Career offices are seeking ways to prepare students for a rapidly changing work force.
WHEN students come to college, they are thinking mostly about what they are going to get out of it — a job.

Landing a good job is the single most important reason students give for going to college. More than eight in 10 first-year students say improving their chances of getting a better job is very important to them, according to a national survey of freshmen conducted annually by the University of California at Los Angeles’s Higher Education Research Institute.

In many ways, this attitude makes sense. Over recent decades, as the American economy has shifted away from one that makes things to one that produces ideas, there has been no surer path to middle-class stability than a college education. The jobless rate for college graduates is close to half that of those with just a high-school diploma. Over their lifetime, workers with a bachelor’s degree earn, on average, $2.8 million, 75 percent more than if they had only finished high school. During the Covid-19 pandemic, college-educated workers were more likely to hold onto their jobs and were hired back faster if they were furloughed.

Still, the public-health crisis has been a reminder of how globalization can leave economies around the world vulnerable to disruption. Although employment has quickly rebounded in the United States, new graduates will be understandably skittish as they enter the job market.

Other forces, such as automation and technological innovation, are also transforming work across all sectors of the economy, and the change is coming at a breakneck pace. Close to 100 million jobs could be created globally by just the midpoint of the decade, according to the World Economic Forum, while existing jobs could require a skills overhaul.

As the employment landscape shifts, students will look to colleges to take an even more active role in helping them navigate the pathway to work. The pressure will be on higher education to deliver on the very thing that students and families say they want most from a college education.

“Graduation isn’t the finish line,” says David Clayton, senior vice president for consumer insights at Strada Education Network, a nonprofit group focused on education and careers. “It’s getting a good job.”

Seeking Solutions

Though students come to college to prepare for a good job, they don’t always know how to find one when they leave. Employers worry about the preparedness of today’s graduates and about how to attract workers with skills for the future. The employment landscape is undergoing a sustained, yet seismic, shift.

The current environment calls for a renewed focus on career readiness, experts say, one that approaches the connection between the classroom and the workplace with fresh eyes.

A small but growing number of institutions are elevating career development to an institutional priority. Some colleges — including Drew, Johns Hopkins, and Wake Forest Universities, and the University of Richmond — have incorporated plans for curricular and co-curricular career education into their strategic plans.

The University of California at Davis
made integrating career preparation throughout the college experience one of its “big ideas,” or key institutional efforts. Davis has attracted $10 million in donor support to its Aggie Launch program, which seeks to make career planning a standard part of academic advising, infuse career education across curricula, and guarantee internships, co-ops, and professional on-campus work experiences for all students.

Hartwick College, a small liberal-arts college in upstate New York, overhauled its approach to undergraduate education to include career preparation as a core principle, in part to head off enrollment declines.

And institutions of all sizes and profiles are making career education the focus of quality-enhancement plans, a student-success metric that’s a critical part of reaccreditation. In Georgia alone, Georgia State University, the state’s largest public college; the private Reinhardt University; and Spelman College, the elite historically Black college, all have such enhancement plans focused on the college-to-career pathway.

A strategic plan is just that, a document or to-do list, but buy-in from the top can put institutional muscle behind career-education efforts. It can also work as an important signal to rally campuswide support and, hopefully, engagement, potentially lowering a persistent barrier to progress.

“You have to move from ‘this is a service’ to ‘this is systemic,’” says Jeremy Podany, chief executive of the Career Leadership Collective, a group that works with colleges on career-development strategies.

**Out of the Basement**

If career development is truly an institutional priority, says Podany, who spent 17 years in higher education, “no longer can it be just the work of a career office in the basement.”

At Wake Forest, Andy Chan’s role as vice president for innovation and career development is part of the presidential cabinet. Having such an adviser among a small group of senior leaders has helped elevate issues of career readiness on the regular agenda of institutional leaders. It’s also helped expedite action — if Chan has ideas for programming that involve other departments on campus, he can quickly assemble colleagues like the dean of a college or the head of alumni relations and “make it happen,” he says.

