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USING LABOR MARKET DATA TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS AND BOOST
ENROLLMENT, RETENTION, AND EMPLOYMENT

SUMMARY

The United States is facing an information gap. Young people are struggling to connect their aspirations to the labor market and to the necessary education. In this report, we address how this information gap is causing students and their parents to question the value of education and how these concerns create enrollment and retention challenges for higher education institutions.

To do this, we call attention to case studies that demonstrate how higher education professionals have successfully met these challenges through the use of technology and transparent data. When students can visualize the connection between education and solid labor market outcomes in their region, they stay motivated; enrollment, retention, and student success improve; and labor market needs are more likely to be met.

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INTRODUCTION

You've heard the question before: Will I have massive debt and no career if I enroll? Today's high school- and college-age students are not confident that the skills they'll learn in college have real-world value. After watching their older brothers and sisters settle for jobs that don't require the degrees they've spent time and money to earn, young people have a hard time believing that a degree will lead to a fulfilling, financially-sustaining career. As described in a recent *New York Times* article, "Many students arrive with the notion that a college education is essential but remain unconvinced that what they will learn during the course of their studies is equally so."[1] Student enrollment, retention, and success are suffering and higher ed institutions everywhere are facing enormous challenges.

Dealing with these challenges begins with clearing up a fundamental misunderstanding about the role of higher education in the workforce. Christopher B. Nelson, President of St. John's College in Annapolis, argues that "education and economics are essentially incompatible," and of course, certain aspects of his claim are true.[2] Education has many benefits that are not labor market or economically motivated, such as the maturation of young people and the development of a sense of self and place in society. And, as Wharton management professor Peter Cappelli points out, education itself is not a great vehicle for job training.[3]

However, students are undeniably motivated by economics when they pursue higher education. As President Obama recently noted, "You came to college to learn about the world, and to engage with new ideas, and to discover the things you are passionate about.… But you're also here, now more than ever, because a college degree is the surest ticket to the middle class. It is the key to getting a good job that pays a good income."[4] According to the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, over 88% of incoming freshmen are going to college because they want successful careers—a noticeably larger share than in the mid-2000s.[5]

Trends of Reasons for Deciding to go to College
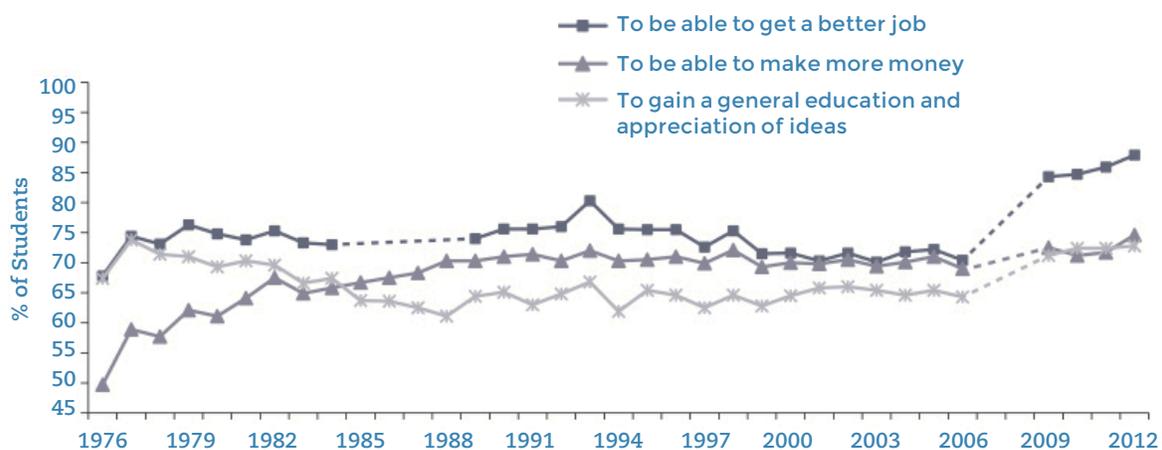
Source: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA

Further, Noel-Levitz's research shows that economics is a huge factor for both parents and students evaluating postsecondary education institutions. According to its 2014 study, prospective students and parents hunt for two primary things on any college website: (1) academic program listings and (2) cost, with scholarships and financial aid falling closely behind.[6]

