

Assessment *in* Practice

An Outcomes Based Approach to Career Development

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INSTITUTIONAL/DEPARTMENTAL CONTEXT

In spring 2013 a new strategic vision for career development was operationalized at the University of Baltimore focused on re-branding the Career Center and increasing student engagement in career planning. The plan emphasized the University of Baltimore's commitment to facilitating the professional development of students and alumni and incorporated the intentional assessment of student learning, engagement, and satisfaction to track success. The Career Center was renamed the Career and Professional Development Center (CPDC) and a team of Student Affairs professionals revised the department's mission, vision, departmental objectives, and developed a new career development framework focused on student learning and outcomes assessment.

A NEW MISSION

The new mission of the CPDC centers on empowering students, developing connections to the employment community, and instituting sustainable programs and services. The mission is supported by three core themes: (1) creating expert career managers, (2) integrating career development campus-wide, and (3) creating synergy between the employment community, alumni and current students. To ensure that the mission and core themes could be connected to learning outcomes and assessed, five strategic priorities were developed.

NEW STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The three themes inform the strategic priorities of the CPDC which include:

- Strategic Goal 1: Engage key internal stakeholders campus-wide in supporting and translating the vision of an integrated, collaborative career and professional development-focused University of Baltimore committed to fostering “Knowledge That Works.”
- Strategic Goal 2: Prepare students and alumni with career development skills and methodology necessary to become active agents of their career paths.
- Strategic Goal 3: Create strong partnerships with the employment community to facilitate student success at University of Baltimore and beyond.
- Strategic Goal 4: Deliver leading edge programs and services to support the CPDC’s mission of preparing students and alumni for professional success by engaging them in the University of Baltimore Career Cycle process, providing resources, and sharing networks.
- Strategic Goal 5: Develop the CPDC as a user-friendly, efficient operation that facilitates the larger university-wide effort to promote student and alumni continuous professional success.

*In 2015, the University of Baltimore Career and Professional Development Center’s Career Cycle was recognized nationally, by University Business, as a **Model of Excellence in Student Success.***

A NEW MODEL OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT: THE UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE CAREER CYCLE—STUDENT LEARNING IN ACTION

The first priority was to enhance student engagement in career development including the integration of learning opportunities that could be demonstrated and measured. To start, a **Career Cycle** was designed to provide students with a framework for career decision making and planning. The Career Cycle became the methodology utilized during individual career coaching sessions between career center staff and students. Undergraduate and graduate students seek career advising for a variety of reasons including career exploration, resume and cover letter development, vocational assessment, job and internship assistance or career advancement strategy. Second, the Career Center also adopted a career coaching approach to career advising known as GROW to increase quality assurance measures and consistency during student appointments in preparation for assessing satisfaction. Of note, in 2015, the Career Cycle was recognized nationally, by University Business, as a **Model of Excellence in Student Success.**

The **GROW coaching model** was developed by Graham Alexander, Alan Fine and Sir John Whitmore in the 1980s and is reviewed in the book *Coaching for Performance: GROWing Human Potential and Purpose—The Principles and Practice of Coaching Leadership* by John Whitmore. The GROW model helps to reinforce the action focused career activities infused into the UB Career Cycle, moving students from discussion to action. The new approach and Career Cycle model gave the staff tools to help students actualize their career plans, increasing satisfaction and engagement. Prior to the launch of the new model and coaching

approach, students reported low satisfaction with career coaching sessions and did not feel the department helped in the attainment of career goals. Within two years of implementing the Career Cycle and training staff on the GROW coaching model, student satisfaction with individual appointments improved significantly.¹

In addition to increasing student satisfaction with individual appointments, the CPDC is also able to assess student learning. This is because the hallmark of the Career Cycle is its focus on learning and its orientation towards action. The Career Cycle is divided into four phases and each phase has an action step (learning activity) associated with it (see chart below). The CPDC team developed direct and indirect measures to assess students learning associated with each action step. In turn, both student satisfaction and student learning outcomes are assessed on an annual basis.

Phase	Learning Outcome	Action Step
Discover your direction	Self-awareness	Define your professional goal
Explore the world of work	Industry-awareness	Create your professional pitch
Communicate your brand	Personal branding	Design your action plan
Create your opportunities	Career management	Develop a career management plan

Lastly, in addition to integrating learning outcomes into individual coaching sessions, the CPDC has integrated the Career Cycle into classroom presentations, professional development workshops, and co-curricular programs. Building off of the action steps (learning activities) associated with the Career Cycle, additional activities and assessment tools have been developed to measure the effectiveness of career interventions in various settings. These developments allow the CPDC team to understand if students are satisfied with programs and services and if students are learning—becoming career ready—as a result of engaging in such activities.

Overall, the development of the UB Career Cycle and the implementation of the GROW coaching methodology has increased student satisfaction with the career center services, shifted student mind-sets from a passive to active engagement in relation to career development, and helped ensure student learning is embedded in career interventions.

