

**The Career Center**

**Student Success and Engagement  
Student Affairs at Illinois**

**Annual Report  
2021-2022**

**Purpose**

The Career Center exists to empower career choice and action.

**Mission**

We coach and support Illinois students, while connecting them to opportunities, as they make career decisions and learn lifelong career management skills. We serve as leaders of the University of Illinois career services community and intentionally pursue leadership opportunities that move our work and the field forward.

**Values**

We invest in relationships.

Recognizing that we cannot do it alone, we actively collaborate with a genuine desire and willingness to connect and pursue partnerships to widen our reach and enhance our impact. We keep an open mind, listen to each other, facilitate connections, and seek mutual benefit.

We embrace knowledge and expertise.

We learn from the past, seek insight from each other, and actively engage in inquiry to motivate and shape the future. We leverage expertise, data, resources, and stories to guide our decision making. Career and student development theories are strong foundations for our practice, and we engage in continuous learning.

We are purposefully creative.

We embrace innovation and foster a sense of curiosity to be exceptional and relevant to the ever-changing landscape and student experience. Our creativity is powerful when it is connected to our purpose and informed by all of our experiences.

We believe leadership is an action.

We are all leaders. The unique perspective and contribution of each individual is essential. We invest in the success of others and the team through open communication, building trust, and mutual respect. We advocate for career services and influence the field on campus and beyond.

**Success Pillars**

We are successful when:

- We keep students at the center of our work;
- We do the routine extraordinarily well;
- We provide relevant services and resources that are grounded in career and student development theory and informed by data; and
- We build and support our team while leveraging each person's diverse talents, skills, and perspectives.

## Reflections from the Director

The Career Center experienced another year with robust student and stakeholder engagement, even in the midst of incredible change. The return to on-campus operations brought reintegration of in-person service delivery with our remote and asynchronous, engagement. As this report demonstrates, students have a strong appetite for career support and guidance with more than 23,000 students engaging with us this past year. Additionally, we supported recruiting activities for more than 500 employers and graduate/professional degree programs who hope to attract our talented students and graduates to their organizations.

As TCC is called to provide career development support and services to all Illinois students, we must understand and respond to the differentiated needs among our diverse student body. In partnership with the Office of Minority Student Affairs, we launched the FOCUS initiative to mitigate disparities in post-graduation outcomes for our underrepresented, first-generation graduates as they launch their careers and professional lives. The initiative supports and prepares students for post-graduation success by providing personal and professional development resources that connect their educational pursuits to their professional aspirations and preparation. The program uniquely engages students at the intersection of self-discovery, career exploration, and identity with intention to positively impact career trajectory, earnings potential, and economic security for years to come. TCC will take what we have learned from this first year to generate additional support and devise methods to scale the initiative in the future.

Beyond our service delivery and engagement with stakeholders, we redeveloped statements of purpose, vision, and success pillars, and engaged in activities to generate trust, a sense of belonging, and shared understanding of our future. Additionally, we completed an environmental scan and reviewed findings from our student needs assessment to consider how stakeholders, audiences, and contextual factors influence our work. The result is a strong foundation for our future – one that will meet the evolving needs of students and other stakeholders while simultaneously fostering a positive, dynamic, and flexible work environment that supports wellness and opportunities for professional growth.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that many of our wonderfully talented staff found their way to new career opportunities. Some moved on to leadership roles on campus or other institutions, some took their experience and knowledge to talent acquisition roles in the private sector, and others found opportunities that leverage their strengths and expertise while providing better alignment with their current personal needs and goals. We celebrate them, their accomplishments, and the evolution of their career. Our mission is to empower career choice and action – and not just for students!

As we look to the next academic year, I am excited for what the future holds. Students are hungry for career development support. We will on-board new team members and support current staff as they embark on new roles. With that will come new ideas, fresh perspectives, and renewed energy. We are committed to creating a positive, fun, and dynamic environment that is supportive, responsive, and impactful to students, staff, and our stakeholders. The future is bright and ripe with anticipation of what it will bring.