Content Priorities for a College Website
(Participants were asked for their top 3 priorities; partial results below)
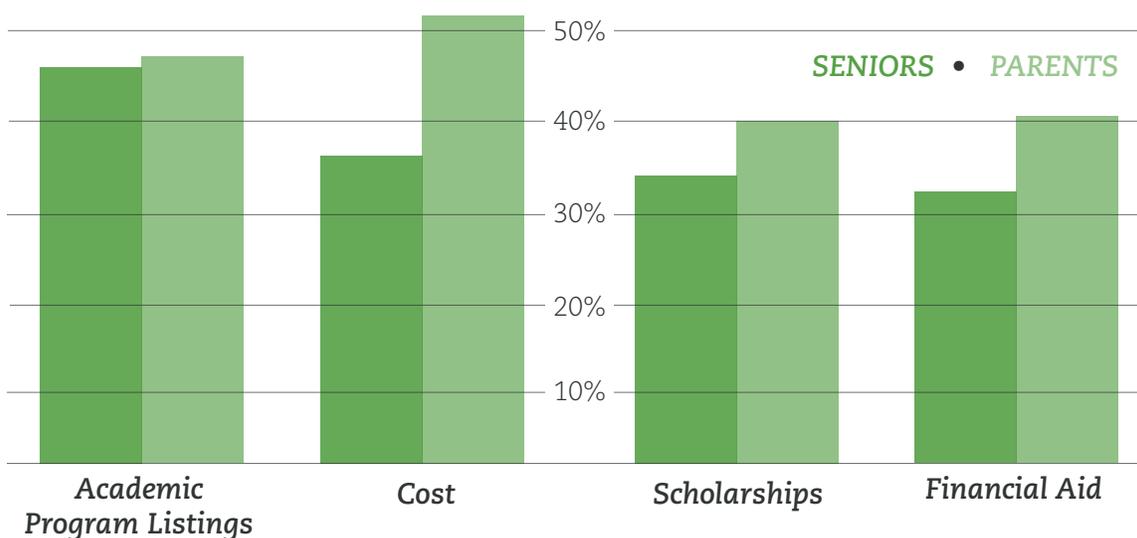
Source: Noel-Levitz. *See source for additional data on academic program details, housing details, enrollment/admissions information, and student life information.*

All across the country, the cost of education is at an all-time high, and students are less willing to go into debt. They (and their parents) want to know that there will be a positive return on their investment, and nearly all higher education institutions are being asked questions about how well their programs and curricula line up with what employers need.

So how can educators respond? What must parents and students know in order to feel confident in their decisions?

THE NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY IN EDUCATION

Education and the labor market do in fact relate to one another, whether broadly or narrowly, and talking openly about this relationship builds trust. In this report, we hope to clarify how the massive amount of relevant data available in the US can educate students and parents.

We want to start by introducing Career Coach, a service that helps educators guide students through strategic decisions about which careers are right for them and how those opportunities relate to education. Over the past six years, 130 higher ed institutions across the United States have used Career Coach to relate their educational programs to data for 800-plus occupations, which represent over 150 million jobs. This is the key connection that young people need in order to make better decisions.

Designed to match a college or university's individual brand and website, Career Coach feels familiar to students and offers powerful data to help you guide them through their education to their career aspirations. In addition, EMSI trains college and university staff to know the data inside and out, so that you can thoroughly answer their questions.

This report highlights the innovative ways that many higher education institutions have embraced Career Coach to build trust and improve enrollment, retention, and student success. One of the things you'll quickly note is that the vast majority of these case studies feature community and technical colleges. Due to their core missions, community and technical colleges have been more regionally focused and employer-driven than their four-year counterparts, and, because they are largely accustomed to explaining how their programs relate to labor market needs, they have been using such analysis for the better part of 20 years. That said, a growing number of four-year institutions are also strengthening their labor market connections.

