COUNSELING TO CAREERS: IDENTIFYING A RANGE OF POSTSECONDARY OPTIONS FOR A RANGE OF STUDENTS

October 4, 2013
I. Background

II. Counseling to Careers and Best Bets

III. Identifying Best Bets: Strategies to Get Started

I. Using Best Bets and Their Implications
Think a good counselor might help???
High school completion is no longer sufficient for entry into a family-sustaining career.

Among jobs with the most anticipated openings, those that require postsecondary training or an associate’s degree pay 79% more ($16,000 annually) than those that require only work experience or on-the-job training.*
For those who actually do make it, student loan debt is at an all-time high, recently passing credit card debt in total volume.

- Loan default rates have risen sharply in recent years, relegating a growing number of students to years of financial hardship.
- The recent study found that while average student debt at graduation has skyrocketed by 200 percent since 1993, income growth has stagnated.
- This is particularly pronounced at some of the for-profits.

SOURCE: Education Sector, *Debt to Degree: A New Way of Measuring College Success*, 2011
Postsecondary education is critical, but not all postsecondary education and training are equally good fits.

- For students with limited time and means to invest, the challenge is particularly acute – postsecondary programs that lead to well-paying jobs and show evidence of persistence are difficult to identify and access.
- There may or may not be reliable or up-to-date information to help students make a good match:
  - No *Princeton Review* or *U.S. News & World Report* rankings
  - Labor market information is not very user-friendly
  - Employer needs are not always clear, nor are the hiring channels from postsecondary to demand jobs (or advancement)
  - Program information may not be readily transparent or accessible – especially what students really need to enter and succeed

**Today we’re going discuss strategies on how to identify a set of “best bet” pathways in a region – and ultimately, what schools can do with that information once it’s in-hand.**
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Counseling to Careers provides districts, community-based organizations, schools, and community colleges with the tools to better connect students with programs of study that align with their interests and regional employment needs.

- It is intended to **build on the ongoing efforts of districts, community-based organizations, youth-serving networks, colleges and their community partners**
- It provides resources and tools to identify **“best bets”** for students who typically flounder in or wash out of general programs
- **It is not a training about how to advise students** – instead, it focuses on building systems to make information more transparent and to put that information in the hands of counselors

The training supports districts and community colleges to make postsecondary and career information more transparent to students.
Best bet postsecondary training programs have several common characteristics.

- Associated occupation is grounded in student career interest and growing sectors of the economy.
- Compressed training program that leads to a credential, often stackable.
- Training program has strong retention and completion rates.
- Training program has evidence of high job placement (paying at or near the regional median wage) with career advancement potential.
CTC helps counselors and advisors triangulate information across key areas and then package that information in profiles for use by counselors and students.
Typically this takes the form of a two-part engagement with ongoing support throughout; today we’ll walk through some of the tools and resources from Part 1 and then explore broader implications that often emerge as a result.

**Part 1**
Build familiarity with tools and resources to engage in on-the-ground research, and develop a work plan to engage in that action research

**Action Research**
Four-month process of speaking with postsecondary program staff and regional employers, with ongoing support from JFF staff

**Part 2**
Structured, customized day of training to share and discuss how generation and use of this information can support counselors and students
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Understanding the local labor market can help to identify a range of potential postsecondary pathways – and even align aspects of CTE/dual enrollment programming.

- Data is not always easy to find and interpret; language is not always clear
- Some of the most important occupational information (e.g., median wage, most common level of education/training, job openings) is spread out across a number of disparate databases
- The data may not always reflect the reality on the ground
- The process can feel overwhelming
Given that, we narrow in on a first set of occupations to explore, aggregating various data sources and using some simple sorts of data. For example:

- Typically requires less than a bachelor’s degree to gain access
- Exclude jobs like supervisors, managers, and sales reps
- Hourly wages at or above the regional median
- High employment in the region
- Employers that are hiring
- Job openings
- Growth
IDENTIFYING BEST BETS: STRATEGIES TO GET STARTED

We provide organizations with profiles and databases of their regional labor markets, offering an initial snapshot of in-demand occupations.

UNIT 2 UNDERSTANDING YOUR LOCAL LABOR MARKET
AMARILLO, TEXAS REGIONAL PROFILE

The chart below offers a regional view of the largest occupations that require less than a bachelor’s degree and have median wages at or above the regional median ($14.07). Jobs with a high national percentage of employees with a bachelor’s degree or higher may be difficult to access without a bachelor’s in some regions. Supervisors/managers, sales representatives, and executive secretaries are excluded from this list.

