



CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON COLLEGE-WORKFORCE TRANSITIONS **Career Services Report: Midwestern State***

October 2017

Outline of the Study

This study documented the experiences of a group of undergraduate students at Midwestern State, with the aim to provide findings and actionable recommendations to student affairs professionals at this campus. Improving educators' understanding of student experiences with career services programming and the career planning process is important given the need for colleges and universities to support and enhance students' career development in a rapidly evolving labor market. Consequently, career services professionals and institutional leaders would benefit from insights regarding whether or not their advising services are meeting students' needs, particularly for first-generation, underrepresented minority and international students whose goals, interests, and concerns may vary from upper-income white students.

Additionally, this study also sought to document how college students make decisions regarding their careers, whose advice they are most likely to seek, and how adaptable, confident, and proactive they are in regard to career planning. Insights into these issues may illuminate how today's students are thinking about the world of work, which can help to inform how educators, student affairs professionals, and institutional leaders design and implement academic and career-related programs.

This report includes findings from an online survey and in-person focus groups conducted with a group of undergraduate student respondents from Midwestern State in the Spring of 2017.

Study Methodology

The aim of this study was to document students' perspectives on the utility of their college's career services offices, influential factors shaping their career choices, sources of information for making these career decisions, and their degree of adaptability with respect to the labor market. This mixed-methods study involved sending a survey link (hosted by Midwestern State's Qualtrics service) to students at varying stages of their degrees at Midwestern State (which ultimately included students who have declared a certificate in business as well). Among the sample of approximately 2,550 students, 464 began the survey with a participation response rate of 18% (80% of students who began the survey finished). After completing the survey, students had the option to self-select into focus groups lasting approximately 45 minutes. Some of the questions asked in these focus groups included: *What do you see as the most significant challenges to finding a job that you want? When you have academic or career concerns, who do you go to for advice and suggestions? Can you describe your experiences with your college's career counseling/advising?* Ultimately, a total of 35 students (out of the 45 who signed up) participated in 12 focus groups.

**pseudonym*



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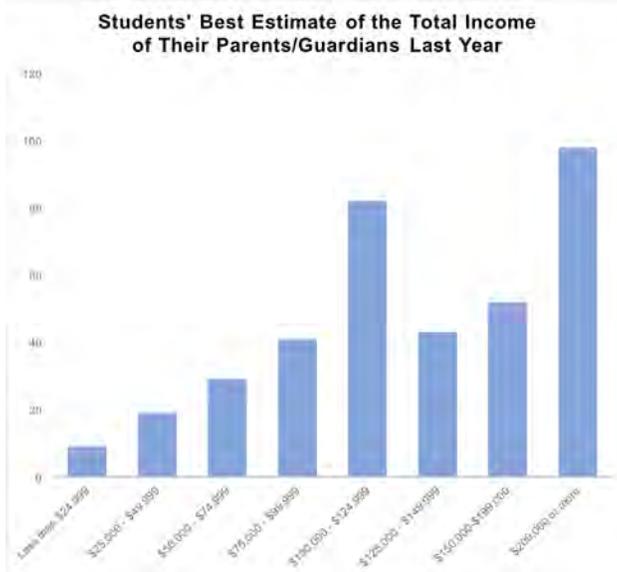
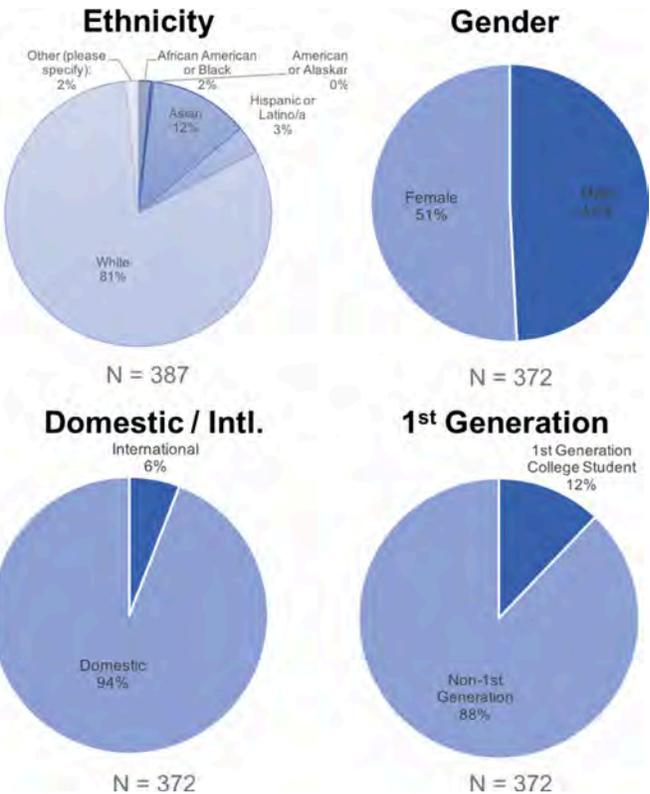
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Survey Respondent Reported Majors*	
Accounting	72
Actuarial Science	39
Finance, Investment, and Banking	112
Information Systems	7
International Business	15
Management and Human Resources	24
Marketing	109
Operations and Technology Management	14
Real Estate	22
Risk Management and Insurance	3
Other**	21
Total Respondents	438

Survey Statistics	
Sample	2550
Participation	464
Participation Response Rate	18%
Completion Response Rate	15%
Survey Completion Rate	80%

*For simplicity of data reporting, double majors and/or certificates are not reflected above. For those with multiple majors, the first listed major was reported.

**The other category represents students whose listed major was not in the College being studied, but may be a certificate program or in another College at Midwestern State.



SECTION A: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS (FOCUS GROUPS)

Focus Group Participant Reported Majors*	
Accounting	7
Actuarial Science	2
Finance, Investment, and Banking	9
Information Systems	0
International Business	1
Management and Human Resources	3
Marketing	12
Operations and Technology Management	0
Real Estate	0
Risk Management and Insurance	0
Other**	1
Total Participants	35

*For simplicity of data reporting, double majors and/or certificates are not reflected above. For those with multiple majors, the first listed major was reported.

