Literature Review

Documentation

Data for this literature review was compiled from a variety of sources and databases. Databases include: ProQuest, Info Trac, EBSCOhost, and Gale Power Search. Additionally, websites were searched to aggregate articles from peer-reviewed journals and other research documents. Items relevant to topic are referenced in this literature review.

Bridging the Gap

University Wire (2014) addresses the challenge that many college graduates are having with finding employment after graduation. The focus is narrowed to one particular graduate who served as an account management intern for the marketing and communications firm Young & Rubican; however, after two semesters and with the completion of her education, she was left on her own and unable to find employment.

To address this concern of finding a job after graduation and students having uncertainty of his or her path to employment, a program called, The CO\*OP founded by Kalani Leifer was established. The main focus of the program is to bridge the gap between the college to career path and connect students with meaningful careers. This particular program combines an academic foundation and hands-on projects to include four weeks of training and 12 weeks of work and mentorship. The mission is to provide the participants with tech skills that will provide him or her a leg up on the competition. The idea of this program is to help students come out of it fully prepared to begin their careers. The main focus of this program is to connect students with meaningful careers and help to clear the uncertainty of what employment will look like after graduation.

Rotrosen, et al. (2017), explored the correlation of college graduates, their degrees and ability to obtain a career in the field of his or her earned degree. Stats show that for some students, they are able to follow the career path in the field he or she majored in, while others may discover that the choice of their majors does not land them with immediate careers. Although not every student immediately enters into the career path of choice based on degree, it is stated that a college degree is a worthwhile investment and yields higher earning power. College graduates average about $600,000 more in lifetime earnings than those with only a high school education.

Rotrosen, et al., proceeds to point out that, not all college experiences are equal and that some graduates with specific majors, such as those majoring in quantitative fields like STEM tend to earn significantly more than other graduates and enter into more lucrative industries. Rotrosen, et. al., examined the diversity of career paths that students within the same college and same major take after college and have discovered that, college majors relate to the future employment status of the graduate, gender and age also relate to employment status, and earning outcomes can vary greatly for graduates of the same college major. Students should seek to understand the correlation of one’s college major to occupation and potential earnings, in addition our nation’s education policies would benefit from assessments of this nature.

Workforce Development

Cross (2017) discusses President’s Trump signing an order to focus on expanding workforce development. The goal is to increase the number of highly skilled workers in America. College students will earn a degree in their specialized field that encompasses in-class academic training to identifying key internships that would expand on workforce skills. This enables organizations to work with interns, provide on the job training, and ultimately create a career pathway for graduates to work in their field of choice.

Additionally, D'Amico, Morgan, Katsinas, & Friedel (2015) conducted a study which reviewed the factors associated to workforce education at the community colleges. Economic development groups acknowledged the importance of hiring highly skilled and trained individuals when expanding businesses across the country. This study looked at the community colleges role in workforce development. The findings were determining which programs students enrolled in to connect with industries and identify their needs. Community colleges also acknowledged the lack of funding at the state and federal level to support all programs specifically the high cost related to regulatory programs. It is important to recognize the critical role academic institutions play and how graduates can impact the workforce with proper training and guidance (D'Amico, Morgan, Katsinas, & Friedel, 2015).

Employability

In his study David Rae (2007) has a focus on higher education institutes in the UK, the author discusses general challenges of developed nations as related to employability and university graduates. Rae acknowledges the need to integrate career and enterprise development within the curriculum, but also considers that this approach can pose challenges to the structure, system, and culture within higher education institutions. Moreland defines employability as: “a set of skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and be successful in their chosen occupation to the benefit of themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (as cited in Rae, 2007, p. 609). A graduate does not necessarily possess the skills, knowledge, and personal attributes as defined by employability.

Rae (2007) defines the problem and discusses that universities face the issue of offering degree programs and subjects that are relevant to the employment market, thereby contributing to the employability of a student, post-graduation. While universities have the freedom to offer degree courses for which they have the capacity for and which may attract the largest student enrollment, there is no requirement for universities to offer degree programs that meet employer skill or workforce planning needs. Many universities do realize this challenge and have developed employability strategies; however, there are deep seated cultural and organizational factors that can impeded the effectiveness of employability initiatives in universities. Rae (2007) concludes the following, first, the learning experience which connects to employability must be relevant to both the core degree subject, as well as stimulating and enjoyable for the student. Second, the university should offer a progression through an individual learning pathway, and finally, universities need to measure and evaluate results as well as learn from them and engage students and graduates in the design and management of the experiences and initiatives developed as related to employability and pathways from the university.

College and Career Readiness

Malin, Bragg, and Hackmann (2017) researched the policy associated to career and college readiness (CCR) and the reauthorization of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (p. 810) in how states are adhering to the policy. The goal is to determine if states are preparing the students with the academic foundation and skill building to be able to transition to college and/or career. The study focused on equity in the school system ensuring we provide equitable services, curriculum, and access that serves the entire student population (Malin, Bragg, & Hackmann , 2017).

Murray (2014) conducted a research study focused on the importance of community colleges building partnerships with local businesses and organizations. The study focused primarily on the college’s dual enrollment program and the success it provides for high school students earning credits then transitioning to college while working with industry partners in various fields. Students benefit from the hands-on experience, building relationship with the organization, and earning income to offset the tuition costs. The one key item is the importance of colleges establishing a foundation and continuous relationship building with workforce partners.

Norman-Burgdolf and Vanderford (2016), produced a study focused on implementing a course to focus on career readiness and preparedness. “The course was also modeled on the University of Kentucky’s successful Preparing Future Faculty course, which brings graduate students, faculty and administrators from a range of institutional types together for panel discussions and shadowing opportunities” (Norman-Burgdolf & Vanderford, 2016, p. 111). The course provides students an overview of the job market, identify specific skillsets required, resources readily available, and understand the academic preparation they are seeking will meet the needs in their chosen career. The authors found providing a career development course is key, but partnering with key industries opens up opportunities for graduates as they seek employment.

Soulé and Warrick (2015), research focused on the current state of education while identifying the skills gap in our society. The authors identified the 4C’s: creativity, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking (Soulé & Warrick, 2015, p. 178). The study reviewed readiness, domestic and global achievement gap, new industry demand skills, and recommendations to help prepare our students for the workforce. The 21st century model is an essential piece in order for school systems to focus on the 4C’s in the classroom as well as incorporating co-curricular activities.

To respond to this challenge, communities must engage in a thoughtful dialogue about changing the role and purpose of school and what they must do to prepare all students with the knowledge and skills they will need for life and success beyond. (Soulé, H., & Warrick, 2015, p. 185).

Summary

The results of the literature review indicate research and studies that support the opportunity that exists for Universities to partner with local employers to support strategic career choices and uncover employment laddering in order to lay foundations for students to upskill in specific career categories. The literature review brings to light the need to focus on bridging the gap between college and career, workforce development, employability, and college and career readiness.