Cabinet-level positions like Chan’s aren’t the norm, but more career-development directors say they report directly to the provost or chief academic dean, giving them a clearer line to decision makers.

But Chan and others say it isn’t enough to raise the prominence of career education — there needs to be a rethinking of the work that career offices do.

Historically, the work of career offices has been seen as a set of services, oriented around matching students with specific jobs. Experts say it should be thought of as more of a process, one that starts with students’ interests. It’s about helping students figure out what they want to do, rather than identifying the jobs they want to get, says Farouk Dey, vice provost for integrative learning and life design at Johns Hopkins.

When Dey and his staff work with students, their starting point isn’t what careers they’re interested in pursuing. Students often don’t know or have only a vague idea, he
says. Instead, the staff asks, “What are you curious about?” Students always have an answer, Dey says. “We should help students know what they’re interested in and give them the confidence to experiment.”

Nick Huang, a 2018 graduate of Butler University, in Indianapolis, credits conversations with career-center staffers for helping draw connections between his involvement in campus clubs and a potential career. Realizing that he would be happiest doing work that had a lot of personal interaction was an “aha! moment,” he says.

Likewise, after Huang studied abroad in South Africa during his sophomore year, a career adviser encouraged him to apply for a Fulbright teaching fellowship, something he wouldn’t have had the confidence to do on his own. Today, he works as a project-marketing manager at Google, serving as a bridge between the development and marketing teams. His year as a Fulbrighter in Macau gave him a more global lens and helps him work across barriers with a multicultural team of co-workers. “One of the reasons you go to college is to get a good job,” Huang says, “but when I first came to campus, I didn’t know what that meant.”

Dey calls this process “life design.” Others use terms like “life and career exploration” or “personal and professional development.” To some, this language might sound woo-woo. But Dey says the old framing, of career planning, doesn’t fit—if it ever did.

“The expectation that students have to
have a clear plan at 18 is unreasonable,” he says. “The worst question is, where do you see yourself in 10 years? It doesn’t work like that.”

If the question was answerable in an era when workers started with and retired from the same company, it no longer is. Not only are few of today’s college graduates likely to stick with a single employer, but the skills revolution also means the actual job that they do will change many times over the course of their careers.

The idea of a career plan is outdated, Dey says. “It’s too linear — and it’s not how jobs work. There are jobs that will exist in five years that don’t exist today.”

It’s preferable to prepare students for career exploration and flexibility, says Shawn VanDerziel of the National Association of Colleges and Employers. After all, it’s a skill they will need throughout their work lives.

Unintentionally, Covid-19 could help accelerate this change. Freed up from staffing campus visits and in-person fairs, career advisers may be able to spend more time on the counseling and coaching aspects of their work.

A shift in language and approach could help bridge the gap with faculty members and others on campus who have been worried that an emphasis on careers could lead to the overvocationalizing of college. Dey’s emphasis on life design, for example, doesn’t sound far off from the language around educating the whole citizen that’s long been at the heart of the case for liberal-arts education.

Skills Portfolios and Career Coaches

Elevating career education as an institutional priority could also help make it a campuswide expectation. Given the consensus around the types of experiences and activities that improve students’ postgraduation outcomes, it’s troubling when only a small share of students engage
in them, says Podany, of the Career Leadership Collective. “Who does it hurt when career services are merely offered?”

Setting an institutional agenda for career education is important but not sufficient. Colleges will also need to embrace specific strategies to make sure that career development isn’t just for the students who seek out the career office. Instead, institutions must be more intentional and more intrusive.

Margaret L. Drugovich, president of Hartwick College, says colleges, hers included, often put the responsibility on students to “come and ask for help.”

“We needed to be much more purposeful,” she says.

At Hartwick, that meant a top-to-bottom redesign of its approach to career preparation. Under its new FlightPath program, postgraduate employability is central to the educational experience from the time students arrive at the liberal-arts college. An introduction to career development is incorporated into the first-year seminar, where students connect with a career coach, write a résumé, and start a portfolio of their work — something they often didn’t do until later in college, says Amy Forster Rothbart, an associate professor of political science who is coordinator of the first-year experience.