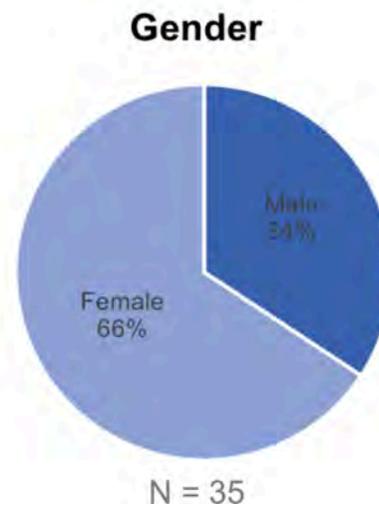
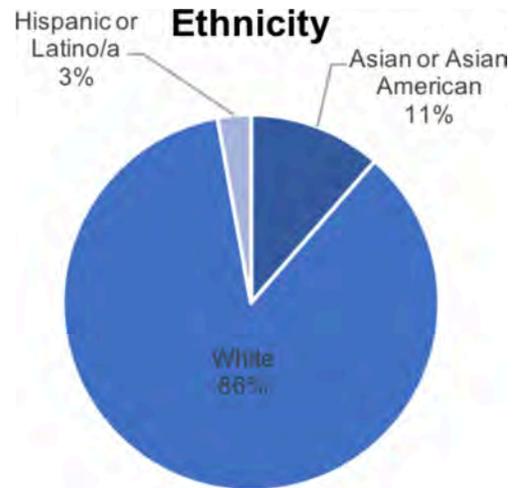
**The other category represents students whose listed major was not in the College being studied, but may be a certificate program or in another College at Midwestern State.

Demographic Observations

Participants in both the survey and focus groups were majority white (81% and 86% respectively). Gender was dispersed equally in the survey (51% female, 49% male), while females had higher participation rates in focus groups (66%). At Midwestern State as a whole, 78% of students are white while 44% are female.¹ Likewise, while international students only represented 6% of the survey respondents, they comprise 10% of the campus.²

In general, students' estimation of their parent/guardians' combined salary favored both middle- and upper-class family incomes.

In the survey sample, first generation students (FGS) comprised 12% of respondents, whereas FGS make up 18% of the entire campus undergraduate student body.³



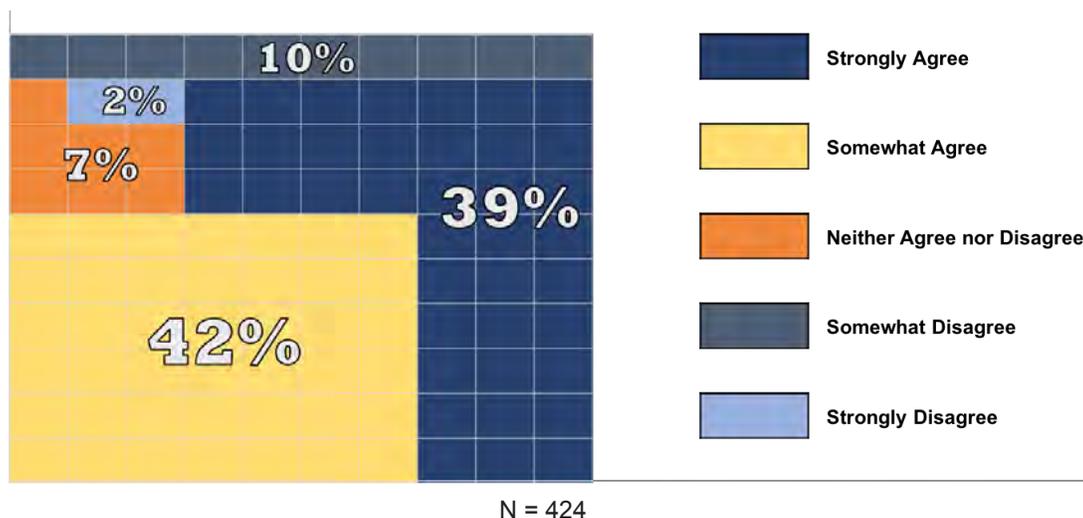
¹ Institutional data

² Institutional data

³ Institutional data

SECTION B: CAREER DECISION-MAKING

Level of agreement with the following statement: "I have clear and specific career goals."



The first survey question asked about whether or not student respondents had clear and specific career goals, and the majority reported that they did. These results are promising and suggest that many students in this group would not need any further assistance in exploring career options. However, the 12% who did not have clear and specific career goals may represent a cohort requiring further assistance.