Jennifer M. Neef  
Director

## Accomplishments and Challenges

### 1. **Accomplishment 1: Increased student engagement by 18% over last year.**

Demand for career development support and services rebounded sharply as the campus returned to a robust on-campus experience. The Career Center saw an 18% increase in total number of student engagements over last year (23,055 versus 19,476 student engagements) and a 26% increase in the number of unique students served (10,101 versus 8,028). There were 9,384 one-on-one student engagements via coaching appointments, document reviews, and mock interviews, which is up 19% over AY20-21 and on par with AY19-20. There were 11,896 student engagements through group programs and workshops, which represents a 20% increase from AY20-21. For scheduled appointments and mock interviews, which are delivered synchronously, 31% were delivered in-person and 69% were delivered remotely. For document reviews, 39% were delivered synchronously, in-person while 61% were delivered asynchronously.

### 2. **Accomplishment 2: Launched the FOCUS Scholars program for first-generation students from historically underrepresented backgrounds in partnership with OMSA and generous support from Synchrony and American Family Insurance.**

Fifteen undergraduate students were selected as the inaugural cohort of FOCUS (Fostering Opportunity, Community, and Unwavering Support for Underrepresented First-Generation Students) Scholars. These talented students engaged in several workshops covering a range of topics including career and self-development, navigating a professional work environment, and embracing and having pride in your identity. Additionally, there were several sessions focused on technical aspects of career development, such as crafting effective professional documents, interviewing, and the job/internship search process. Session topics were developed and facilitated with the experience and perspective of first-generation, Black, and Indigenous people of color at the forefront. This created space for open and authentic dialogue about topics that are often intimidating for students belonging to these respective groups. Synchrony and American Family Insurance have invested generously in the success of our FOCUS Scholars through their involvement in the program and financial support of a \$2,500 scholarship per participant.

### 3. **Accomplishment 3: Engaged in an inclusive strategic planning process, “The Yellow Brick Road”, to clarify our purpose, success pillars, and vision for the future that will guide our work and way of working.**

The Career Center introduced redeveloped statements of purpose, vision, and success pillars, and engaged in activities to generate trust, a sense of belonging, and shared understanding of our future.

Additionally, we completed an environmental scan and reviewed findings from our student needs assessment to consider how stakeholders, audiences, and contextual factors influence our work. The result is a strong foundation for our future – one that will meet the evolving needs of students and other stakeholders while simultaneously fostering a positive, dynamic, and flexible work environment that supports wellness and opportunities for professional growth.

**4. Accomplishment 4: Initiated transformation of our physical space and website to better serve users and improve their experience.**

The Career Center began the process to create a modern, welcoming, and collaborative environment that attracts students and stakeholders to our physical space in the Arcade Building. The renovation includes new flooring, contemporary furniture, and an Illini-themed paint scheme. The project will continue into FY23 with updated signage and technology, as well as elements that reflect our values and celebrate student success. Additionally, we started an overhaul of our website to align it with university standards, improve accessibility, and enhance user experience. The new site is expected to launch in January 2023.

**5. Accomplishment 5: Supported development and training of future practitioners.**

The Career Center provided robust practicum experiences for two UIUC doctoral candidates – one in Counseling Psychology and the other in Clinical-Community Psychology – and a masters student from Illinois State University in their College Student Personnel Administration program. Three staff members contributed to their individual and group supervision; and these aspiring and talented students contributed much to The Career Center by providing direct services to students, leading assessment projects, and engaging in research.

**Challenges:**

Our challenges centered on navigating an incredible amount of change and maintaining staff morale while responding to needs of students and other stakeholders. The impact of: return to on-campus work; changing campus policies related to COVID, purchasing, and HR; implementation of new financial and HR systems; and high staff turn-over with prolonged time-to-fill vacancies was acutely felt throughout the year. Staff resilience was further stretched by ongoing needs for family care, political unrest, and violence in our community. Our attention continues to be on reconnecting as a team, elevating morale, and bringing the best of ourselves and what we have learned over the past two years into our future practice.