Hartwick students also complete a “21st-century career module,” a series of three interlinked classes that focus on three critical skills: communicating across difference, data analysis, and understanding the role and limits of scientific outcomes. The courses are connected by unexpected animating themes: One triad centers on health care, looking at issues such as public-health gaps and the effects of music therapy; another is related to science fiction. And once Covid-19 recedes, students will take part in first-year discovery trips over their January break, giving them a taste of experiential learning, as well as closer faculty connections.

**Zeroing In on Equity Gaps**

Many colleges increasingly view career readiness as a social-justice issue, particularly in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests. It’s not enough simply to raise overall career outcomes — they also recognize the need to reduce, and eventually eliminate, the persistent gaps in employment outcomes based on race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Career offices are building closer relationships with on-campus partners, like multicultural services and financial aid, to better meet student needs. At Butler, career-center advisers spend four hours a week at the university’s diversity center, bringing career services directly to underrepresented students.

Some colleges are creating special career-related opportunities for low-income and minority students. The University of Chicago’s Stand Together program offers internships for underserved students in fields including finance, law, and public service. Johns Hopkins’s DEI Collective places first-generation, minority, and other students, including students with disabilities, in paid internships with employers interested in hiring diverse job candidates.

Other institutions are creating cohort programs to help underrepresented students get ready for careers. Chicago gives a group of select first-year students access to career-exploration events in various disciplines through a “career catalyst” program. The University of North Carolina at Chapel
Hill is expanding its Carolina Covenant Scholars program, which allows low- and middle-income students to graduate debt free, and offers students networking, guided mentorship, and internship opportunities.

At the University of Oregon, selected first-generation, underrepresented, and Pell-eligible students take a one-term course focused on developing professional competencies. After they complete the course, students are assigned mentors for long-term support and take part in internships, undergraduate research, and other experiential-learning opportunities.

Nonprofit organizations can also be college partners in tackling these inequities. Aimee Eubanks Davis started Braven after teaching sixth grade in New Orleans with Teach for America. Eubanks Davis stayed in touch with her former students, cheering them on as they sought to go to college. When a group did, she figured this was success — a bunch of low-income Black kids had made it to the ivory tower.

But after graduation, the students struggled to find good jobs; one had a degree from Northwestern but flirted with unemployment.

Eubanks Davis realized that her students were floundering because they didn’t have the networks or understanding to navigate the path from college to career or know how to tap that expertise on their campuses. Braven, which works with colleges including Spelman and San Jose State and Northern Illinois Universities, puts students through a career-focused accelerator course, a combination of online modules and small-group cohorts of students, and then pairs them with a leadership coach.

In eight years, Braven has gone from having just 17 students to 5,500 participants at a half-dozen colleges, Eubanks Davis says. Since the Black Lives Matter protests, she says companies’ interest in working with Braven students has only grown. “They want to do good to do better,” she says.

Indeed, the movement for racial and social justice could be an important catalyst to progress in dealing with career equity gaps. Two-thirds of employers surveyed by the National Association of Colleges and Employers said they had allocated more resources to attract and recruit previously underrecruited candidates since the BLM protests. Forty percent had changed the sources they relied on to try to find a more diverse set of applicants.

Many colleges increasingly view career readiness as a social-justice issue.

Diversity is good for a company’s bottom line — a McKinsey & Co. study found that companies that had the most ethnically diverse leadership teams outperformed by 36 percent in profitability those with few executives of color.

Colleges say it’s important for many of their students to go to work at companies and organizations that truly value diversity. At UC-Davis, Marci Kirk Holland, executive director of the career and internship center, looks for employers that have employee resource groups — worker-led groups centered around race, ethnicity, gender, ethnicity, and other affiliations — that can help students have a “soft landing.”

Butler’s career center created a directory of Black- and minority-owned businesses and did an audit of the diversity practices of employers who hire Butler graduates. Loyola Marymount University required all employers who wanted to recruit on campus to sign a pledge committing to diversi-
ty, equity, and inclusion in their hiring and company culture. Not a single employer declined, says Branden Grimmett, the associate provost for career and professional development.