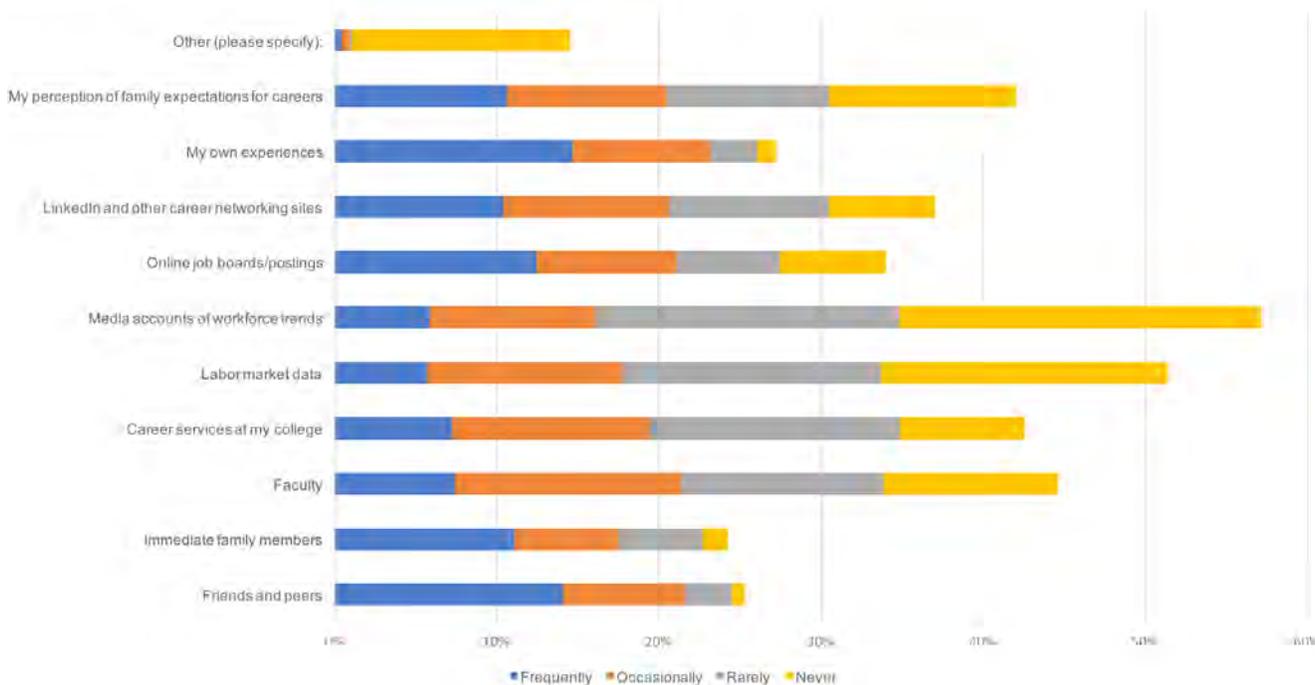
Focus Group Data: Experiences in Career Decision-Making

One of the foci of the focus groups was to identify the people, events and experiences that most influenced students' thinking about careers. While internship and job experiences proved to be influential, many students described exposure to the world of business prior to university, however, these experiences vary significantly. While some students cited extracurricular activities such as golf "that aligned well with the business world", other students noted transferrable skills and experiences such as in-classroom group activities in high school that revealed their preference for working collaboratively with people. Still, others credited the business-oriented occupations of their parent(s)/guardian(s) for their career choices.

A significant proportion of students described their enjoyment of working with people, and the subject of math, alongside a disinterest or poor performance in science, as considerable factors in choosing to pursue a business degree. Likewise, many students described their pursuit of business as an alternative to pursuing medicine, suggesting a preference for careers that are more likely to be associated with financial success and of societal importance. As such, students also described their awareness of Midwestern State's notable reputation with producing CEOs and successful businesspeople.

"I always liked numbers and math. In school, that was always my favorite subject. And also I'm terrified with blood so I knew I didn't want to do anything in the medical field. And so coming in to college I was between engineering and business, because they're both like very math-related and work-- I want to work with people too. And then I realized that engineering has a lot of like science and physics and I don't really like that. So, I thought business would be good because I like working with people and I like working with numbers, which is why I picked accounting ultimately."
 - Midwestern State Student

Frequency of sources accessed when seeking information about possible careers



N = 400

The above survey question asked students to whom or where they turn to get information about careers. Answers to this question are important in order to better understand if career services are one of these sources, and whether or not alternative information sources should be accounted for when designing career advising programs. Immediate family members, friends, and students’ own experiences serve as the major sources of information they seek. It is worth noting how equally spread students’ perceptions of family expectations from a frequently accessed source to never. Data on workforce trends and labor market projections, which are a strong emphasis of state-level workforce initiatives (with respect to K-12 student career planning and workforce development) were used the least. These findings suggest that advisors should be aware of the impact of family and/or peers in students’ predispositions for certain career pathways. Like faculty, career services appear to have been accessed broadly at least once, indicating that these are services students explore but may not necessarily return. Finally, introducing career and labor-market data might help students make more informed decisions about their career paths, but currently may not be presented in a personalized or straightforward manner where the data can easily translate to a student’s individual circumstance.

Focus Group Data: Information Sources

Students in the sample seemed particularly adept at networking independently with individuals who they identified as working in a position they desired and accounted for the most sought-after information source about career decision-making. Parents who were described as having applicable professions or work experience were also highly sought for advice and information. Likewise, older peers who had post-baccalaureate work experience were also cited as valuable.

Other notable sources included an online job search tool (as a starting point), the career advising office, academic advising, LinkedIn, current supervisors or managers, professors, professional student organizations, and company websites. Company websites were reported as particularly useful in gaining a sense of an organization’s corporate responsibility and corporate culture. Students at Midwestern State mentioned the importance of a company’s culture—as well as touching on themes of work-life balance—in several different focus groups.

“To me it’s very important to work for a company that gives back to the community, because there’s more to life than just work. And I think it’s important to help other people, especially if it’s a big successful company and they have a lot of like resources to help others. If they’re not, that turns me away from the company definitely. So, that’s important to me. And I also agree that if they’re out in the community and they care about like they show that they care about other people, that they’ll probably-- it’s probably like a better place to work as far as being an employee there and like having understanding bosses and supervisors and people who want to help you and care about you indulges you as an employee.”

- Midwestern State Student

Focus Group Data: Notes on Personal Influences

Students identified strong personal influences on their career decision-making as high school math teachers, economics courses, current or former supervisors/bosses, friends, siblings, and parents (regardless of their profession, though it is worth noting the significance of parents in business or business-related professions). There was frequent mentioning of stability and financial success in conversations related to business professions, but not often cited as a salient factor in actual decision-making processes. Many students recalled having high expectations from their parents growing up, as well as “pressure to be good at everything” and make choices independently.

“And almost all of them have family in accounting which I was unaware of at the time but then I realized I was kind of an outlier that I’m an accounting major with no family ties to the accounting profession. I think every single one of my roommates has like an uncle or a parent in accounting.”