**Overview of Programs and Services**

- Engaged over 23,000 students through 1:1 services and group programs, as well as more than 500 employers and graduate schools in fairs and recruiting activities.

- Engaged over 9,300 students in 1:1 services, which includes career coaching and pre-health advising appointments, mock interviews, drop-in services, and document reviews.
- Engaged nearly 12,000 students through more than 300 group programs, workshops, career fairs, and promotional events.
- At least, 10,100 unique students participated in TCC's services, programs, workshops, career fairs, and promotional events.
- Delivered 312 group programs and workshops; 222 of them (72%) provided tailored content in response to requests from academic departments, student-serving administrative units, student affairs units, and student organizations.
- For scheduled appointments and mock interviews, which are delivered synchronously, 31% were delivered in-person and 69% were delivered remotely.
- For document reviews, 39% were delivered synchronously, in-person while 61% were delivered asynchronously.

In addition to direct service to students and engagement of external stakeholders, TCC continued to lead coordination and collaboration through the Career Services Council (CSC). Reimagining Career Services was the theme for the annual CSC Conference which featured keynote addresses from Christine Cruzvergara, Chief Education Strategy Officer at Handshake, and Farouk Dey, Vice Provost for Integrative Learning and Life Design at Johns Hopkins University. Additional community conversations throughout the year centered on the evolution of career services as a tool for social mobility, meeting the needs of students and stakeholders, and reimagining how we build connections, support professional development, share best practices, and effectively distribute information.

Furthermore, TCC continued to spearhead the *Illini Success* initiative to collect and report graduate outcomes. The final report of the Illini Success Initiative Review Task Force was published in July 2021 and included several recommendations to sustain and strengthen the initiative, including the addition of a dedicated Data Coordinator and Analyst. The Illini Success Core Team updated the survey instrument to surface, acknowledge, and broaden range of post-graduation paths taken by our graduates, such as those related to gap years, gig work, entrepreneurial ventures, etc., as well as to assess how well a student's first destination is aligned with their goals. They also began exploring possibilities for analyzing and reporting the data across different dimensions and enhancements to the Illini Success website.

### Assessment

To ensure delivery of effective services and programs that enhance learning and meet the needs of students, TCC maintains a persistent and robust assessment portfolio that provides insights, guides future endeavors, and measures impact. Specific projects this year include:

- Administered survey to assess learning and student satisfaction among students who used our resume review service to complete an LAS 101 assignment

- 93% of respondents indicate they know what information is important to include in a resume
- 81% of respondents indicate they know how to tailor their resume for a specific objective or purpose
- 87% of respondents indicate they can effectively use action words to describe their experiences
- 89% of respondents indicate they are more confident that their resume effectively communicates their qualifications
- 92% of respondents indicate they will be able to revise their resume for a new purpose in the future
- Overall, the service received a Net Promoter Score of 60 (strong)
  - A higher percentage of students who engaged in an in-person, one-on-one review presented as "Promoters" than respondents who engaged in the online resume review service or an in-person, group review
  - A higher percentage of international students presented as "promoters" than domestic students
  - Black/African-American and Latinx students, presented as the highest for "promoters" by ethnicity
- Analyzed learning and satisfaction, as well as pre- and post-participation assessment of career certainty among FOCUS Scholars
  - Survey results indicate that because of FOCUS...
    - 80% of participants increased their awareness of career opportunities
    - 80% of participants are more confident in their ability to search, apply, and interview for career opportunities
    - 73% better understand their skills, values, and interests and how they connect to their career goals
    - 73% cultivated a professional network of mentors and advocates
    - 54% developed a sense of community with other FOCUS scholars
  - 80% participants had a high level of career certainty prior to participation as indicated by a first occupational choice in their application essay; students post-FOCUS reported less career certainty, with 57% indicating a first career choice. These findings suggest that the FOCUS

program may have helped scholars become more aware of a breadth of career opportunities available

- Overall, the program received a Net Promoter Score of 71 (outstanding)
- Completed assessment of satisfaction, preparation, learning and/or preferred modality were for several large events, including the the Part-time Job Fairs, Graduate and Professional School Fair, Pre-Health Conference, and All-Campus Career and Internship Fair.