Collaborating With the Faculty
As colleges rethink their approach to career education, career-center staff members on many campuses are getting a new boss, the provost, and new colleagues, faculty members.

Professors can be “career champions,” encouraging students to think about their postcollege plans and to take part in career-building activities.

The organizational shift of career development out of student services and into academic affairs is an important one, experts say. It highlights the “education” part of career education — that it’s central to the student experience, not an add-on or afterthought. And proximity, at least within the institutional bureaucracy, could improve engagement between the career center and academic departments. “We’re in the same sandbox,” Grimmett says. At Loyola Marymount, career education was moved out of student affairs in 2015.

For Grimmett and his fellow heads of career education, building a closer working relationship with professors is a priority. Faculty members can be critical allies and advocates for career development. They have more face time with students than just about anyone else on campus, and regular classroom interactions give them more opportunities to reach students in their daily lives. The nature of the professor-student relationship — with the professor as teacher, sage, and authority — gives their perspective weight. For many students, faculty members are role models whom they hope to emulate.

“If you want to move outcomes,” says Penny MacCormack, chief academic officer of the Association of College and University Educators, which focuses on effective teaching practices, “go to the people who spend the most time with your students.”

Research also suggests professors may have specific credibility and legitimacy with students when it comes to career guidance. In a survey conducted by Gallup and the Strada Education Network, two-thirds of students who had a college mentor said it was a faculty member. Nine in 10 of these students turned to their professors for career advice.

Rothbart, Hartwick College’s first-year-experience coordinator, says students often trust and relate to faculty members because their suggestions are different from the “formulaic” advice they may have gotten from other adults in their lives, like high-school guidance counselors. “What liberal-arts faculty are good at doing,” she says, “is asking students about what interests them, what motivates them, how they want to do good in the world.”

Career centers are looking for new ways to enlist faculty members in career education. One is to build awareness among professors about the career office and the services it offers. Professors can be “career champions,” encouraging students to think about their post-college plans and to take part in career-building activities like internships. Wake Forest has developed tool kits to aid faculty members in responding to students’ career questions. At Mercy
College, in rural New York, instructors can request career-office speakers in their classes.

Butler University assigns career advisers as liaisons to the different academic colleges. While all liaisons spend a percentage of time each week based at their colleges, the adviser attached to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is actually stationed there full time, making it easy to meet regularly with faculty and administrators, go to classes and events, and advise students, says Gary Beaulieu, director of career and professional services.

Butler made the liberal-arts college a priority because it is the university’s largest and because its majors had fewer direct career paths than those in more professionally oriented colleges like business or health sciences. In the six years since the embedded model has been in place, advising appointments scheduled by arts-and-sciences students have increased by 20 to 25 percent annually — so much that Butler has had to add a second career adviser to work with students in those fields, Beaulieu says.

The other reason faculty members are critical partners is that they hold the keys to the curriculum. It’s important to forge closer ties between what students do in the classroom and what they hope to do after graduation. “Integrating into curriculum is everything,” says Bill Means, director of career and professional development at Florida A&M University.

“If we’re not in the classroom,” he says, “if we’re not impacting and influencing the curriculum, then we’re going to become very obsolete.”

**Career Education in the Classroom**

Colleges have taken different approaches to integrating career education into the classroom. At Mercy, professors can add web-based career-curriculum modules, focused on competencies like interview skills, critical thinking, and writing, to their syllabi. Students then complete the modules as homework assignments.

Institutions like Hartwick have made an introduction to career education part of the first-year seminar. Other colleges have overhauled their capstone programs to emphasize more hands-on work and industry connections just as students get ready to go out into the workplace.

“It’s motivating to students when they hear faculty members talk about what drew them.”

Dwayne Peterson, executive director of career engagement and opportunity at New College of Florida, says there’s no one-size-fits-all strategy. He works with individual faculty members to figure out what would work best in their classrooms. In a computer-science course that he team-taught, he and the instructor analyzed data to figure out where students struggled and how to better articulate the skills they were learning. For a popular drama course, he developed a supplementary workshop in which students were taught about skills valued in the workplace and then asked to complete a self-reflection, analyzing where in the course they may have gained those skills.