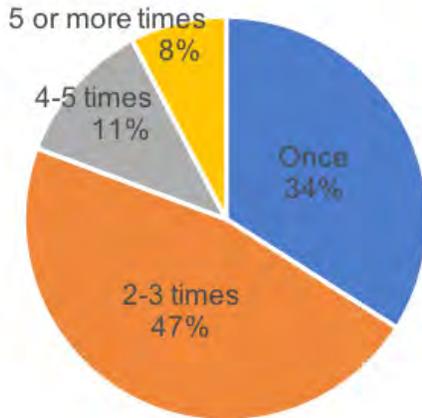
- Midwestern State Student

“And my mom always told me if you’re a doctor, you give up your 20s so I didn’t want to do that too.”

- Midwestern State Student

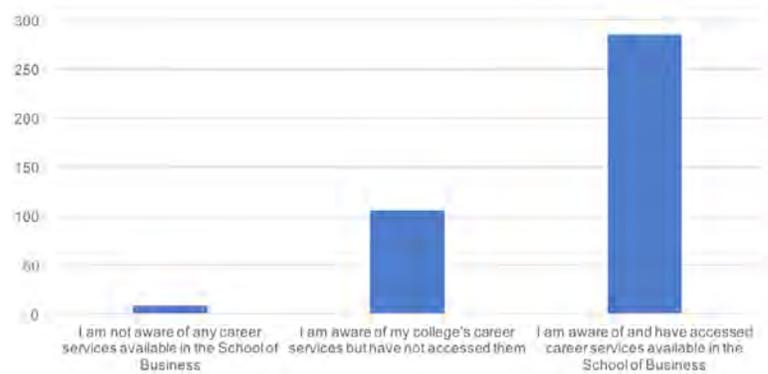
SECTION C: EXPERIENCES WITH CAREER SERVICES

Frequency of career services



N = 285

Awareness of Midwestern State career services



N = 400

*Respondents were limited to those who indicated that they had accessed careerservices at Midwestern State.

The figures above represent questions aimed at determining both student awareness and frequency of use of career services at Midwestern State. A total of 98% of respondents were aware of the services available to them, and 71% of the total sample had accessed them. Among the students in the sample who did access career services in the last year (N=285), 66% reported doing so on more than one occasion, indicating that both awareness and utilization of career services at Midwestern State is not an issue.

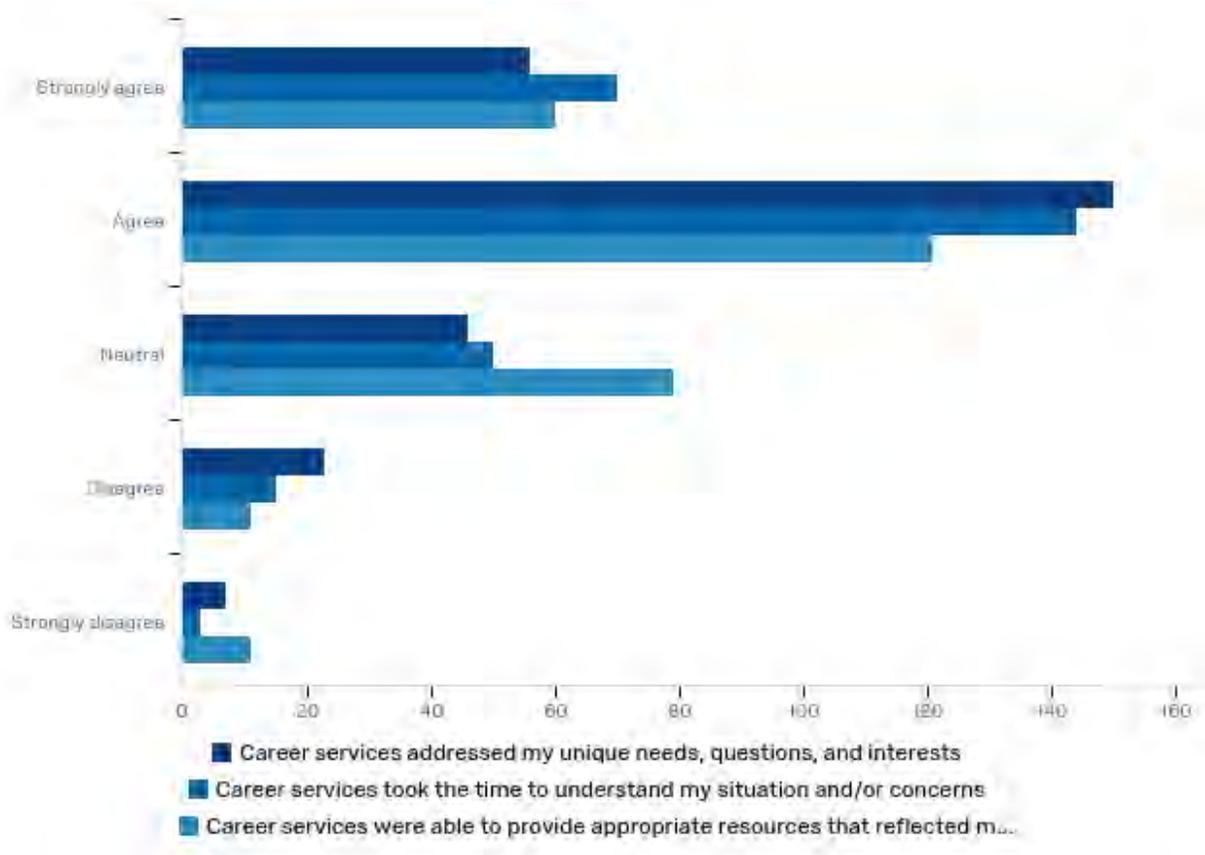
Focus Group Data: Utilization

Participants seemed to access a wide variety of career services offered at Midwestern State. Both the online job search tool and the career fair were described as valuable starting points or “gateways” to using other services, though some students remarked that they wish they had used these services earlier in their academic careers.

As expected, other services such as mock interviews, resume workshops, and networking events were used most frequently by students already in the process of accepting a job offer or beginning an internship, but generally regarded as valuable.

