**Multiple Academic Credentials for Workforce Competencies**

### Focus: *Career readiness across and beyond the curriculum*

To understand the underlying factors responsible for producing graduates capable of thriving in the workforce, the 2016 Gallup-Purdue Index[[1]](#footnote-1) conducted a series of surveys and showed that graduates who worked on long-term projects that took a semester or more to complete and those who had a job or internship where they could apply what they learned in the classroom doubled their odds of success in their work later in life. Also important were 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.

### Additionally, a current survey found that only 11% of business leaders and 14% of the public felt strongly that university graduates leave with the skills needed for workplace success[[2]](#footnote-2),[[3]](#footnote-3),[[4]](#footnote-4). The purpose of this proposal is to provide a means to integrate workforce preparedness skills with core skills in the various degree programs offered at FAU including Bachelor of General Studies and non-degree students seeking to accumulate certificates and other academic credentials. The key 21st century skills are identified by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) as the career readiness competencies[[5]](#footnote-5) sought by employers:

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| --- | --- |
| Critical Thinking/Problem Solving | * Leadership |
| * Oral/Written Communications | * Professionalism/Work Ethic |
| * Teamwork/Collaboration | * Career Management |
| * Digital Technology | * Global/Intercultural Fluency |

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

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

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

Also striking is that some of the largest achievement gaps, such as teamwork, leadership, 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 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. It is interesting to note that all 8 NACE competencies were ranked in the top 10 out of 18 for employers, but leadership and teamwork were not in the top 10 for the faculty.

**Strategic Plan**: To address this lack of alignment, we propose an 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 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. The goal is to expand upon the newly organized thematic clusters of the Intellectual Foundations Program (IFP) as a stepping stone to accumulate multiple credentials in parallel to the conventional degree program pathway by engaging in the following evidence-based high impact practices:

* **Curricular framework.** The proposed QEP will create multi-semester, 1st-year cornerstone experiences that emphasize career preparedness and also create industry-recognized micro-credentialing pathways that do not interfere with but instead provide synergistic support for academic programs by working with faculty liaisons 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.
* **Professional development**. We propose to institute faculty learning communities to share best practices in various and related disciplines as well as partner with industry when relevant.
* **Expansion of FAU Career Center**. The goal is to leverage the existing excellent resources of the FAU Career Center 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.
* **Community engagement**. 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 final pillar will solidify community engagement partnerships and strengthen collaboration with employers to develop the innovative workforce of the future that serves the needs of society.

**Measurement of Success**: Assessment monitoring will include numbers of students that complete career-readiness 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, and numbers of students able to secure full time employment within 6 months of graduation as well as annual salary as tracked in the FETPIP reports. Numbers of students who are career-ready and numbers of internships/co-ops/student employment will be tracked with improved assessment rubrics that can assist in targeted continuous improvement metrics. 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. Producing employable graduates will also support greater retention, faster degree completion, and more fruitful relationships with alumni and industry.

**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[[6]](#footnote-6). 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 all FAU students to successfully secure employment or entrance into the graduate, post-graduate, or professional program of their choice.

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**Appendix:**

**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.

**List of proposed implementation projects in more detail**:

* Curricular framework
  + A supportive multi-semester 1st-year experience that relies on 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.
  + Audit all courses to identify those that involve long-term projects as part of the class and work with faculty liaisons selected from across the colleges to create a menu of industry-recognized credentials that students can achieve during the course of their studies at FAU.
* Professional development
  + Comprehensive faculty and staff professional development that focuses on institutional culture change related to inclusive instruction, student development theory, and equity using a faculty learning community model that engages faculty, adjuncts, industry experts/employers, instructors, and teaching assistants.
* FAU Career Center
  + Better student preparation for meaningful internship/co-op experiences through case management career advising.
  + Secure and integrate innovative artificial intelligence tools to enhance student career readiness such as resume/interview skills, negotiation, conflict resolution, multicultural awareness, etc.
  + Increased opportunities for new students and transfers to build connections with faculty in gateway courses or co-curricular activities such as student organizations.
* Community engagement
  + 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.
  + Industry-focused career communities led jointly by career specialists, faculty, and employer engagement professionals from diverse backgrounds.

1. The Gallup-Purdue Index (2016) <https://www.gallup.com/services/176768/2014-gallup-purdue-index-report.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Peck, A. (2017). Engagement and Employability: Integrating Career Learning through Cocurricular Experiences in Postsecondary Education. *NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lumina Foundation. (2016). Goal 2025. https://www.luminafoundation.org/goal\_2025 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Peck, A., and M. Preston. "The value of engaged students." NACE Journal (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2016). Career readiness defined. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)