Elizabeth Leininger, an associate professor of biology at New College, has her neurobiology students complete an assignment in which they are given four different jobs ads — to work at a science journal, in science communications and education, at a neuroscience research lab, and in clinical trials. She asks them to write a CV.
and cover letter for one of them. The lesson works on several levels: Students make connections between what they’re learning in class and potential careers, and they see the many different options for work within the field. They also exercise critical skills, such as being active readers and persuasive writers. Often, students realize they already have experience and knowledge required for the positions — they learn about database searches in the same course, for instance — and they talk about how to frame that expertise.

“As professors we’re teaching the subject matter, but it could become obsolete,” Leininger says. “What are more durable and lasting are the skills they learn.”

In many ways, efforts like Peterson’s are less about changing what professors are teaching than about how they teach. In 2017, the Council of Independent Colleges and the Association of College and University Educators, with support from Strada, started a consortium on instructional development that, in part, trained faculty in ways to integrate career guidance into their teaching and prepare students with career-ready skills.

The approach was radical only in its simplicity: Professors were asked to be explicit with students about why they were having them do specific assignments or tasks, and how that work relates to what happens on the job — for example, how doing group work in the classroom is good preparation for working in teams in the workplace, including pointing out the difficulties that often arise in collaborative assignments.

Faculty members were also encouraged to talk about the careers and jobs related to the disciplines they teach. “It’s motivating to students when they hear faculty members talk about what drew them,” ACUE’s MacCormack says.

Colleges participating in the consortium reported increased use of the campus career office. Dillard University was so pleased that it went to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to get additional support for the project after the initial funds ran out. “I really do think there’s a cultural change around increased awareness of preparing students for a career,” says Yolanda W. Page, vice president for academic affairs at the university.

Being transparent about what you’re teaching and why it is valuable, especially to first-generation and other underrepresented students. It disadvantages students when they don’t understand what’s happening in the classroom, says Catherine Haras, the senior director for effective teaching and learning at California State University at Los Angeles, who co-authored an American Council on Education paper on career-relevant instruction. “We’d never ask students to play tennis without telling them the rules.”

It also is good pedagogy, says Steven C. Taylor, her co-author and a senior fellow on postsecondary education at Stand Together, an education-focused nonprofit. Students learn better when they’re able to apply the skills and competencies they are taught.

And such efforts could actually strengthen faculty members’ academic work, says Taylor, who is also a founder of ED2WORK, a group focused on policy for adult learners, by demonstrating its relevance to current challenges and in other contexts.

Know Your Skills

To help students better demonstrate the skills they have learned in the classroom to employers, more colleges are encouraging students to develop portfolios or complete career inventories.

Florida State University’s career center helps students create an online portfolio where they can collect writing samples, class presentations, and lists of skills they
have mastered. They can then send a link to potential employers and others.

Students at Northeastern University can log on to an app to track their skills and to reflect on their experiences inside and outside the classroom. It can help them make connections between what they learn in the classroom, a co-curricular activity, and one of the university’s required cooperative-education experiences.

The State of Kentucky is working on providing a comprehensive learner record for all students, detailing the skills and knowledge they have acquired while earning a degree.

In the wake of the pandemic, it is likely to be even more important for students to be able to articulate and demonstrate their skills. The continued use, at least in the short term, of remote and hybrid internships will complicate employers’ ability to do a firsthand assessment of students’ skills on the job. In the virtual recruiting environment, students may have just a few minutes to effectively convey their qualifications for a job and make a lasting impression.

But some experts say that the accelerated cycle in which job skills are emerging and evolving means that college curricula cannot remain static.

Colleges will need to use their expertise to identify skills and reverse-engineer their educational offerings, mapping shifting job demands and creating educational programs and sequences.

