A Framework for Higher Education Labor Market Alignment

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Increasing Concern About Labor Market Alignment in Higher Education

- Rising student debt, and “jobless recovery” affect on college grads

- Higher skill expectations from employers, and changing structure of jobs & the skills mismatch

- Increased focus on role of community colleges in workforce preparation

- Recent Federal policy developments
Yet, Alignment is Not Well Understood

- Community colleges have a long track record of workforce development

- Yet, alignment is not well understood in terms of:
  - The goals of alignment, and how they reflect stakeholder needs
  - The range of approaches to alignment
  - Link between alignment approaches and outcomes

- Need for information on “what works” and how to improve outcomes.
What is Higher Education Labor Market Alignment?

Activities and outcomes to ensure that higher education institutions graduate the correct numbers of graduates with the necessary skills for the job market in a way that supports students’ career goals and is consistent with institutional mission and labor market conditions.

Job Vacancy Alignment
“Getting the numbers right”

Skills Alignment
Ensuring competency
Alignment Involves Balancing Multiple Interests

- Students
- Employers
- Institutions
- Labor markets
- Policymakers/funders

The Result: No “one size fits all” approach but rather a broad continuum of alignment activities & outcomes
Alignment Can Occur at Multiple Levels

Partners needed at all levels to achieve systemic change.
Alignment is a consideration at all points in the program life cycle!

- Support & Follow-up Services
- Work-based Learning
- Competency Assessment / Self-Paced Learning
- Instructional strategies
- Curriculum development
- Program selection & enrollment

Contextual Factors
- Institutional Factors
- Program/Institutional Structure
- Labor Market Dynamics
Three Core Activities Promote Alignment

- **Collecting/validating** information on employer and student needs

- **Incorporating** information into program components

- **Relationship-building** alignment activities are also important throughout
## Multiple Measures of Alignment Outcomes Exist

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Job Vacancy Alignment</th>
<th>Skills Alignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attainment of credential with labor market value</td>
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<td>Graduate production compared to job openings</td>
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<td>Earnings, employment, and retention rates</td>
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<td>Direct assessment of student/employer experiences</td>
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<td>Real time jobs data on turnover</td>
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However, Assessing Alignment Outcomes is Not Precise or Easy

- Need to consider:
  - Time horizon
  - Balance of stakeholder goals

- Challenge of linking alignment activities and outcomes
Recommendations/Conclusions

- Recognize a wide range of LMA approaches and metrics exist
- Recognize that LMA implementation and measurement is more of an art than a science
- Use multiple metrics to assess LMA policies
- Promote a dialogue across stakeholders to develop consensus about goals, approaches, and metrics
- Conduct more comprehensive research on LMA
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