Part of our mission is to provide leadership that drives our field forward. One way we do that is to share our information, knowledge, and perspectives with others for adaptation and use in other practices. This year, several staff members were invited to share our work related to assessment, including best practices for using rubrics to improve document reviews through presentations at the National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions Conference and National Career Development Conference. Additionally, Dr. Julia Makela was invited to deliver a webinar series focused on assessing the impact of career services for CERIC and The Canadian Association of Career Educators and Employers, as well as to deliver a keynote address about needs assessment in career services for the Missouri Career Development Association Conference.

### **Equity, Inclusion, and Justice**

As TCC provides career development support and services to all Illinois students, we must understand and respond to the differentiated needs among our students. We must embed considerations of access, equity, and inclusion into our daily practice, as well as deliver services and resources that acknowledge and support students who are navigating complex career development issues at the intersection of identity, socio-economic status, ability, and other variables that influence career choice and preparation. We must actively work to mitigate barriers that create inequity and negatively influence student success. In addition to the launch of the FOCUS initiative to mitigate disparities in post-graduation outcomes for our underrepresented, first-generation graduates as they launch their careers and professional lives, other efforts related to equity, inclusion, and justice this year include:

- Improving accessibility of educational materials, web resources, presentations, and website
- Increasing awareness of TCC among our first-year Black students by participating in Circuit, BNAACC's early move-in program
- Partnered with La Casa Cultural Latina and Prospanica (student organization) for a Latinx Empowerment event with Cindy Miranda, Senior Vice President for Digital Client Initiatives & Hispanic Network+ National Leader from Synchrony
- Embedded diversity and multiculturalism into our counseling practicum and career coaching training
- Participated in the Womxn's Career Institute
- Sponsored and attended I-HOPE Gala in support of undocumented and DACA students

- Curated and shared articles, videos, and other media centered on intersectional issues of career development, race, gender, salary equity, parenthood, socio-economic status and privilege through TCC's DEI Digest. Small groups convened periodically to discuss the material to enhance knowledge and understanding of difference, privilege, and justice at the intersection of our work

### **Collaborative Partnerships**

Strategic partnerships and collaborative programs help us reach more students and enhance impact. Through collaboration we are more likely to meet students in convenient spaces and times, as well as address specific career concerns by providing tailored content. This year, TCC hosted 312 programs and events for students, with nearly three-quarters (72%) conducted in a collaborative fashion. We partnered with more than 40 academic units, 12 student affairs units, 27 registered student organizations, and 22 other campus and external entities in response to requested or co-sponsored workshops and programs.

### **Facilities**

The Career Center began the process to create a modern, welcoming, and collaborative environment that attracts students and stakeholders to our physical space in the Arcade Building. The renovation includes new flooring, contemporary furniture, and an Illini-themed paint scheme. Additionally, an eco-friendly bottle-filler was added. The project will continue into FY23 with updated signage and technology, as well as elements that reflect our values and celebrate student success.

Moreover, we maintained a lease for commercial property on Green Street in partnership with New Student Programs. Balancing the cost of leased space with optimal use of available space in the Arcade Building is an ongoing challenge. Continued reimagination and implementation of flexible and hybrid work models in the coming year may impact how much physical space is required to meet our mission.

The capital project to demolish Illini Hall and construct the new Data Science Center in its place will likely impact and influence our ability to effectively use space in the Arcade Building in the coming year. Conditions and concerns related to this project continue to warrant attention to ensure the safety and integrity of the Arcade Building.