In some cases, colleges will start new programs and majors, while others will revise their curricula to better match employers’ needs. But the rapid skill-set changes mean that even innovative, state-of-the-art programs could become swiftly out of date. The challenge for colleges will be to design pathways to careers that remain navigable even as the jobs themselves morph and shift.

This type of approach has typically been something that community colleges and online providers like Southern New Hampshire and Western Governors Universities have been more adept at using. But traditional four-year institutions need to become more flexible, agile, and quicker to change, says Matt Sigelman, chief executive of Emsi Burning Glass.

Often, workers need to gain new competencies that can complement their existing skill sets. A study by Emsi Burning Glass and the American Enterprise Institute found that liberal-arts graduates could become eligible for 1.4 million additional jobs if they acquired specific practical or technical skills, like data analysis, computer programming, or graphic design, to supplement their broad-based education. By adding these marketable skills, they could earn more competitive wages.

Career centers can play an important role in helping students understand the changing job market. Their guidance can help students mix and match from a menu of courses and competencies to customize their education to meet employers’ appetite for new skills.

Colleges can create stackable credentials, microcredits, or other nondegree options that would be tailored to teach specific skills and competencies. These bite-size programs could appeal to both current students and alumni, as well as others already in the work force who need to pick up skills on the fly.

Florida International University’s micro-
credentialing program awards students digital badges to recognize their mastery of 21st-century skills such as initiative, understanding artificial intelligence, and data literacy. The California Community Colleges system also offers digital badges in areas prized by employers, such as adaptability, collaboration, resilience, and social/diversity awareness.

Some colleges have grouped together a series of related courses to form a mini-curriculum in a particular area. Students at Virginia Commonwealth University, for example, can take classes in computer programming, cybersecurity, and data science to earn a digital tech credential, a signal that non-STEM students have marketable digital-technology competencies.

Butler has begun to explore offering stand-alone credentials and certificates in certain high-demand areas like graphic design, human relations, and Excel. Beau-lieu is hoping to tap alumni to teach some of the courses, which could be offered in on-demand modules.

The university has also struck deals with employers like Wipro Limited, an information-technology and business-process-services company, which runs a 10-week course for Butler students, giving them a basic certification in Salesforce, the popular business software. Students get training while Wipro builds connections with students who might be potential hires.

Sigelman says that the pandemic could make it easier for colleges to offer more short-term, flexible learning options, because it has forced both students and faculty members to become comfortable with hybrid and online learning. Teaching in those formats can expand colleges’ reach, particularly to working learners who might not otherwise be able to fit an in-person, on-campus course into their busy schedules.

“I really do think there’s a cultural change around increased awareness of preparing students for a career.”

As the skills revolution continues, alumni and other midcareer professionals could become a more regular presence on college campuses, even those that typically serve 18- to 22-year-olds — an acknowledgment that workers may need to constantly update and upgrade their skills.

“If the landscape of skills is changing that fast,” Sigelman says, “we need to acknowledge that it’s impossible to provide students with what they need in one fell swoop.”

Educating students for careers will no longer be a one-time endeavor but a lifetime commitment.
A cross the country, colleges are getting students to start thinking early on about what they want to do after they graduate. They’re ensuring that all students can take part in experiences like internships and mentoring, which make a real difference in job readiness. And they’re calling out connections between the skills students learn in their courses and what they need in the workplace. Colleges hope these fresh approaches will help students move more seamlessly into their careers. Here are two examples.

Colleges hope these fresh approaches, featured in the following case studies, will help students move more seamlessly into their careers.

Reconceiving Career Planning to Reach All Students

Call up Farouk Dey to talk about careers, and you might find yourself in a discussion about sidewalk curb cuts. Dey, vice provost for integrative learning and life design at the Johns Hopkins University, sees curb cuts — the graded ramps that connect streets to sidewalks, meant to help people with disabilities — as a design feature that has turned out to be useful to many others. Since the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1990, curb cuts have helped wheelchair users, older walkers, moms with strollers, movers, in-line skaters, and more.

Dey, who has been at Hopkins since 2018, takes the same approach to career readiness. He tries to figure out what helps students who have the toughest time moving from college to career and then makes the services and programming available to all students.