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Registered Nurses</td>
<td>2,220</td>
<td>$20.41 $27.54 $33.06</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers</td>
<td>1,940</td>
<td>$9.67 $10.32 $22.28</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correctional Officers and Jailers</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>$14.26 $16.41 $17.91</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Guards</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>$8.07 $23.95 $26.95</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintenance and Repair Workers, General</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>$9.17 $14.72 $18.24</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>$14.88 $18.23 $20.81</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
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SOURCES: Bureau of Labor Statistics; State Department of Labor
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<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional LMI</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reliable and robust</td>
<td>Looks backward to forecast; lacks current labor market perspective (time lag)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consistent and documented methodologies</td>
<td>Static/not dynamic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional comparisons</td>
<td>Lacks data on current demand/employers’ requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public, no-cost distribution</td>
<td>Does not effectively capture emerging occupations/skills requirements/certifications</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Real-time LMI</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reveals new and emerging trends in occupational definitions</td>
<td>Duplication errors (though this difficulty is quickly becoming obsolete with more sophisticated algorithms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers insights into the skills and certifications sought by regional employers</td>
<td>Certain trades (construction, manufacturing) do not necessarily use online job postings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies early indications of market shifts; data is collected regularly</td>
<td>Online job ads can be vague</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tracks hiring demand</td>
<td>Not every job posting represents an actual vacancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>Proprietary/Cost</td>
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Used together, traditional and real-time labor market information can help you and your students to:

- Better understand your local labor market – its past and current trends and likely future trends
- Get a sense of occupational wages in your region and collect more detailed and up-to-date information on employer demand in your region (e.g., the education levels, industry certifications, and skills they typically require for certain jobs)
- Identify and speak in more detail with employers in your region that can provide a range of work-based learning opportunities for your students
- Gather information on new and emerging occupations in your local labor market

Understanding your local labor market can help to better align advising and instruction to economic trends in your region – BUT local labor market data is not the end of the story.
We look to employers and other workforce partners to fill in the blanks.

**Wages**
- Find out about benefits (e.g., health insurance, tuition remission, retirement plans, long-term disability insurance) – students need to know about the value of these incentives
- Wage gains associated with career advancement

**Growth**
- Growth does not always mean job opportunity, and projected declines may still yield high numbers of quality jobs
- Occupations with projected declines may still have numerous job openings due to people leaving jobs for various reasons (replacement jobs)

**Job Openings**
- Contact employers and workforce development organizations to find out if occupations really have job openings in your region

**Education, Training, and/or Work Experience**
- The level of education/training required for jobs may differ by region and employer
- Major economic events (e.g., a recession) can affect the education/training/work experience employers require/prefer when hiring
Employers can provide valuable information about the professional and technical skills they are looking for – as well as current and anticipated demand. For example:

- **Demand and recruitment**: What jobs are currently in demand, and what is their short-term and long-term outlook? What are the preferred credentials and skills needed to access those jobs? How are employers recruiting for jobs, and what qualities/skills/experiences distinguish successful candidates from others?

- **Job characteristics**: What are typical working and lifestyle considerations for the job? Why type of personalities would/would not be a good fit?

- **Postsecondary connections**: Who typically trains and supplies your job candidates? Do you offer further education/training opportunities?

- **Career advancement opportunities**: Can/do employees advance in the organization? Are there well-defined career ladders – if so, what do they look like?
Engaging employers can help to address some of the problems they face in building a skilled and reliable workforce.

- Employers across all industries report that while academic/technical skills remain fundamental, too often job candidates and employees lack soft skills
- Hiring and retention challenges include:
  - Criminal background; drug use
  - Unprofessional emails/email addresses/behavior on social networking sites
  - Inappropriate dress/physical appearance
  - Résumés don’t represent candidates well
  - No call, no show
  - Lack of communication, problem solving, and teamwork skills
  - Lack of willingness to learn; lack of interest in job
Think about what you’d want students to know about a program before they sign up – and sign a check.