Specifically, students who participated in job shadowing programs recalled the significance of the experience in determining both what type of internship and job they wanted and what work experiences did not suit them well. Students who took part in job shadows advocated for wider student participation in the experience.

Level of agreement with the following statements regarding student experiences with career services



The graph above illustrates students’ level of agreement with three different ways in which career services responded to various needs. In terms of career services addressing students’ needs, questions, and interests, 73% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, with 10% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Likewise, 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that career services took the time to understand their situation and/or concerns, with only 6% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Lastly, in regard to the career services being able to provide appropriate resources that reflected students’ cultural/ethnic background, 64% of students agreed or strongly agreed, with 8% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

Focus Group Data: Identity Considerations

Participants described the desire for career services to cater more specifically to the needs of specific populations: (1) International students: especially in terms of navigating visa sponsorship; (2) Returning adult students: on how to leverage their previous work experience in the job market; (3) First generation students: in terms of navigating a system with which they are less familiar; (4) Working-class students: who cannot afford to take an unpaid internship or multiple unpaid internships; (5) Students who wish to either work abroad or use their foreign language expertise in determining their career path; (6) Women who are looking to work in fields that are particularly male-dominated; and, (7) Domestic students who are from areas outside the Midwest and want to access internships and/or job opportunities outside of the region (on the west or east coast, for example). Further, students described a need for increased diversity of advisors (especially international career advisors and advisors of color), and a perception that career services are geared toward students with an already extensive (family) business background.

“International students are a huge population of the Midwestern State. Yet there are hardly anything that can be very beneficial to us. We don’t even know what companies accept international students and end up spending time on the ones that do not accept international students. And the Midwestern State is doing nothing (at least that I know of) to try to encourage companies take international students.”

- Midwestern State Student

“As a person of color, I felt that Midwestern State hasn’t offered much in terms of career preparation specific to persons of color. I think that a good first step would be to educate diverse students on various opportunities available only to them. I know several large investment banks have workshops specifically for diverse individuals, and I think it is worth putting more (or any) of those on the online job search tool.”

- Midwestern State Student

“And then the gender thing I don’t feel like I was ever had a problem with that with career services, but I would say as a whole at Midwestern State it’s entirely ignored. And if you talk to any guy most of them will say it’s a ‘bro sesh’. I don’t know if you would agree with that, but I’ve talked to many people that are like oh, yeah, is this school’s a ‘bro sesh’. They’re like oh, you’re a girl in that like that’s rough. But yeah, I think it would be nice if there was like a class on just like the basic problems and issues in the business world. Gender being one of them.”

- Midwestern State Student

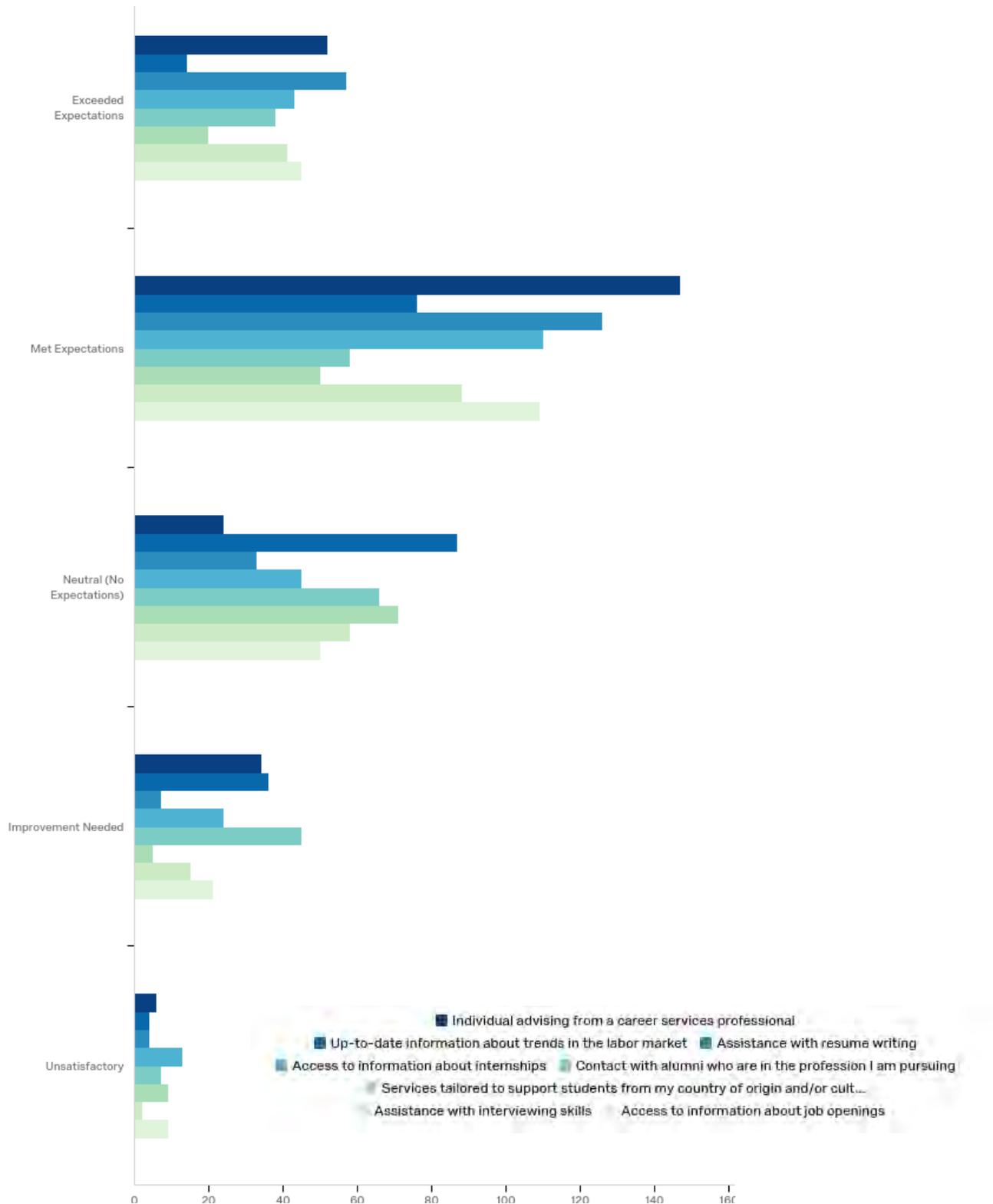
Focus Group Data: Feedback on Career Services

Resume reviews and workshops, mock interviews, and job shadowing experiences were cited as services yielding the most satisfaction. Many students remarked how much more well-prepared they felt compared to peers from other colleges.

“The career summit is a good way for us to explore the career services at Midwestern State. I hope that there are more workshops throughout the semester that I can learn more about job openings, CPT for the international students, and interview skills prep.”

- Midwestern State Student

Student assessment of how well specific career services and/or programs met their expectations



Career Services and Expectations (previous page)

In the graph on the previous page, different aspects of career services and/or programs were rated based on students' experiences as exceeding expectations, met expectations, neutral, improvement needed, or unsatisfactory. The most highly rated service was assistance with resume writing, where 85% of respondents found it to meet their expectations or exceed them, while 69% of respondents found individual advising from a career services professional to meet or exceed their expectations.

However, only 30% of respondents found the availability of up-to-date information about trends in the labor market to meet or exceed their expectations. Likewise, only 17% of respondents found their expectations met or exceeded in terms of contact with alumni network. Interestingly, 50% and 67% of respondents rated these items as neutral, respectively. While a minority of students found these services to meet or exceed their expectations, the majority of them rated these as neutral or as having no expectations, suggesting that students may not be aware of these services or cognizant of their benefits, from which increased outreach and/or support might prove beneficial.

While the graph depicts a generally positive review, it is worth noting that the only service ranked as unsatisfactory were services tailored to students from different countries and/or cultural backgrounds.

"I've used a lot of them [career services], most commonly being my career adviser. I developed a really strong relationship with her. So then, I felt comfortable going for like pretty much any question I had, which was helpful in like negotiating job offers and such. Other than that, the company I signed with, I was actually originally interested in because I had done a job shadow which is a program Midwestern State set up with that company. I hadn't considered them before. And then it was an exposure, they took us through like the day to day, what it might look like. ... So, that was really helpful in mind."

- Midwestern State Student

Focus Group Data: Feedback on Career Services (Continued)

Along these lines, many students described the lack of personalization in career services. Students described the "cookie cutter" types of graduates they felt "Midwestern State wants". In this sense, participants voiced discouragement over the perceived privileging of Midwestern State contacts/preferred companies over those that may better match students' interests, but may not have a relationship with Midwestern State. See students' comments below.

"Career advising wanted to fit me into one of their molds—they were not interested in hearing my goals. Advisors don't seem equipped to work with people who aren't interested in typical business major careers with the typical business major employers."

- Midwestern State Student

"I felt as though that was my career adviser's goal: to get me a job, any job, even if it wasn't what I wanted to do."

- Midwestern State Student

"The question I had for career services was important in deciding between internship offers and building my career. I felt the advisor cared more about Midwestern State's reputation and relationships with companies rather than my professional growth. It was rather frustrating, and caused me to go to a company and into a role that ended up being a poor fit. Since this experience I have used other resources for career help (mentors, family, friends, etc.)."

- Midwestern State Student

"Need a variety of opportunities for un common career areas. The non-profit sector is the largest growing sector in the business world and yet the BBA program still only works with and offers accounting and marketing jobs, time to adapt."

- Midwestern State Student

Focus Group Data: Feedback on Career Services (Continued)

Many students described a need for resources dedicated toward internships and job opportunities outside of the Midwest. Likewise, students also lamented a lack of assistance for those who want to work or intern internationally. Acknowledging the role of alumni in their decision-making processes, both a desire for more informational interviews with alumni and expansion of the alumni network were listed as important ways career services could improve.

“Now that the school has done away with the cap on out-of-state students, it’s important that the school begins to recognize students would like to work all over the country because the student body is increasingly from all over the country. Midwestern State should try harder to find recruiters from cities other than big cities!”

- Midwestern State Student

“I hope that there could be a resource where we could find how many people were going to a specific location. Like for example, I’m going to New York for an internship, but I have no idea who is also going to New York and I want to find a roommate that is from Midwestern State because you have-- I have no idea who is like-- I don’t know anyone in New York. And I actually talked to the career adviser about that. Like, is there a feature on the online job search tool I can find students or graduates from Midwestern State going to New York to intern or study? But they say no.”

- Midwestern State Student

Reflecting on their career advising appointments, students cautioned against an over-reliance on the online job search tool (being referred to “feeling rushed” and being told to “just go on the online job search tool”), cited advisors’ lack of thorough understanding of industry trends, and a desire for stronger alignment between students’ career goals and the experience/expertise of career advisors available to them. Further, students do not seem to gain as much from peer advisors as they do from professional career advisors, whose services they prefer.

“I was just expecting like somebody like my academic adviser. But I got one of my friends who was just working there. He’s like a student part-time. And so, that immediately-- my expectation that I was going to be working with like a professor/teacher type of role and then ended up getting like one of my own friends. And immediately, it was like, OK, what do you know that’s really more than what I know?”