Regardless of where you fall on this spectrum, we are eager to partner with you to help answer questions like this one, asked by a concerned father in the documentary film *The Ivory Tower*: "Is my daughter going to have a job? She's not going to come back home after she's done?"
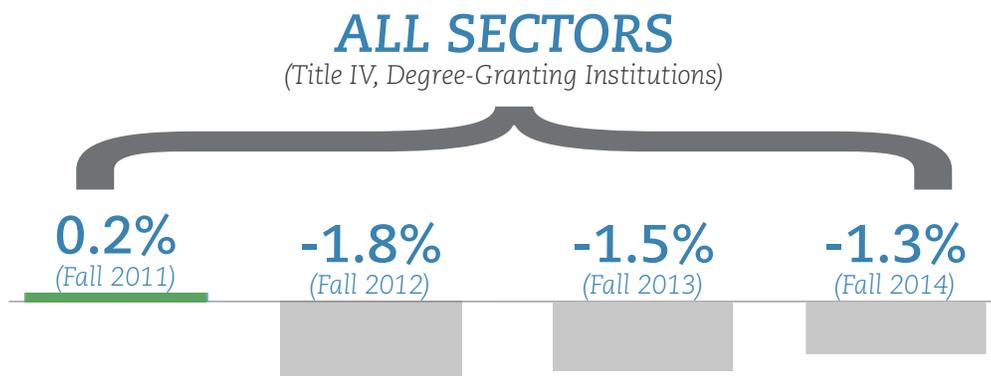
THREE CHALLENGES
And How Career Coach Helps

ENROLLMENT

According to a recent article at InsideHigherEd.com, enrollment declined across all higher ed sectors between fall 2011 and spring 2014.[7] In addition, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reported that, in fall 2014, overall postsecondary enrollment decreased 1.3% from the previous fall, and public sector enrollment (two-year and four-year combined) declined 1.5%.[8]

Percent Change in Enrollment from Previous Year

ALL SECTORS
(Title IV, Degree-Granting Institutions)

0.2%	-1.8%	-1.5%	-1.3%
(Fall 2011)	*(Fall 2012)*	*(Fall 2013)*	*(Fall 2014)*

Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center

These challenges are often much more pronounced at the regional level. For example, the *Mansfield* (Ohio) *News Journal* recently ran an insightful report on the situation at Ohio's community colleges.[9] Despite an increase in demand for skilled labor,[10] enrollment at Ohio's community colleges has dropped 18.5% over the last five years—and over 5% just from 2013 to 2014.

In some ways, this decline is to be expected: More students attend college during a recession, and so it is no surprise that enrollment has declined as the economy has recovered. However, with more schools facing outcome-based funding systems and a growing number of businesses saying they can't find qualified workers, enrollment remains a critical concern, especially for community colleges that have taken a particularly harsh hit. As stated in the *New York Times* article "Raising Ambitions: The Challenge in Teaching at Community Colleges," "Two-year colleges enroll nearly half of all undergraduates in this country, the majority coming from the lower half of the income distribution…. It is hard to see how economic mobility might regain momentum, or how an educated citizenry might be maintained, without community colleges accomplishing their mission of graduating the poor and struggling."

Career Coach was built to help fix this problem. By connecting educational program data at a college or university to local occupations, Career Coach helps individual institutions prove the value of their education and market their programs to prospective students. Here are some of the greatest success stories.

Florida's **Valencia College**—which, in 2010, awarded more associate degrees than any other two-year school in the nation—has embraced the role that Career Coach can play in the college's *A Smarter Way* campaign. The college launched a television commercial that featured a young woman literally searching in the dark for a career.[11] She finds a solution when a large, LED light suddenly spells out Career Coach. "Looking for info on the best careers in the area?" says the voiceover. "Career Coach by Valencia College can shine some light on the subject." The woman finds herself in a well-lit room where she can browse opportunities at Valencia College via the online tool. Valencia College has also featured Career Coach on billboards, radio spots, print materials, and a new landing page.

Career Coach also added a twist to **St. Louis Community College**'s *Step Inside and Find Your Future* campaign when the college introduced a 36-foot computer-and-WiFi-equipped trailer and invited prospective students and community members to *Click and Find Your Future*. The trailer transports staff and faculty to schools where they invite students (sixth-grade and up) to explore technology careers via STLCC Career Coach. The trailer also visits community events, such as fairs and festivals.

Not only does Career Coach help higher education institutions bring students to campus for the first time; it also brings students back. As part of the *It's Your Turn to Learn* campaign, **Minnesota State Community and Technical College** targeted its non-returning, non-completing students. "The college's vision is a success story for every student," said Anthony Schaffhauser, Dean of Student Success at Minnesota State. "To do that, students have to have goals. It doesn't usually happen by chance." Adding Career Coach strengthened that effort considerably; the *It's Your Turn To Learn* campaign helped undecided students define their goals and has also led to the re-enrollment of about 60 former students.

Many universities are also starting to see how labor market data can demonstrate connections between their programs and growing regional opportunities, which in turn helps finalize enrollment decisions. For example, the **University of Idaho** plans to use Career Coach to boost enrollment by educating prospective students about its majors and the in-demand careers that could be attained with those majors.

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE AND RETENTION

Noel-Levitz reports that half of college freshmen want career services upon arriving. And two Community College Research Center studies of community college students in Washington[12] and Virginia[13] found that a quarter of students who enroll in the fall semester do not return in the spring. Of those who do enroll in the spring, one fifth do not return for the subsequent fall semester.

Helping students understand how education fits into their path to opportunity is critical to keeping them motivated at college, especially during their first year. That's why Bill Griffin, Associate Vice President of Curriculum Programs at **Fayetteville Technical Community College**, introduces Career Coach to students immediately upon their arrival: "In my welcome letter, I encourage new students to take a look at Career Coach, so they have an idea of what they want to do before they start interacting with admissions counselors or faculty advisors. Hopefully, they'll have a better idea of where they want to go, how to get there, and the need to remain focused as they participate in their programs of study."

"In my welcome letter, I encourage new students to take a look at Career Coach.... Hopefully, they'll have a better idea of where they want to go, how to get there, and the need to remain focused as they participate in their programs of study."

FTCC found other uses for Career Coach that further enrich the student experience and better the institution as a whole. As FTCC Vice President of Human Resources and Workforce Development and Institutional Effectiveness Carl Mitchell explained it: "Career Coach is regularly used by people in student services, academics, workforce development, marketing, public relations, human resources, and by faculty and staff working at our various campuses. It's not isolated and available in just one area."

Advisement and career services directors at **Miami Dade College** also see the value of Career Coach, especially for new students. "Career Coach is honestly the first tool we use with students when they come in the door and they say, 'I want to be ...' and we'll say, 'Well, what do you know about the career path? Have you explored what it means in terms of income, in terms of job prospects?' And the answer from students is usually no," said Paola Documet, who works at MDC's Medical Center campus.

"Career Coach is honestly the first tool we use with students when they come in the door and they say, 'I want to be...' "

At **North Central State College** in Ohio, students spend one-on-one time with their advisors over their first year and learn how to use Career Coach. The school also built Career Coach into their First Semester Course, which requires each student to use the tool in a project that confirms his or her career path.

At **Santa Monica College** in California, professors use Career Coach to help students better understand the opportunities ahead of them—as part of an assignment, as a mandatory threaded discussion, or as an extra credit project. An additional identification survey in SMC Career Coach also allows the college to track exactly who is using the tool, providing leads to admissions and advising staff.

STUDENT SUCCESS

Enrollment and retention lead toward the ultimate goal: student success. This refers to more than graduation rates. When we speak of true student success, we must consider graduation rates, full-time employment rates in students' chosen fields of study, and continuing education rates at more advanced levels. Success means guiding students along a path that fulfills their passions while also answering no to that question—Will I have massive debt and no career if I enroll?

