

Empowering Faculty Contributions to Student Career Readiness

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Motivation, Research, and Goals

Our group was charged with developing proposals to empower UCI faculty to infuse career competency content into their courses. While the Division of Career Pathways (DCP) already provides students with many helpful career resources, DCP recognizes that more deliberately integrating career content into coursework can complement the services that DCP already provides, addresses discipline-specific challenges in career development, and may reach students who would not typically take advantage of DCP services.

Addresses a Need. Survey evidence reveals that “Career Advancement” is the primary reason that students in the US give for enrolling in undergraduate degree programs. However, with some important exceptions, many degree programs are designed primarily to teach proficiency in specific academic disciplines. To the extent that being proficient in a particular discipline is valued by the labor market, then that is an added bonus. Faculty often expect that students will use non-academic resources on campus, like DCP, to learn about preparing, searching, and applying for jobs. However, where it makes sense to do so, incorporating career competency content into either courses or degree programs can provide considerable benefit to students.

Overcoming Barriers for First-Generation Students. UCI is a large institution with a substantial first-generation population. Relative to other students, first-generation students face known challenges that might leave them less likely or less able to take advantage of the resources offered by DCP. Therefore programs to incorporate career competency into courses and degree programs might be particularly valuable to our first-generation students.

Challenges to Overcome. Proposals to promote the incorporation of career competency content in courses and degree programs must take into account several challenges. First, successful proposals will require that faculty understand the need and buy-in to the proposals. Second, students must be properly incentivized to engage with the solutions proposed. Finally, schools and/or departments must be able to track student outcomes to gauge the efficacy of the implemented proposals.

Research. We gathered information from several sources. We met with several UCI faculty who we understood to be already incorporating career competency topics in their class. These faculty include

- Susan Coutin Professor, Department of Criminology, Law, and Society; and the Department of Anthropology
- Elizabeth Crook, Associate Teaching Professor, Department of Earth System Science
- Julia Lupton, Distinguished Professor, Department of English, School of Humanities
- Hadar Ziv, Associate Professor of Teaching, Donald Bren School of Informatics and Computer Sciences

We also consulted with DCP to learn more about their resources and we explored Handshake, DCP's online portal for career services.

Recommendations

Our four recommendations to empower faculty contributions to student career readiness involve varying levels of work to implement and varying levels of commitment and buy-in from university stakeholders. We view these four recommendations as providing a set of activities that empowers faculty and students to benefit from existing DCP resources while facilitating and incentivizing faculty to innovate by creating DCP-aligned resources tailored to their courses, majors, and schools. These recommendations are complementary but stand-alone options.

Recommendation 1: DCP Certificate Program. We propose that DCP creates a certificate program that bundles together existing DCP resources, programs, and activities into a navigable, structured, and flexible curriculum for students. The certificate program would create a legible pathway for students and would provide a clear signal to employers. We suggest that students take a required number of credits or courses at DCP (e.g., going to a career fair, completing an apprenticeship, engaging in a professional practice) that are grouped by DCP as early- to late-stage career activities. Providing this type of roadmap for how to access resources would give students guidance about how to move through DCP resources most effectively. We also suggest that the certificate program is flexible, to accommodate major- or school-specific offerings. While this recommendation is largely student facing, we envision that a certificate program and roadmap of requirements would facilitate faculty efforts to interface and coordinate with DCP.

Recommendation 2: Professional-Development Toolkit. We recommend that DCP creates a professional-development toolkit to support faculty interested in incorporating career readiness into their courses and mentoring activities. The toolkit would provide a standardized and accessible resource for supporting students' experiences, while creating an on-ramp for faculty engagement. The toolkit could take the form of a Canvas sandbox, to lead faculty and students through varying modules that move from early- to late-stage career exploration activities. Faculty interested in incorporating DCP resources into their classes could pull activities and videos from the Canvas sandbox. DCP could also highlight the existing work from other faculty who have tailored DCP activities to their specific school and major. For example, faculty have invited alumni/guest speakers to discuss their professional trajectories and how their UCI major related to their professional experiences.

Recommendation 3: Create a Pathway into UCI FATE. We recommend that DCP coordinate with existing efforts of UCI FATE (or Faculty Academy for Teaching Excellence), which is an initiative of the UCI Division of Teaching Excellence and Innovation (DTEI). We see our group's charge as well aligned with UCI FATE projects and initiatives, and this coordination could help promote DCP aims across a broader cross section of campus faculty who are natural partners and early adopters of innovative teaching practices. Moreover, coordination with UCI DTEI could include campuswide faculty sessions, in the mode and manner of existing DTEI workshops, that spotlight DCP aims and provide ideas for 1-2 discrete activities that faculty could incorporate into their existing curricula.

Recommendation 4: Professional-Development Course Designation. We recommend that the campus consider creating a professional-development course designation, through the creation of "P" courses that are analogous to those of the Writing Center for their "W" designation. Creating a P designation builds on existing courses that already incorporate professional development learning goals and activities into their courses and provide a clear signal for students. This designation would also incentivize faculty to innovate existing or new courses by incorporating DCP resources and activities to qualify for a P designation. The designation could also facilitate rewards to faculty during the merit and promotion process by enabling them to reference their P-designated courses.