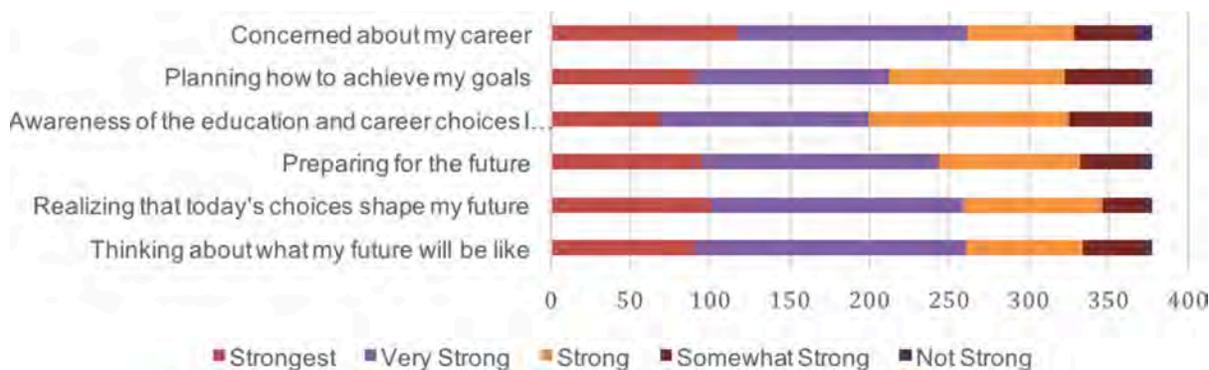
- Midwestern State Student

In terms of professional development, students expressed an anxiety toward networking (suggesting workshops aimed at overcoming this anxiousness) and favored increased and improved opportunities for career fair preparation. Additionally, some students, particularly females, wished for more training opportunities for negotiating salary offers.

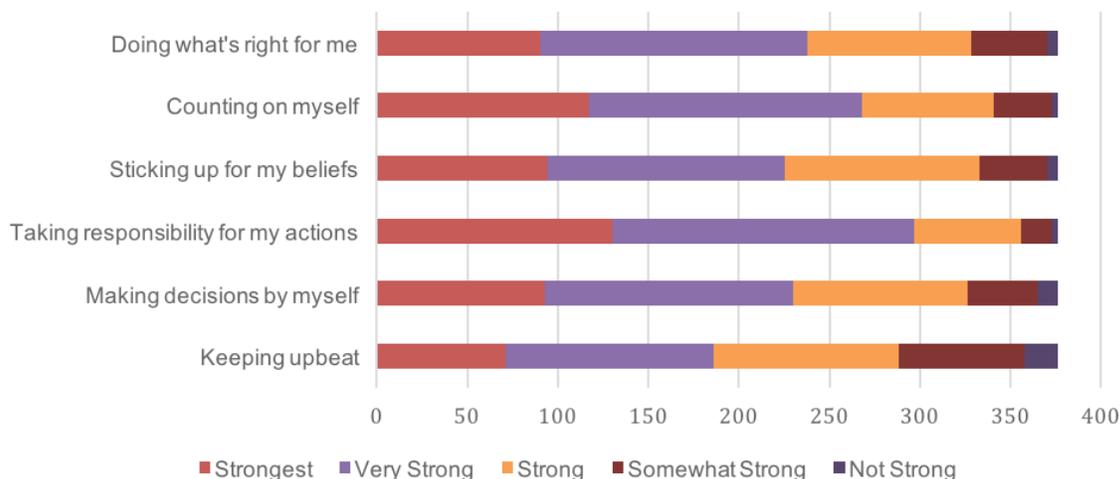
SECTION D: CAREER ADAPT-ABILITIES SCALE

In the field of counseling psychology and career advising, an influential idea is that of career construction, or the notion that individuals can and should develop their own narratives about their careers throughout different stages of life. This approach puts students' own interests, goals, and personal aptitudes at the center of discussions about career planning. The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS) (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) is a scale used to measure four important aspects of an individual's ability to engage in this process, known as career adaptability. The CAAS consists of four scales (Concern, Control, Curiosity, and Confidence), each with six items, that are measured in the questions below. These measures are included in this report to provide a better sense of how concerned students may be about their futures, how personally responsible they feel they are in shaping them, how curious they are about their potential selves, and how confident they are in their pursuit of professional ambitions.

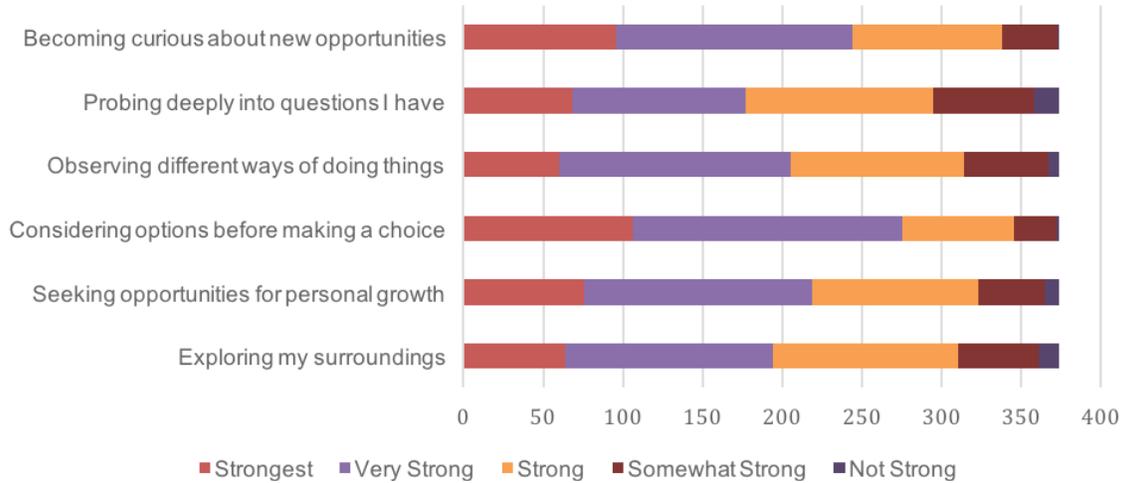
Concern represents thoughts about the future and how individuals look forward to and plan for what might come next (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The question below measures *Concern* by respondents self-assessing their development of the following abilities.



