

# A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING LABOR MARKET ALIGNMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Michelle Van Noy and Jennifer Cleary

Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers

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# Increasing Emphasis on Labor Market Alignment in Higher Education



- Rising student debt
- Higher skill expectations from employers
- The “jobless recovery” affect on college grads
- Changing structure of jobs & the skills mismatch
- Increased focus on role of community colleges in workforce preparation

# Prior Research on Community Colleges' Link to the Labor Market



- Harmon & MacAllum (2008) & Adams, Edmonson & Slate (2013) focus on organizational characteristics and mechanisms needed to respond to labor market needs
- Dougherty (2003) examines variation in presence of contract training across community colleges
- Leigh & Gill (2007) examine outcomes in terms of the match between numbers of graduates and job openings
- Jacobson & LaLonde (2005), Belfield & Bailey (2011), and others document labor market returns to community college education

# A Conceptual Framework for Higher Education Labor Market Alignment



- Our framework for higher education labor market alignment is based on the following definition:

**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.**

# Two Key Goals of Higher Education Labor Market Alignment



- **Job vacancy** – programs graduate enough students in the field relative to available job openings
- **Skills** – program graduates to possess the skills employers are seeking in the field

# Alignment Involves Balancing Several Key Factors

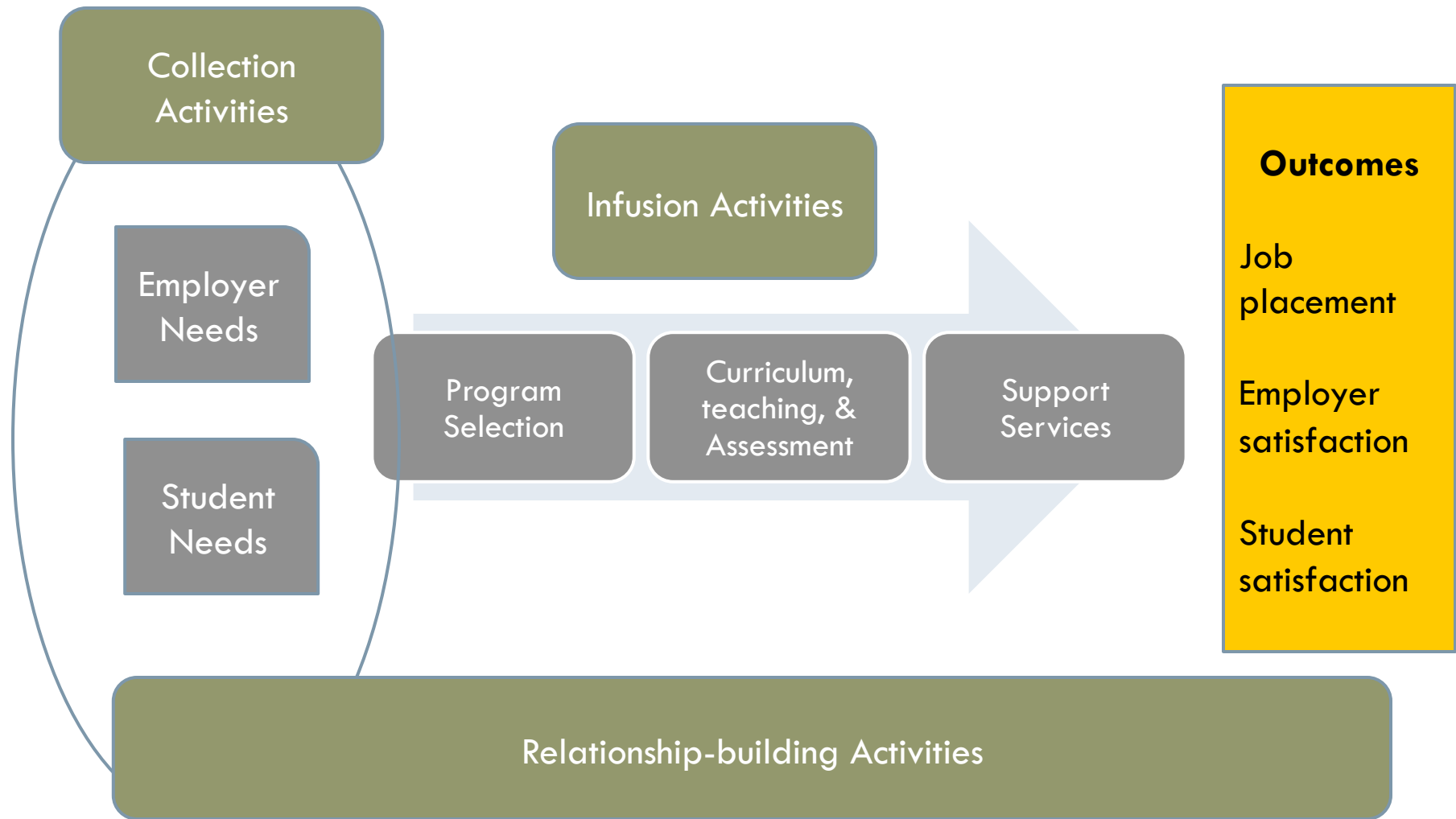


- Employer needs
  - ▣ Numbers of workers with necessary skills
  - ▣ Quick
- Student needs
  - ▣ Meaningful work at a decent wage
  - ▣ Education & credentials to support career advancement
  - ▣ Individualized pace and schedule to speed time to complete
- Institutional mission
  - ▣ Priority on general education versus workforce education
- Labor market conditions
  - ▣ Industry mix and stability

# Need for a Research Framework for Alignment in Workforce Education

- Very few studies of alignment in workforce education, and no research on alignment **processes/activities** (Griffin, 2010); Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Roach et al., 2008)
  - ▣ Rubin & Dierdorff (2009) Match O\*Net competencies to curricula
  - ▣ New approaches involve matching skills from job listings to curricula (JFF, 2013)
  - ▣ Focus is only on curricula and how well it aligns with standardized assessments of employer skill needs
- Need for better formative research in workforce education (Griffin, 2010)

# Alignment Research Framework Model





# Key Model Assumptions



- Alignment of program components with student and employer needs contributes to enhanced labor market and satisfaction outcomes for students and employers. (Harmon & McAllum, 2003; multiple policy studies)
- Successful outcomes are is mitigated by effectiveness of alignment activities
- Alignment activities affect:
  - Effectiveness of needs identification
  - Consistent infusion of needs into program parts
  - The “Woo-Woo” Factor: The relationships built with employers and across program components
- Therefore, evaluating the alignment activities can shed more light on how program-level alignment activities affect outcomes.

# Alignment Activities

	Job Vacancy Alignment	Skills Alignment
<b>Instructional</b>		
Program selection and enrollment management	X	
Program content and curriculum development		X
Instructional strategies		X
Work-based learning activities		X
<b>Student support</b>		
Student advisement on career and major choice	X	X
Career transition support	X	X

# Alignment Outcomes Measures

	Job Vacancy Alignment	Skills Alignment
Attaining a credential with labor market value		X
Job placement rate	X	
Retention	X	X
Earnings	X	X
Patterns of growth in graduate production relative to jobs (CIP-SOC matching)	X	
Employer satisfaction		X
Participant satisfaction		X
Employee performance reviews		X

# For more information, contact:



- Michelle Van Noy, [mvannoy@rutgers.edu](mailto:mvannoy@rutgers.edu)
- Jennifer Cleary, [jcleary@ejb.rutgers.edu](mailto:jcleary@ejb.rutgers.edu)

Or, visit our website at:

<http://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu/>