Establishing a Campus-Wide First-Destination Survey: Reflecting on the Journey

Presentation for the 2015 National Association of Colleges and Employers Conference & Expo

June 5, 2015

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Context Then – November 2013

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

- 32,000+ undergraduate students in 10 colleges – graduate approximately 8,000 undergraduates per year (gets bigger and more diverse when you add graduate students)
- Selective, four-year, residential, research-intensive institution
- Decentralized system, with separate budgets and a history of working independently
- No campus-wide first destination survey has existed in the past, however some colleges (e.g., ACES, Business, Engineering, Media) and units (e.g., School of Chemical Sciences) have conducted surveys for varying lengths of time (1 year to 15 years)
- Part of a three campus system (U of I Springfield & U of I Chicago); Other campuses do not have campus-wide first destination surveys
Context Now – June 2015

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

- 32,000+ undergraduate students in 10 colleges – graduate approximately 8,000 undergraduates per year (gets bigger and more diverse when you add graduate students)
- Selective, four-year, residential, research-intensive institution
- Decentralized system, centralized budget for collaborative first destination initiative supported by the Office of the Provost
- Campus-wide first destination survey in place and collecting data since August 2014; although a few colleges are still hanging on to their individual surveys as well (ACES, Media)
- Part of a three campus system (U of I Springfield & U of I Chicago); Talking with system partners collaboration opportunities as they progress on efforts to establish campus-wide first destination surveys
Reflections on the Journey: Conversation Themes

1. Climate and needs
2. Gathering resources
3. Defining our approach
4. Relationship building
5. Implementation
6. Communication and branding
7. Looking forward to sustainability
**Check-In:**
Where are You in Your Campus-Wide First Destination Journey?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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Conversation Themes
Climate and Needs

- What created the opportunity for our career center to be at the center of first destination data collection?
  - Why this need?
  - Why now?
  - Why these staff members with these particular skills / this specific knowledge?

- Why is career services at the middle of this initiative?
  - Should we be?
  - What is the value of having career services at the middle? The value to us? To the university? To the initiative itself?
  - How does the initiative change (look or feel different) if career services is at the middle versus another driver (e.g., alumni relations, institutional research)?

- Who would we like as our core partners in this initiative?
  - What do they bring that we lack?
Climate and Needs

Sample description from the “about us” section on The Career Center’s First Destination website...

Why the Involvement and Leadership of Career Services?

Many times, first destination survey efforts are tied to career services offices. There are many reasons that this occurs.

On the one hand, career services professional associations (e.g., the National Association of Colleges and Employers) have been at the forefront of creating national standards for first destination surveys. We are following exceptional practice in our field.

On the other hand, we want our graduates to know that WE CARE about where they go next – in fact, it is a key part of our business! Have you landed a great job or get into the graduate program of your dreams? We want to congratulate you on your success. Are you graduating and unsure of your next steps? Tell us on the survey, and come knock on our doors. Did you know that U of I Career Services offices serve alumni too? Learn more by visiting The Career Center.
Gathering Resources

- What information and resources already exist to lay a foundation for our first destination initiative work?
Gathering Resources (Nov 2013 – Jan 2014)

- Research and evaluate first destination survey and knowledge rate data collection strategies **external** to our university
  - Literature and professional associations: NACE
  - Third-party vendors: 12Twenty, CSO Research, HEP Data
  - Reached out to peer-institutions, reviewing websites, reports, surveys, and conducting phone interviews about their data collection processes

- Research and evaluate first destination survey and knowledge rate data collection strategies **internal** to our university
  - Requested copies of all graduate outcomes surveys currently in place and conducted a question-by-question comparison.
  - Also surveyed administrators about data collection processes.

- Used all of this information to develop a “best practices” recommendation statement for U of I.
Defining Our Approach

- What are the 5 – 7 key ideas that will define our first destination initiative?
- How will this initiative be connected to the culture and feel of our institution?
Defining Our Approach (Feb 2014)

- **Key ideas to guide the U of I initiative**
  - Mirror the NACE standards
  - Data collection should be uniform across campus – “tell the Illinois story”
  - Brief – 5 minutes or less
  - Standalone
  - Collect data at least 6 to 9 months past graduation
  - Include multiple data collection points and strategies
  - Time-stamp data collection and identify method collected