### **2021-2022 Goals**

**Goal #1: Optimize the blend of in-person, remote, synchronous, and asynchronous services to effectively meet the needs and expectations of students.**

The Career Center provided services in three modalities: 1) synchronous and in-person; 2) synchronous and remote; and 3) asynchronous:

- 63% of services were delivered synchronously while 37% was delivered asynchronously
- For scheduled appointments and mock interviews, which are delivered synchronously, 31% were delivered in-person and 69% were delivered remotely

- For document reviews, 39% were delivered synchronously, in-person while 61% were delivered asynchronously.

**Goal #2: Cultivate a community of continuous growth that embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion to support the career and professional development of all Illinois students while enhancing the inclusivity of our work and culture.**

The Career Center devoted time and effort toward this goal and our accomplishments include:

- Launch of FOCUS initiative for our underrepresented, first-generation students
- Facilitation of employer-led conversations and workshops about inclusivity in the workplace
- Exploration of partnership with Rush University to enhance recruitment and matriculation of underrepresented students
- Curation and sharing of articles, videos, and other media centered on intersectional issues of career development, race, gender, salary equity, parenthood, socio-economic status and privilege through TCC's DEI Digest. Small groups convened periodically to discuss the material to enhance knowledge and understanding of difference, privilege, and justice at the intersection of our work

**Goal #3: Create the strategic design for the future of work at TCC, with conditions that support success through shared purpose, streamlined practices, personal wellness, and opportunities for professional growth.**

The Career Center redeveloped statements of purpose, vision, and success pillars, and engaged in activities to generate trust, a sense of belonging, and shared understanding of our future. Additionally, we completed an environmental scan and reviewed findings from our student needs assessment to consider how stakeholders, audiences, and contextual factors influence our work. The result is a strong foundation for our future – one that will meet the evolving needs of students and other stakeholders while simultaneously fostering a positive, dynamic, and flexible work environment that supports wellness and opportunities for professional growth.

### **2022-2023 Goals**

**Goal #1: Support TCC team to foster sense of belonging as well as enhance connectedness, agility, and resilience.**

This goal is aligned with Student Affairs Goal 4J: Human Resources

Strategies include:

- Create an annual plan focused on team building, belonging, and positivity.

Metrics and Evidence:

- Creation and execution of plan with feedback and assessment of progress from staff

**Goal #2: Provide intentional support and learning opportunities to enhance multi-cultural awareness and competencies of staff**

This goal is aligned with Student Affairs Goal 2C: Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

Strategies include:

- Create annual plan for unit-wide plan for professional development that includes a focus on DEI
- Each staff member will identify and pursue individual developmental and learning opportunities aligned with their interests and goals

Metrics and Evidence:

- Creation and execution of plan with feedback and assessment of progress from staff

**Goal #3: Establish environment, website, and social presence that is welcoming, inclusive, and safe, along with being student-centered, vibrant, and positive**

This goal is aligned with Student Affairs Goal 2D: Leadership Development and Career Development

Strategies include:

- Complete facelift in Arcade Building to create a modern, welcoming, and collaborative environment that attracts students and stakeholders to our physical space in the Arcade Building
- Overhaul of our website to align it with university standards, improve accessibility, and enhance user experience
- Distribute created and curated content through social channels that celebrate success, difference, and inclusion

Metrics and Evidence:

- Facelift and website project are completed
- Assessment of engagement through social channels

**Goal #4: Optimize the blend of in-person, remote, synchronous, and asynchronous services to effectively meet the needs and expectations of students.**

This goal is aligned with Student Affairs Goal 2D: Leadership Development and Career Development

Strategies include:

- Build upon the experience of this past year of delivering services in three to determine an optimal mix of current services and delivery modes.
- Expand content and awareness among students for asynchronous engagement, including creation of original video content, recording of live presentations, and distribution through social channels, website, learning management system, and more
- Consider new forms of synchronous remote engagement, including live chat and drop-ins after normal business hours

Metrics and Evidence:

- Assess student preferences for service engagement and implement feasible adaptations to optimize the blend of service delivery modalities to effectively meet the needs and expectations of students.

