for student leadership*, 2018(157), 27-37.



## **Budget Narrative**

The approach and resources outlined in this proposal will provide support to increase high-impact practices and strengthen the workforce of the future, while helping to establish FAU as the premier career-centric University that trains the most sought-after talent in the region. To successfully serve, collaborate, and build partnerships with key QEP stakeholders, the leadership team will consist of the QEP faculty coordinator (25% FTE summer support) to drive the faculty-led workforce skills focus described herein and the QEP Associate Director 100% FTE for the Career Center staff position that will lead the integrated model of connected service delivery of early engagement, exploration, and in-depth industry experiences via technology-driven high-touch services. Central to this role is supervising industry-focused career communities that bring together career specialists, faculty partners, and employer engagement professionals. After the planning years, a QEP assessment coordinator specialist will be brought on board, and a 50% FTE budget coordinator/web developer will be required to manage the budget, purchasing, staff lines, etc. as well as the preparing the web page, marketing, and social media updates for the QEP. One-time costs for office setup are requested for computers, office furniture, technology, etc., and additional annual administrative costs for copying, supplies, phones, marketing materials, and promotional items will be required. An allowance for assessment instruments, data analysis, norming and external evaluator costs is requested as well as travel for conferences/workshops to present and refine the model in addition to travel for evaluators for SACS onsite review and travel for high profile members of the guest speakers clearinghouse pool.

Funding is requested for the key incentive programs related to the QEP. These include the Career Champions Network liaisons program (\$2500 per year per liaison), Curriculum Enhancement Grants for developing cornerstone, keystone, or capstone coursework, faculty/staff/student annual recognition awards programs, learning communities and facilitators for professional development and for community engagement, and honoraria for the diverse guest speaker program. Finally, expansion of FAU Career Center programs will include technology and software (described in detail in Appendix B) to assist in collection and analysis of employment data as well as the peer consultants program.

## Appendix A:

### NACE Competencies Student Outcomes:

- **Critical Thinking/Problem Solving:** Ability to obtain, interpret, and use knowledge, facts, and data to demonstrate originality and sound reasoning to analyze the problem, make decisions, and overcome challenges in developing a workable solution.
- **Oral/Written Communications:** Ability to articulate ideas effectively to different audiences in terms of technical writing and public speaking.
- **Teamwork/Collaboration:** Ability to work effectively in a team environment, managing conflict and building collaborative relationships with colleagues and customers representing diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, religions, lifestyles, and viewpoints.
- **Digital Technology:** Ability to leverage existing digital technologies ethically and efficiently to solve problems, complete tasks, accomplish goals, and seamlessly adapt to new and emerging technologies.
- **Leadership:** Ability to leverage the strengths of others to achieve common goals, and use interpersonal skills to motivate others, organize, prioritize, and delegate work.
- **Professionalism/Work Ethic:** Ability to demonstrate personal accountability and effective work habits, e.g., punctuality, working productively with others, and time workload management, and understand the impact of non-verbal communication on professional work image. The individual demonstrates integrity and ethical behavior, acts responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind, and is able to learn from mistakes.
- **Career Management:** Ability to identify skills, strengths, knowledge, and experiences relevant to the position desired and career goals necessary for professional growth.
- **Global/Intercultural Fluency:** Ability to respect diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, sexual orientations, and religions to demonstrate inclusiveness, sensitivity, and respectful interaction with all people of different backgrounds.

## **Appendix B:**

### **Details about Artificial Intelligence Tools to Expand Career Services**

- Jobscan, Jobs EQ & Big Interview. These tools will increase access and scale-up university-wide career services by allowing students to receive consistent and constructive feedback on their resumes and interviewing skills using artificial intelligence and machine learning to improve outcomes.
- LinkedIn Learning. This platform can assist faculty to supplement classroom learning and help our students earn hundreds of industry-recognized certifications. Furthermore, LinkedIn learning is also a widely used tool for staff development by other SUS schools (UCF, UF, among others) and employers (including Modernizing Medicine, etc.).
- EMSI. This tool assists in data mining to identify current and future geo-targeted employment trends and opportunities (by city, county, state, etc.). Through the use of labor market information and real-time data (including industry trends, position specific salaries, etc.), FAU would be able to identify employers who are actively hiring and work with them to prepare our students for their talent pipelines. Furthermore, EMSI can identify employers of FAU graduates nationwide.
- Jobs EQ for Education is a software tool that informs us on what skills, certifications, and occupations will be high-wage and in-demand in the coming years. Jobs EQ would help us align programs to our community's needs, guide students to the right careers, and market the value. In addition, Jobs EQ allows us to forecast how our region is expected to expand. Jobs EQ also provided Real-Time INtelligence (RTI) job posting data which updates nightly and allows FAU to enhance our understanding of the companies seeking applicants, and the positions they are seeking to fill.