Career Coach helps students reach success in many ways and across many demographics. For example, a new feature assists veterans and ex-military personnel who are transitioning into the civilian workforce. By mapping military occupation codes to standard occupation codes, this feature identifies civilian careers that are similar to specific jobs in the military and facilitates conversations with advisors about transferrable skills, helping veteran students streamline their education and reach their goals more quickly.
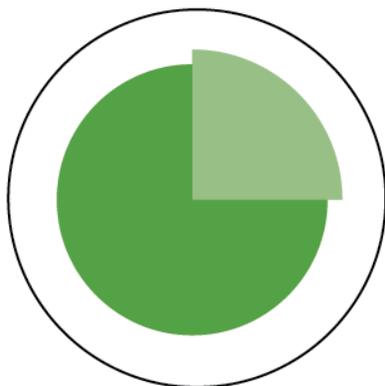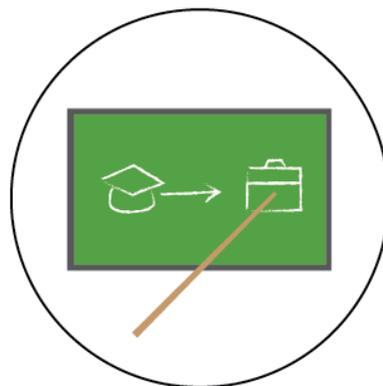
DATA TOOLS TRAINING

As Louis Efron, Head of Engagement for Tesla Motors and author of *How to Find a Job, Career, and Life You Love* wrote, "Just providing someone a job is an easy task; giving them the right job is the hard part. Get this right and you will unleash organizational growth and sustainability, plus shift economic power." [14] Higher education institutions are discovering that, with the help of Career Coach, *the hard part* doesn't have to be so hard.

The day after the 2014 State of the Union address, Vice President Joe Biden and his wife, Dr. Jill Biden, traveled to **Monroe Community College** in Rochester, New York, to talk at its Applied Technology Center. Biden's visit was inspired by MCC's response to local skills gaps, which—after working with EMSI to research labor market needs and developing relationships with local businesses—resulted in the establishment of an accelerated machinist training program and secured career pathways for many of the college's graduates.

Beyond its research and data collection, MCC has placed a major emphasis on communicating the most pertinent data on careers and training to students and jobseekers in the Rochester area, largely via Career Coach. Among other congratulatory remarks during his post-State of the Union visit, Biden commended this tool.

CPCC Career Coach attracts about 5,500 visits per month, and, in 2014, about 600 users clicked through the site to contact a staff member for additional information.

Since launching Career Coach in early 2013, **Central Piedmont Community College** has taken a dynamic, multifaceted, budget-conscious approach to implementing the tool throughout each student's educational experience at the college. Owen Sutkowski, CPCC's Director of Transfer and Career Services, noted how Career Coach speaks to the entire student learning experience, to students in the middle of their education, and to those approaching graduation that are poised to enter the workforce. It's working. CPCC Career Coach attracts about 5,500 visits per month, and, in 2014, about 600 users clicked through the site to contact a staff member for additional information.

Central Piedmont is also distributing Career Coach to high school guidance counselors and the area's "middle colleges"—transitional institutions that give high school-age students a jumpstart on college. In addition, CPCC hired a part-time Career Coach expert to make certain that the tool has a maximum impact. "Before we had Career Coach, I was recommending that people go to one place for job outlook, another for postings, and then visit the CPCC website for programs," said Sarah Wilson, CPCC's Career Coach Project Coordinator. "But Career Coach is one website. It gives people all the information they need to move forward with their education, at whatever stage they happen to be in."

Amarillo College in Texas also uses Career Coach as part of its data-based approach to student success. "All the wages, all the aging of the workforce, all the job openings and all the training that you need are all specific to our area," explained Ellen Green, the Chief of Communications and Marketing at Amarillo College. "It's really difficult to find the right information when it comes to salaries and also the aging of the workforce and how many people are going to be moving out of the job." Career Coach puts that information all in one place, making success easier to attain because students know what they need to accomplish in order to reach their goals.

CONCLUSION

These case studies illustrate that when students can identify their goals and visualize related opportunities, enrollment, retention, and student success improve. By connecting your program data to real career opportunities, whether broad or narrow, you will help close the information gap for your students. If this is your goal, EMSI is in a position to help. We collect the necessary program information from your institution, map the data to real career opportunities, build and host a custom website for your students, and train you how to use it.

