A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING LABOR MARKET ALIGNMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Michelle Van Noy and Jennifer Cleary
Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers
Council for the Study of Community Colleges Annual Conference
April 4, 2014
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.
- 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.
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

Collection Activities

Employer Needs

Student Needs

Infusion Activities

Program Selection

Curriculum, teaching, & Assessment

Support Services

Outcomes

Job placement

Employer satisfaction

Student satisfaction

Relationship-building Activities
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 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Job Vacancy Alignment</th>
<th>Skills Alignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program selection and enrollment management</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program content and curriculum development</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-based learning activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student advisement on career and major choice</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career transition support</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Alignment Outcomes Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Job Vacancy Alignment</th>
<th>Skills Alignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attaining a credential with labor market value</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job placement rate</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earnings</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterns of growth in graduate production relative to jobs (CIP-SOC matching)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee performance reviews</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For more information, contact:

- Michelle Van Noy, mvannoy@rutgers.edu
- Jennifer Cleary, jcleary@ejb.rutgers.edu

Or, visit our website at:
http://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu/