

Bridge the Gap Between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs: The A-to-Z of Partnering With Faculty

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The saying "It takes a village to raise a child," could apply to providing quality academic and career advising to help college students maximize their undergraduate potential.

No one adviser has all the answers and can offer all the guidance and feedback that students need. Don't try to go it alone—instead, identify faculty partners willing to work collaboratively with the career services office in a partnership to promote student success. Begin working with those faculty members who understand and appreciate that both parties want to help students reach their personal, academic, and professional goals.

Better advising will result from sharing knowledge and information between two areas that traditionally do not have the need to partner closely. Here's an A-to-Z guide to help career services form strong partnerships with faculty.

Alumni Connections

Maintaining connections with alumni is beneficial for career services professionals as well as faculty. For career services, alumni can be a solid resource for classroom speakers and advisory board participants. Also, they are often a good source for job leads offered by their employers. Faculty often need postgraduate career outcome data from alumni for the purpose of accreditation. Discuss with your faculty the best way to ensure current students will remain connected to the university as alumni, and to identify the most engaged alumni to call upon as a resource.

Budget Sharing

These days, everyone copes with limited budgets. It can be a challenge to obtain the funding for providing quality student programming and career-related resources. Consider inviting faculty to collaborate and combine monetary resources for a mutual benefit. For example, career services might be interested in purchasing a costly online career planning resource. Find out if faculty members who teach first-year students would incorporate the career planning resource into their classes and split the cost. Someone from career services could offer to attend a class to facilitate the administration and interpretation.

Classroom Presentations

Faculty will often call upon career services to conduct classroom presentations on career-related topics. By doing so, career services practitioners are assisting the faculty member by introducing up-to-date career information for the students. And, the career center can promote the office and services directly to the student population it serves. At Seton Hill University, the career services office conducts approximately 20 classroom presentations per semester. These sessions are much more productive than independent workshops. The classroom presentations provide a captive and engaged audience of students, thereby introducing students to career services and generating a steady stream of student appointments throughout the semester.

Develop Major Specific Resources

This can be a great way to attract faculty's attention! Create major-specific handouts that highlight quality internships or a one-page post-graduation outcome sheet that identifies employers, job title, wage information, and graduate school demographics for recent graduating classes. In turn, ask faculty to provide a list of the core competencies that students develop through their curriculum so that the career center can better market their majors to employers.

Employer Development

Employers are increasingly interested in connecting with faculty to source prospective students for internships and jobs. Similarly, faculty are interested in connecting with employers to ensure the curriculum is cutting-edge and producing graduates that are employable in an area related to their academic major. Career services can serve as the connection between faculty and employers. These connections help promote career services among faculty as an office that provides a useful and tangible service to their department. Employers will feel they have made the necessary networking contacts to improve recruiting initiatives that will attract talent to their organization.

First-Year Engagement

Faculty members have a keen interest in retaining students beyond the first year. Students can become disengaged and lose focus when they cannot make clear decisions regarding their academic major and career. This uncertainty can have a negative impact on retention rates. Career services staff can position themselves to work collaboratively with faculty to provide direction for students who may be struggling with major and career decisions. Faculty advisers are often unaware of the specific assistance career services can provide in this area. Inform faculty members of the major and career planning resources that career services provides. Give faculty a handout at the beginning of each academic year that includes a listing of specific career assessments the office offers to help students in the career planning process. Make certain they are aware of workshops or webinars the career center is planning on these topic areas as well as any programming offered exclusively for first-year students. At Seton Hill University, career services supplies faculty members with a card that outlines services and contact information so that students can easily arrange for an appointment with a career adviser. Those cards facilitate the referral process for the faculty adviser and increase the likelihood that a student will follow through with making an appointment in career services.

Graduate and Professional School

Faculty may often take the lead on graduate and professional school advising. Connect with those individuals to determine how your office could assist. Brainstorm resources to offer through the career center that would help students research graduate programs. Consider becoming a host site for free graduate school sample tests through an organization such as Kaplan. Offer to review personal statements or graduate essays for students and provide targeted mock interviews for graduate school, medical school, dental school, and so on.