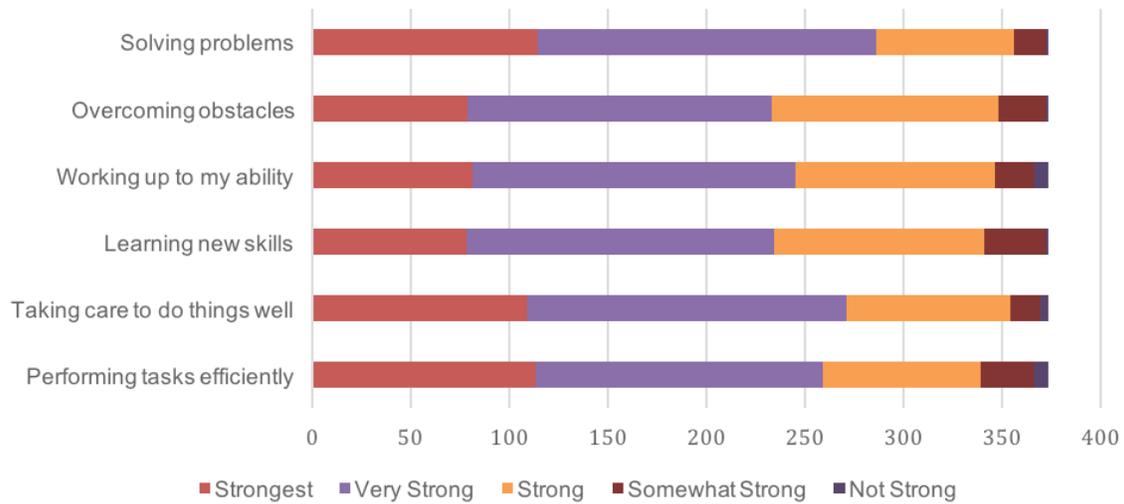
Control marks the cultivation of responsibility in individuals to shape themselves and their environments by using self-discipline, effort, and persistence. The question below measures *Control* by respondents self-assessing their development of the following abilities.



Curiosity is embodied by one’s ability to imagine possible selves and future scenarios. The question below measures *Curiosity* by respondents self-assessing their development of the following abilities.



Confidence allows an individual to actualize choices, pursue their aspirations, and implement their life design. The question below measures *Confidence* by respondents self-assessing their development of the following abilities.



CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data included in this report, we offer several conclusions that may be important for educators, institutional leaders, and career services professionals to consider as they design and implement career-related programs and courses.

Recommendations

1. Family and friends act as strong influence on students' career decision-making

Students enter college with certain ideas and goals regarding careers that are strongly influenced by their childhoods, family members, and peer networks. In addition, while in college, these social networks represent an enduring and influential source of information about job openings and careers, which is consistent with research on the influence of social capital (e.g., opportunities and resources available through social contacts) on career development and job acquisition. Along these lines, students also expressed a need to be connected with other students or alumni in their respective region, to gain international experience, and to have access to a more extensive alumni network.

The implications of this finding is twofold: (a) students, particularly those without strong forms of cultural capital at their disposal, should be provided with opportunities (and related coaching) to foster new networks and social resources, and (b) cultural, familial, and peer influences and pressures should be recognized and acknowledged - as both positive and potentially negative influences- in shaping students' career decisions.

2. Personalization, not utilization, of career services remains an issue

Student awareness of and participation rates Midwestern State's career services is notable, demonstrating successful outreach. Given these high rates of participation, students are more informed to offer ways that programming might improve. Interestingly, while survey data offered a glimpse of areas open to improvement, focus group data widened this area significantly. For instance, while survey participants rated their one-on-one interactions with career advisors as overwhelmingly exceeding or meeting their expectations, many students in the focus groups expressed a desire for these meetings to be improved in terms of their consistency, duration (not feeling "rushed") and above all, personalization.

Personalization was a key factor in many students' critiques, regardless of their background or concentration. As described earlier, combining labor market trends and data with a personalized approach might facilitate students' informed decision-making. The area of personalization also featured a narrative around "cookie cutter" business graduates, where students expressed their perceptions of wanting to move beyond the "cookie cutter" graduate they feel the school wants to produce. In this way, students talked about taking less-traditional pathways in building their careers and gaining internship experience in sectors such as sports marketing, the entertainment industry, NGOs and the non-profit sector, international companies, start-ups, healthcare management, management consulting, and more.

4. Students' unique identities and situations require tailored services

Certain sub-groups of students at Midwestern State tended to describe more unmet needs or expectations. The majority of international students in the sample—and more specifically in the focus groups—expressed the desire for an international career advisor as well as more resources and support in terms of looking for companies that offer visa sponsorships. Additionally, this study found a strong relationship between students' navigation of university and their career choice with their parents'/guardians' university and professional experiences. In so doing, first-generation college students face additional challenges in that they are less likely to have these informal educational experiences and may be less prepared to navigate college and the career center. Female students, while crediting the career center for positive experiences, noted that the atmosphere in both their internships and within Midwestern State can be challenging, though this varied upon major (for instance, in male-dominated fields such as accounting and finance, but not in female-dominated fields like marketing).

5. Associated companies with Midwestern State could diversify and expand

Lastly, it appears that career services could diversify the companies with which they collaborate in terms of both their organizational type, structure, and especially location. Many students described wanting to intern and work post-graduation outside of the Midwest. Students who secured internships out of the area also expressed a need to be connected with other students or alumni in their respective region. Similarly, students also expressed the desire to gain international experience as well as assistance in leveraging desirable attributes to working abroad, such as foreign language expertise. Finally, the majority of respondents expressed a desire to have access to a more extensive alumni network.

References

Savickas, M. L., & Porfeli, E. J. (2012). Career Adapt-Abilities Scale: Construction, reliability, and measurement equivalence across 13 countries. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 80*(3), 661-673.

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**Wisconsin Center for
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The mission of The Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions (CCWT) is to conduct and support research, critical policy analysis, and public dialogue on student experiences with the transition from college to the workforce in order to inform policies, programs, and practices that promote academic and career success for all learners.

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