- **Connections to U of I culture / Unique contributions of our approach**
  - Focus on data use with an “inquiry / research” and “career exploration” tone
  - Put data “in the hands” of key stakeholders through development of data portals
  - Embrace IRB approval as a key aspect of the project
Relationship Building

- How do we build support and enthusiasm for this initiative?
- Who should we reach out to? In what order? With what messaging?
  - Core partners
  - Career services partners
  - College partners
  - Student advisors
  - Administration
  - Institutional Review Board
  - Technology support
  - Alumni relations and Foundation partners
  - And more...
Relationship Building

- Sample from U of I
Implementation

- How will we delimit the boundaries of the initiative?
  - What are we tackling first? What can wait until a later date?
  - How will we phase in our efforts to allow for testing and quality assurance?

- What will quality look like?
  - What checkpoints can we build in to test the quality of data that we are gathering?
  - How can we communicate with stakeholders to continue to build confidence in and enthusiasm for the effort?

- While staying true to the key ideas that guide our initiative, where can we bend and flex to respond to accommodate needs as they emerge?
Implementation

- Sample from U of I

**Aug 2014 Grads (~600):**
Email Surveys Only – *Testing Survey Questions*

**Dec 2014 Grads (~1,200):**
Email Surveys + Cap & Gown Collection for Some Colleges – *Testing Data Collection Processes*

**May 2015 Grads (~6,400):**
Email & Paper Surveys + Full Cap & Gown Collection + Classroom Visits + Partnerships with Alumni Relations Groups – *Expanding Response Rates*
Communication and Branding

- How do we communicate this work to key audiences, such as:
  - Current students, prospective students, and their families
  - Administrators, staff, and faculty
  - Employers and alumni
  - State and federal government representatives
  - Accrediting boards and grant funding agencies

- What titles, words, images, and/or messaging do they connect with?
- What formats are most useful or engaging?
- What types of information are most useful or desired?
- How can the reporting of this information be used to help shape the culture of the institution in a way that encourages future graduates to contribute survey responses?
Feedback on survey language & titles from student focus groups

- Terms students suggested that we avoid
  - Words “survey” & “initiative” imply work – may turn graduates away
  - “Outcomes” sounds impersonal / cold
  - “First Destination” may be confusing—are you referring to a location? Also, the word “destination” felt “final” to students, and they expressed that their first job out was simply a stepping stone.

- When connecting with graduates around survey completion, students suggested using informal language:
  - “Feedback” or “check-in”
  - “How’s life?”, “What’s next?”, “Out-of-College”, “Graduation Follow-up”
Looking Forward to Sustainability

- How do we integrate this initiative into the fabric of the institution?
  - What processes can be streamlined to ease data collection, analysis, and reporting efforts?
  - How can activities be appropriately automated, so that they become common practice (rather than exceptions or additions to our work)?
  - How do we continue to encourage broad institutional ownership of the project, with contributions of time and resources beyond the career services office and staff?

- How can technology be integrated to facilitate and customize dissemination of findings?

- How do we manage stakeholder expectations, addressing their needs within the constraints of project resources?
Looking Forward to Sustainability

- Ultimate aim at U of I...
  - Continue to build the first destination initiative brand through strong communication and dissemination of findings, in order to encourage a cultural shift toward participation in this effort.
  - Graduates respond to the survey because they recognize it from having seen reports of the data or having used the career exploration data portal.
  - Administrators, faculty, and staff encourage survey completion because they are familiar with the survey effort, have used their data portal, and found the information helpful.

- We essentially hope that, with time, the effort will begin to feed itself. Only time will tell... the story continues...
Why Reflect on our First Destination Journey?

- There is value in reflecting on the process
  - We learn who we are
  - We learn the value that we contribute to the people and structures around us
  - We connect with others – share, teach, and improve ourselves

- We figure out what core themes contribute to developing a successful First Destination Initiative
  - So far, the core themes discussed today seem to suggest that first destination is about more than collecting numbers and putting them in a thick report

  First destination information becomes meaningful when
  - The effort is connected to the culture and climate of an institution
  - The effort is clearly defined
  - Results are communicated to stakeholders in desired formats and language
  - Strong relationships exist to implement and sustain the effort
Thank you for joining us.

We wish you all the best in your first destination journeys, and look forward to continuing to share stories at future NACE conferences.

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Access the PowerPoint at www.careercenter.illinois.edu/research/networks