“Let’s not make it an accommodation,” Dey says. “Just make it standard so everyone gets it.”

Among the experiences Dey has sought to make standard: Every Hopkins student will have access to an alumni mentor. And every student will graduate having had one or more immersive educational experiences, such as an internship, undergraduate research opportunity, international study, or entrepreneurial activity. These activities are seen as high-impact practices for career readiness by groups like the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

The challenge for colleges will be to design pathways to careers that remain navigable even as the jobs themselves morph and shift.

For Dey, the metric of success isn’t in the topline number alone, the total number of students who complete an internship or take part in a networking event. The measure of progress is in the disaggregated data: Are the results equitable for low-income students and wealthier peers, for stu-
Farouk Dey, vice provost for integrative learning and life design at the Johns Hopkins U., wants to make career services and programming available to all students.

The Challenge:
Students from minority and low-income families needed more support in planning their careers.

The Strategy:
Redesign career programs so all students take part in high-impact practices and receive advising and mentoring. Offer one-stop shopping at a new career center.

The Results:
Gaps in postgraduate employability and salary between disadvantaged students and their classmates have all but been eliminated.

The focus on greater equality in career opportunity and outcomes is part of a larger push for access and success at Hopkins. Michael Bloomberg, the business executive and former New York mayor and a Hopkins alumnus, gave the university $1.8 billion for such efforts in 2018, the same year Dey was hired from Stanford University to lead a new, equity-driven approach to career development.

As Dey sees it, the trouble with the legacy model of career education is that it was...
built on the assumption that students would figure out how to get the right experiences on their own. That was fine when higher education was reserved for elite students who came to college with social and family networks of their own and didn’t necessarily need guidance to put them on a path to success. Colleges initially didn’t invest much in career offices because there was little need to do so.

Even as career placement became a more-common expectation of colleges, the responsibility largely fell to students to figure out what services they needed and how to gain access to them. It’s a model that simply does not work for many students, Dey says. He compares the typical college experience to an a la carte menu: Students from backgrounds where they don’t have many college-educated role models don’t know what to order. Too often, they end up not participating in key activities at all.

“The college experience shouldn’t be a scavenger hunt.”

“These are things not all students get because they are not baked in,” Dey says of needle-moving experiences like experiential learning and mentorship. “You have to know about these things to get them.”

To make career-development opportunities more accessible and inclusive, Hopkins has reorganized and centralized them under Dey. The offices that oversee different high-impact practices can be scattered, dispersed, and sometimes quite literally on the periphery — the study-abroad center on one side of campus, the internship office on another. At Hopkins they will now be consolidated in a new, one-stop, state-of-the-art center that was set to open in 2022.

“The college experience shouldn’t be a scavenger hunt,” Dey says.

Dey and his team also try to anticipate the different barriers that can make it more difficult for students to take advantage of opportunities or cause them to miss out altogether.

In addition to the centralized career hub, career-center staff go to where the students are, with advisers assigned to different majors and disciplines. These “nested” advisers build up expertise in certain disciplines, make connections with employers and alumni, and can offer students individualized, on-demand career support.

When the pandemic canceled many internship opportunities, Dey raised $500,000 to fund immersive experiences for students during the summer of 2020. Students used the grants to take part in unpaid experiences, including volunteer work, research, and virtual internships. Some recipients wrote books or started their own businesses.

The university has also defined immersive experiences more broadly than simply internships. Students can gain important skills through research, study abroad, and campus-leadership roles, Dey believes. Ninety-seven percent of students now get such immersive experiences, an increase from previous years, but Dey and his staff must help students tie these experiences into broader career exploration. A work-study position can be a meaningful experience if connections are made to what students are learning in the classroom, Dey says.

Even the language Dey uses is meant to underscore a cultural shift. The new integrated career office is called the Imagine Center. That’s the message Dey hopes to send to students: “This is an institution you
come to to imagine your life, to imagine your future."

For These Students, Career Planning Starts On Day 1

When students visit Loyola Marymount University, in Los Angeles, the first stop on the campus tour is always the same: the university’s Office of Career and Professional Development.