CREATING SUSTAINABLE OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PROCESSES

As with most efforts, creating sustainability can be challenging. In 2015, the University of Baltimore commissioned a Middle States Self-Study Steering Committee in preparation for an accreditation site visit and asked several units, including the CPDC, to develop a three-year Student Learning Outcomes

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¹ Satisfaction data are collected by sending students an electronic After Appointment Survey.

assessment plan and to conduct a comprehensive Administrative Unit Effectiveness Study. This request provided the CPDC team with an opportunity to further develop assessment processes to increase sustainability. The timeline featured the assessment of two learning outcomes per semester with each outcome paired with a direct assessment technique and performance product. Each outcome was also related to **institutional learning outcomes** and the **career readiness competencies** outlined by the National Association of Colleges and Employers.²

PROCESS & KEY FINDINGS: ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT STUDY

Collecting data on student learning outcomes centering around the Career Cycle also provided useful data to assess Unit Effectiveness. Methodologies utilized for the CPDC's Administrative Unit Effectiveness Study included the construction of an Internal Review Team, career services benchmark research, student and academic leadership needs assessment, and quantitative and qualitative data from employers. Highlighted below are lessons learned regarding student learning and performance perceived by employers and current students.

EMPLOYER FEEDBACK & STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The CPDC's Employer Relations Team acquires employer feedback from companies who actively recruit UB students. Targeted employers included companies who attend UB career fairs or participate in the On-Campus Recruitment Program. The On-Campus Recruitment Program provides **multiple venues for employers to connect with UB students** and increase company brand awareness through heightened visibility. Recruitment options include hosting an information session, staffing an information table, visiting classrooms, and conducting interviews onsite. Participating employers are asked to complete evaluations rating their recruitment experience and their perceptions of UB students. In addition, employers who hold interviews on campus using the CPDC's interview rooms are invited to lunch with the Employer Relations Team where qualitative perceptions of UB students and the CPDC's recruitment experience are discussed.

Key findings from employer evaluations and qualitative feedback included students' inability to effectively communicate strengths and a professional brand during interviews, and poor resume execution. After receiving the employer feedback, the CPDC spent the 2016 academic year implementing career interventions focused on resume development and interviewing skills; and then assessing student learning. As a result, in the 2017 academic year, there was a notable improvement in both the quantitative and qualitative feedback from employers concerning student employability skills.

Key findings from employer feedback included students' inability to effectively communicate strengths and poor resume execution. As a result, the CPDC spent the academic year implementing career interventions focused on resume development and interviewing skills; and then assessing student learning.

² At this juncture the CPDC recognized that the "opt-in" nature of the department's services places limits on the ability to implement career interventions, assess student learning, and collect performance products.

STUDENT FEEDBACK & LEARNING OUTCOMES

Lastly, to survey undergraduate students, a needs assessment was administered and completed by 145 undergraduate students. The results indicated that over half of the respondents would prefer to have career development integrated into their academic experience through mandatory career coaching or a for-credit career course. The results prompted the CPDC leadership to meet with the General Education Committee and academic colleagues about the possibility of instituting a required career course. It was determined that the best course of action was to integrate the UB Career Cycle into key academic courses. Although business students are required to take a for-credit professional development course, faculty from the other colleges were concerned about adding additional credits to degree completion. In particular, faculty from disciplines in the Arts & Sciences, were concerned about the ability to create one single career course for a variety of liberal arts programs ranging from history to Simulation and Game Design. Integrating the UB Career Cycle into the classroom was identified as the best alternative for requiring career interventions and infusing them into the curriculum. Currently the CPDC has a partnership with the Freshman Seminar course faculty who allow the CPDC Career Specialists to administer a group interpretation of the iStartStrong, a career interest inventory. In turn, the course instructors have developed a Signature Career Assignment required of students in all course sections which includes crafting a professional goal (action step one on the UB Career Cycle) and submitting a reflection paper. In summer 2018, another Signature Career Assignment was developed to incorporate resume development into upper level writing courses which is a requirement for all students. Both curriculum integration assignments are a collaboration between the CPDC staff and faculty. Specifically, the Director of the CPDC partners with faculty leads to determine the career topics and interventions that will be utilized in the classroom along with assessment strategies.

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LESSONS LEARNED

- Co-curricular units who provide “opt-in” services and programs for students are limited in the ability to implement interventions and assess outcomes due to infrequent interactions with students. Solutions include integrating career development into key courses and identifying learning outcomes that can be assessed in brief interactions and individual coaching sessions.
- Learning outcomes and unit effectiveness can work in tandem which makes the data collection process more efficient and allows for easier scaffolding of strategic priorities, outcomes, and effectiveness assessment.
- Career services professionals can improve student learning by assessing employer perceptions of student career readiness.

FUTURE PLANS

- To increase student participation in experiential learning the CPDC once again adopted a new name in summer 2018—The Career Internship Center (CIC). To enhance internship services available to UB students, the newly minted CIC also hired an Internship & Recruitment coordinator.
- The CPDC serves both undergraduate and graduate students. Efforts are underway to further enhance career services for graduate students to address the needs of career advancers, career changers, and experienced professionals who are upskilling to re-enter the workforce. One step will include developing an advanced UB Career Cycle for graduate students.
- Moving forward, the CPDC aims to assess 1-2 specific learning outcomes each semester centered around the Career Cycle or career readiness competencies.

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About NILOA

- The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in December 2008, and is co-located at the University of Illinois and Indiana University.
- The NILOA website contains free assessment resources and can be found at <https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org>.
- The NILOA research team has scanned institutional websites, surveyed chief academic officers, and commissioned a series of occasional papers.

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