Host

Host career-related events that will appeal to all of the academic areas served by the career center. Maintain a good balance of resources and programs that will serve all academic areas. This will promote career services as a place that has something for everyone. Faculty will be more interested in your office and more apt to refer students to career services if they know you are making the effort to provide resources that meet the career-related needs of their students.

Internships

Students are becoming increasingly aware of the need to complete a minimum of one internship prior to graduation. If they are not connected to the career services office, they often turn to their academic adviser for guidance. Inform faculty of the internship resources that exist in career services. The more they know about those resources, the more likely that they will refer students to the career center. Also, some employers send their internship opportunities directly to academic departments. Create a process so that faculty can easily filter those opportunities to your office as well. Work with the technology department to use the current recruiting system or create an internship database that would allow career services and faculty to have one centralized location to post and share opportunities for students.

Jobs

Introduce faculty to your recruiting system and offer faculty accounts so that they can be aware of opportunities listed for their majors. This will promote the value in referring students to career services. It allows them to better understand the process for forwarding opportunities to career services when they become aware of them. Don't forget to invite the faculty to advertise their own department student employment or research opportunities through career services.

Know the Academic Majors at Your Institution

Having a solid understanding of the academics at your institution is essential for providing targeted career advising and appropriate employer development. Meet annually with faculty to gain an understanding of the academic majors as well as the type of employment that each major prepares students to pursue. These meetings can be useful for keeping up-to-date on new majors or changes occurring to existing majors. Be prepared to highlight your office during these meetings and to mention particular resources that may be of interest to the faculty group. These meetings are a great impetus for generating new ideas that result in continued collaborations.

Letters to Welcome Students and Their Families

On most college campuses, the admissions office sends letters to welcome newly admitted students. The Mellon College of Science at Carnegie Mellon University goes beyond that, issuing the newly admitted students a welcome letter from the associate dean who serves as their academic adviser during the first year. The letter aims to generate excitement on their acceptance and to introduce the advising team, which includes the career services liaison. The letter invites direct contact with the advising team if the student should have questions prior to arriving on campus. An additional letter, also introducing the advising team, is sent to the student's parents/guardians, sending the clear message that contact is welcome if any concerns or issues should arise during the academic year.

A magnet is included, containing the contact information for the advising team members for quick reference. Since new students and their families often have questions beyond academics, inviting this type of contact prior to their arrival on campus can alleviate concerns and allow the student to begin the academic year on the right foot instead of spending time trying to hunt down answers. Parents are appreciative of knowing whom they need to contact if there are questions or concerns.

Mock Interviews as Assignments

Mock interviews can be advertised to the faculty as a topic for classroom assignments. During the fall 2012 semester, a faculty member in Seton Hill's Chemistry Department arranged individual mock interviews for her students to take place in the career services office. Three job descriptions were provided to the students, and they were required to apply for one of the jobs. One week prior to the mock interview, students submitted their credentials to the career services office for review and selected their mock interview time. A rubric was created to ensure consistent assessment during the interviews and immediate feedback was given to each student. As a final step, students were required to submit a thank-you message via e-mail after the interview process. The rubric, credentials, and a copy of the thank-you e-mail were returned to the instructor for assignment of a grade. Feedback from the students participating in this assignment was positive. They felt that the assignment introduced them to what they could expect in an actual interview situation.

NACE Resources for Faculty

Are the faculty members at your college or university aware that NACE has established guidelines on the dos and don'ts of referring students to employers? This information is available online; consider sending faculty the link to this information.

(See [www.naceweb.org/Knowledge/Legal/How to Write Reference Letters.aspx](http://www.naceweb.org/Knowledge/Legal/How_to_Write_Reference_Letters.aspx))

O*NET (The Occupational Information Network)

Recently, a Seton Hill faculty member contacted the career services office because she was developing a proposal for a new major. She had to provide employment-related statistics and information as part of the proposal. To help her obtain the information she needed, we introduced her to O*NET. The resource offered all of the information she was seeking. While we often use O*NET as a tool when working with our students to help them gain a better understanding of careers, don't overlook the value it provides to faculty. Consider arranging a demonstration of O*NET for your faculty.

Placement Data

Faculty should be aware that the career services office compiles placement information on each graduating class. Make sure they understand that this information can be made available to help them work with prospective and current students, and may be beneficial when preparing for accreditation.

Questions

Develop the reputation for your office as a place where faculty, staff, and students can come for quick and accurate answers to career-related questions. If you don't have the answer, be willing to go the extra mile and find the answer.

Resume Assignments

Work with faculty to implement a classroom assignment that requires students to create their resume. Seniors at Seton Hill University are required as part of their senior integrative seminar class to complete their resume. Representatives from the career services office provide a classroom presentation to instruct students on the appropriate format and content for their resumes. Typically, the resumes are critiqued by the career services staff before being returned to the students.

Surveys

Many career centers are required to survey students on topics that range from feedback on services and programs to post-graduation statistics. Do not overlook the significant role that faculty can play in helping you get the data you need. Determine if they are surveying students, too. If so, is there a way to partner in this endeavor and send one survey instead of multiple surveys? When I worked in the career center at Carnegie Mellon University, I was able to establish this type of partnership with the physics department. We realized that we were sending two graduation surveys that could easily be combined into one. The combined survey was a requirement as an exit interview in the physics department prior to graduation. When the surveys were complete, the academic department provided copies to the career center. Each department was able to extract the information needed. Students appreciated having to complete one survey instead of two, and there was a 100 percent response rate.

Teaching Outside of the Classroom

When planning events and workshops, consider including faculty as speakers or panelists. Faculty members can provide great insight on their own academic areas for programs centered on choosing a major. Imagine an academic majors fair where faculty could staff tables to market their departments and majors to prospective or current students. Faculty are also a knowledge base for graduate school related programs.

Understanding Career Services

In many cases, faculty members may not have a clear understanding of the comprehensive and useful role that the career services office plays on their campus. Hosting an open house for faculty and staff can be a great way to showcase all that you have to offer. Do you invite faculty to your workshops and events? If not, send an invitation! Faculty are very interested in developing a better understanding of the work being done in career services.

Visit Each Other

Faculty and staff are traditionally very busy during the academic year. It is often easy to remain in your own area and not venture too far across campus. Make a goal for yourself that includes visiting at least one academic area periodically. Introduce yourself to faculty you may not know and make contact with those you do know. Read bulletin boards and show an interest in the department. If the opportunity exists, arrange to attend a faculty meeting to learn more about their majors and to market your office. Create ways to entice faculty to visit your area, too. Plan a faculty social in career services to facilitate the process of engaging with faculty.

Website

Do you have a resource area on your website for faculty? If not, consider developing content and adding this to your site. At Seton Hill, we have created an intranet site that faculty can access to complete an online presentation request form, obtain detailed information about the career services office, view or print schedules of career-related events, and access links to NACE resources designed for faculty. *(Editor's note: NACE provides members with free content for their websites and other communications, including content that is relevant to faculty. For details, see the Grab and Go service at www.nacweb.org/knowledge/gg/)*

Xerox® That Syllabus

Prior to each semester, send faculty a list of your workshops, events, job fairs, and select career resources you want to market to students. Ask them to include the information on their syllabus or on their online course management site. Faculty are often willing to incorporate relevant career-related information into their classes. As a bonus, they may be willing to offer credit to students who use your services or attend events.

Yearly Sharing of Data

Most career services offices complete an annual report that provides statistics and information summarizing activities engaged in during the academic year. Share this information with faculty. Make sure they understand that this report contains key information related to student usage of services and programming, and employment statistics that are specific to academic majors and departments. Encourage them to incorporate this information when they compile their own department statistics.

Zero in on Additional Ways to Partner

While the ideas included in this article offer suggested starting points, consider the organizational culture of your campus and what truly engages and motivates your faculty. Determine shared interests and goals and be willing to begin collaborating with a few faculty allies. As news spreads of your successful partnerships, faculty interest will grow as well as an interest in your office. With a little effort on your part, partnering with faculty can be as easy as A-B-C!

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