It might seem strange that students’ first impression is of an office that many of them typically don’t visit until they’re about to graduate. But for Loyola Marymount, it is a deliberate decision.

“We have only a limited amount of time with our students,” says Branden Grimmett, the associate provost who oversees the career office, “so it’s important to start early.”

Landing a prime spot on the campus tour was an easy request for Grimmett — the career and professional-development team reports to the university’s vice provost for enrollment management.

The team also reports to the provost, a signal of how career education is embedded in the Loyola Marymount experience, including academics. The dual reporting structure isn’t unique — the University of Chicago has a similar setup — but it is unusual.

For Grimmett, getting to students early is a practical move. Fewer traditional-aged students coming to colleges like Loyola Marymount have had work experience as teenagers. Only about one-third of teenagers hold part-time or summer jobs, according to the Brookings Institution, and the share of high-school students who work has been declining for decades. The academic and extracurricular demands on students are more intense. But the number of low-wage jobs has also decreased while competition from older workers, displaced by automation or trade, has grown, Brookings found.

That means Grimmett is exposing many undergraduates to new skills and experiences. He wants them to begin networking and take part in internships. Eighty percent of Loyola Marymount students do at least one internship before they graduate.

“It normalizes careers as part of their college planning,” Grimmett says.

But emphasizing career prospects in college admissions is also a smart pitch to today’s students and their parents. After all, many families value a college degree as future job security. Ninety percent of students and parents, in a survey by Barnes & Noble and Money magazine, rated “preparing for a fulfilling career” as a very or extremely valuable benefit of a college education. An annual survey of college freshmen conducted by the University of California at Los Angeles found that students ranked getting a better job above all other factors as very important in their decision to go to college.

Other colleges have sought to make career readiness part of their appeal. After its enrollment declined nearly 14 percent since 2017, Hartwick College, a small private institution in New York, made a focus on postgraduate employability the centerpiece of efforts to attract new students.

When David Donovan, a 23-year-old from San Juan Capistrano, Calif., was choosing where to attend college, he was already thinking about his long-term prospects. “Having older siblings, college for me was always about getting a good job,” he says. Donovan liked how engaged Loyola Marymount students were with the career-development center; he’s now a senior there.
The university’s career-staff members participate in almost every admissions and recruitment event, Grimmett says, and come with data at the ready. They can tell students about Loyola Marymount’s employment track record for alumni from similar backgrounds and how one’s field of study affects career options.

“Good data makes good college choices,” Grimmett says. The transparency about employment outcomes seems particularly important to parents, who tend to worry about their children’s long-term future.

But Grimmett also discusses his own background in his interactions with parents of prospective students to make the point that a major isn’t destiny. He studied music and religion as an undergraduate and got a master’s degree in theology from Harvard University — not exactly the expected path to working in higher education. A college education, he says, can lead to many different careers.

Because Loyola Marymount’s career center is also part of academic affairs, it has close ties with the academic disciplines.
Every school and college has a career coach on campus, typically someone with a professional background in a particular industry rather than in higher ed. When prospective students express interest in a specific major, they can meet the right career adviser during the admissions process, building early relationships. They come to campus knowing who can help and where to find them.

The career office seeks out other ways to interact with prospective students. It organizes “career treks” — though these have been temporarily suspended by the pandemic — in which groups of about two dozen students travel to cities in both the United States and abroad for career-focused visits with alumni and employers. (During the pandemic, these networking and career-information sessions have been held online.)

As part of the treks, the university also invites prospective students who live locally to select events to introduce them to the broader Loyola Marymount network. For parents, these events often send messages not just about careers but about community. “They knew even if their son or daughter was on the other side of the country,” Grimmett says, “they were part of a support system.”

Karin Fischer writes about international education, colleges and the economy, and other issues. She’s on Twitter @karinfischer, and her email address is karin.fischer@chronicle.com.
“Colleges are working with academic departments, student groups, and dorm staff to take career education out of the career office and spread it across campus.”

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