**Biotechnology**

Biotechnology simply defined is the use of living organisms to make products beneficial to humans. There is a wide range of opportunities in the biotechnology field from using yeast to make pharmaceuticals to growing artificial skin cells to be used for burn patient grafts. This field is rapidly expanding providing many new job opportunities.

The Biotechnology Certificate Program is designed to provide students with an overview of the science of biotechnology as well as the technical skills necessary for employment in the industry. There are a variety of jobs available locally offering good salaries and benefits. Courses from the certificate degree can be applied towards an Associates Degree.

### Program Coordinator

Jane Smith  
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### Admissions Requirements

See College requirements

### Next Step

Employment in the biotechnology industry. Courses could transfer to an associate's degree or a bachelor's degree in biotechnology.

### Courses

**Cluster A**  
Cell Biology  
Introduction to the Chemistry of Living Systems  
Introduction to Microcomputer Applications

**Cluster B**  
Molecular Biology  
General Microbiology

**Cluster C**  
Techniques in Biotechnology

Is this a “best bet” program?

What would you want your students to know about this program before they sign up – and sign a check?
Postsecondary program staff can help clarify how programs align with demand as well as lift out key information students should know before choosing a program. For example:

- **Program Design and Structure:** How long is the program, and what content does it cover? What is the program’s instructional approach (e.g., hands-on vs. lecture-based)? Does the program offer flexible scheduling/online courses?

- **Entering and Succeeding in the Program:** Are there minimum scores required on the ACCULPLACER OR COMPASS? Is there a waitlist, and if so, what can students do in the interim? What supports exist to ensure students are successful?

- **Alignment with Employers:** How does the program involve employers? What jobs does the program prepare graduates for? Can students with a criminal background work in the field?

- **Program Outcomes:** What are rates of persistence and completion? What percentage of graduates get hired/transfer to other postsecondary programs? Where do they typically get hired, and what can they expect to earn?
Using this information, districts, colleges, and community partners can identify best bets by:

1. Analyzing the data against best bet criteria

2. Selecting initial best bets and providing information to students and community partners

3. Staying in contact with students who choose these programs to ensure they really are best bets and make adjustments as needed

**A Best Bet**
- Program and occupation satisfies all or most of the best bet criteria

**Could Be a Best Bet**
- Program and occupation satisfy all or most of the best bet criteria but are not currently accessible to some students

**Not a Best Bet**
- Program or occupation does not satisfy one or more key aspects of the best bet criteria
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Developing information on your career pathway programs can help counselors and students connect with best bet programs.

**Sterile Processing Technician**

*WHAT I DO:* I am a medical professional who sterilizes and sets up supplies and equipment needed for surgery, physical exams, and other medical procedures.

*WHAT MAKES MY JOB HOT?*

**Short-term training:**
- Training programs are typically 2-5 months long, including both lecture and lab/clinical practice. Programs prepare students to take a professional certification exam.
- Program graduates often receive a Certificate of Completion in Central Processing, which—along with professional certification—can get them an entry-level job as a Sterile Processing Tech.

**Solid growth:**
- In Massachusetts, this job is expected to grow 10% from 2008-2018.

**Good pay (Boston 2010 figures):**
- Typical entry-level wage: $13.73/hr.
- Median wage: $18.31/hr.
- Experienced-level wage: $24.96

**Typical job benefits include:**
- Medical & other insurance
- 401(k) retirement savings plan
- Tuition and certification fee reimbursement

**Room for advancement:**
- A Sterile Processing Tech can move up to become a Sterile Processing Tech II, then III, and can then advance to become a Supervisor or Manager.

Each profile will:

- Capture important occupational information and employer preferences
- Provide an overview of an associated postsecondary program
- Identify career trajectory opportunities, including wage growth
The schools, programs, and colleges we’ve worked with have found that Counseling to Careers can be applied in a number of ways.

- Improve postsecondary guidance and transitions
  - Schools have developed brochures and profiles to make information more transparent and help students and families become more informed consumers

- Strengthen relationships with colleges and community partners
  - Schools and youth-serving organizations have reported that this has helped to strengthen (or develop new) relationships with community colleges as well as other community partners (e.g., workforce boards, unions, CBOs, etc.)
  - New lines of communication have opened up across departments within college campuses – including between the continuing education and credit-bearing sides of colleges

- Inform the development of new/revision of existing pathways
  - Informed district leaders as they review their CTE pathways
  - New nursing program at one college; revision of a solar panel program at another
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JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

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