USING LABOR MARKET DATA TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS AND BOOST ENROLLMENT, RETENTION, AND EMPLOYMENT
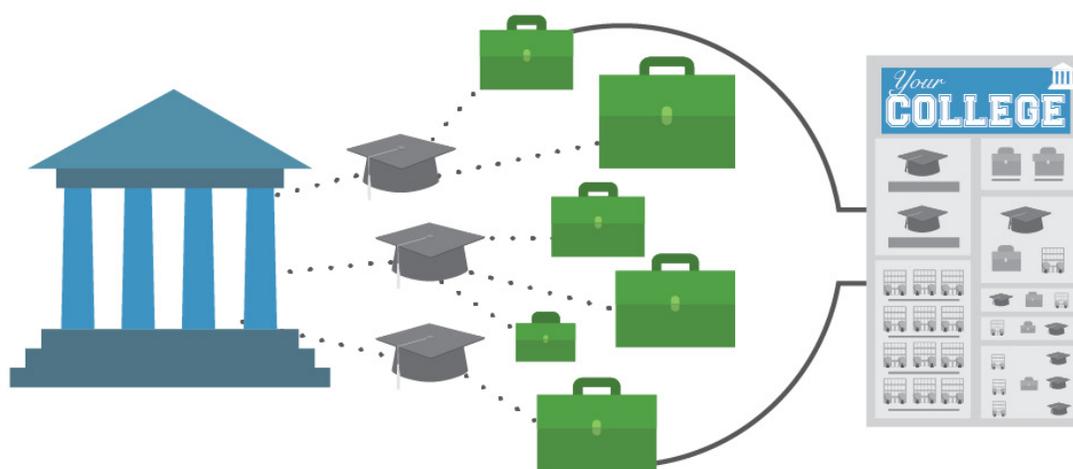
THE NEXT STEP

Career Coach will continue to be a great tool that helps colleges and universities engage their students. But uncertainties about education and career decisions are reaching students at a much younger age, causing an increased need to deliver labor market information to students as early as high school. Young people and their parents are hungrier than ever for data that can help them make smarter choices. To get the full benefit of this information, they need to be able to access it before they decide where to enroll for college.

So, after meetings with the White House, many conversations with clients, and a year's worth of research, we've begun work with our parent company, CareerBuilder, to create Find Your Calling: a free, national, youth-oriented website designed to help high school students and their parents understand the labor market, line up their interests with real career opportunities, and, based on all of the colleges and universities in their area, determine which school and educational path is best suited to help them be successful. We plan to launch the site in 2015.

Find Your Calling is designed to complement Career Coach. One of the goals of this new tool is to create a way for young people to connect to those higher ed institutions that value and can discuss the relationship between education and career opportunities. To that end, for colleges and universities that use Career Coach, Find Your Calling will share their pre-mapped program data with millions of high school students and their parents, putting students in contact with the colleges and universities that can help. Then, Career Coach will provide campus-specific training and local data that will help educators engage students through enrollment and as they continue on in their studies, ensuring that they stay motivated on their paths toward careers.

Students and parents are asking tough questions. Let us help you answer them.

CAREER COACH
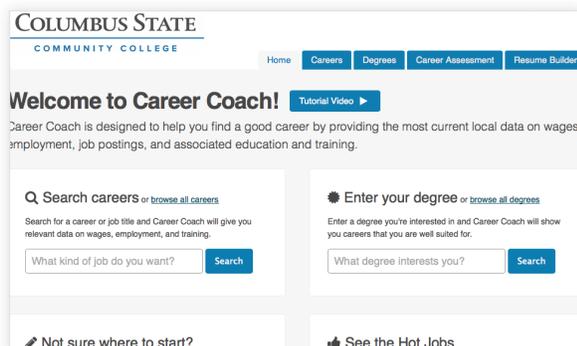
FIND YOUR CALLING
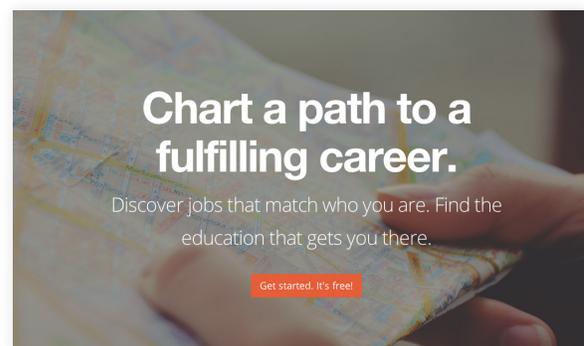
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