## APPENDIX A: By The Numbers

### Participation and Demographics<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the demographic tables, definitions of the data columns are as follows:

- **% of TCC Users:** Percent of each total headcount demographic as it relates to the total population of students who used services
- **% of Unique TCC Users:** Percent of each unique student demographic as it related to the total population of students who used services
- **Campus Total:** Number of each demographic attending the University (From DMI, 2021 Fall 10-day enrollment data)
- **% of Campus Total:** Percent of each demographic as it relates to the total population of students attending the University
- **% of College Used Services:** Percent of each demographic on campus who used TCC services

## APPENDIX B: Professional Contributions of Staff

### Conference Presentations and Publications

**Andruczyk, E., Valadez, M. D.** (2021, July). Embracing sustainable innovation from within: Creating virtual practices with multiple benefits [Conference presentation]. National Career Development Association Conference, Virtual.

**Crum, J.** (2022, June). Improving Personal Statement Reviews with Rubrics. [Conference presentation]. National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions Conference in Denver, CO.

**Crum, J., S. Stasko, and T. M. Knox.** (2022, June). Unchecking The Boxes. [Conference presentation]. National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions Conference in Denver, CO.

**Makela, J. P.** (2021, October-November). Assessing the impact of career services: Tools for informing practice and communicating value. Invited webinar series presented for CERIC and The Canadian Association of Career Educators and Employers.

**Makela, J. P.** (2022, May). Crafting a common understanding with clients: Needs assessment in career services. [Keynote presentation]. Missouri Career Development Association's Conference, Virtual.

**Makela, J. P., et. al.** (2022, June). Culture and the ethics of providing career services. [Invited panelist]. Asia Pacific Career Development Association, Virtual.

**Makela, J. P.** (2021, September). Evidence-based storytelling and the value of career services. CAREERWISE [Web blog]. CERIC. Retrieved from <https://careerwise.ceric.ca/2021/09/22/evidence-based-storytelling-and-the-value-of-career-services/#.YdueAv7MLIU>

**Makela, J. P., Frost, M. (Hosts).** (2021, October). Shared campus practices with career data (No. 5-7) [Podcast]. In Everyday Innovators show. The Career Leadership Collective. <https://www.careerleadershipcollective.com/everyday-innovators>

**Makela, J. P., Villarreal, B., & Jerez, J.** (2022, June). Writing effective personal statements: Improving practice with rubrics. Roundtable presented at the National Career Development Conference in Anaheim, CA.

### Awards and Honors

#### ***Hire Big 10+ Outstanding New Career Services Professional, Summer 2022***

Michael Valadez, Assistant Director, received the 2022 Outstanding New Career Services Professional Award from the Hire Big 10+ Consortium. He was specifically recognized for developing TCC's online document review service; leading the Diversity and Inclusion Networking Exchange (DINE), a campus-wide committee that provides students the opportunity to connect with employers who value diversity and inclusion; and co-leading

the FOCUS Scholars Program that seeks to mitigate the disparities in post-graduation outcomes for underrepresented and first-generation graduates.

### **National and Regional Leadership**

#### ***ACPA-College Student Educators International***

Commission for Global Dimensions of Student Development, Member-at-Large

#### ***Central Association of Advisors for the Health Professions***

Board of Directors, Member-at-Large  
Annual Meeting Planning Committee

#### ***Hire Big 10+ Consortium***

Allerton Conference Planning Team, Member  
Personal Strategy Knowledge Community, Facilitator

#### ***Midwest Association of Colleges and Employers***

Conference Planning Committee, Member

#### ***National Association for Advisors for the Health Professions***

Conference Planning Committee, Member

#### ***National Association of Colleges and Employers***

Awards Committee

#### ***National Career Development Association***

Awards Committee, Co-Chair  
Board of Directors, Secretary  
Ethics Committee, Member  
International Student Service Committee, Co-Chair  
International Student Service Committee, Member  
Leadership Academy, Mentor

#### ***Special Libraries Association – Illinois Chapter***

Executive Board, Membership Director