



A NOTE FROM JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

Jobs for the Future (JFF) drives transformation of the U.S. education and workforce systems to achieve equitable economic advancement for all. To align with this mission, JFF's Student Success Center Network (SSCN) engages community colleges across 17 states, serving nearly half of all U.S. community colleges, to research and scale best practices that support student access, success, and equitable economic advancement.

In partnership with CCCSE, JFF developed the special-focus survey items explored throughout this report to better understand students' experiences with career exploration, the development of career skills, earning credit for prior learning, and participating in work-based learning. These questions were selected to examine the student experience across the pillars of JFF's Guided Career Pathways framework, which recommends that institutions embed early and regular career exploration, work-based learning opportunities, and options for credit for prior learning—strategies that can enhance learner success, and increase retention and completion.

Developed in partnership with the SSCN, the Guided Career Pathways framework evolves guided pathways to include an explicit focus on equitable economic mobility and post-graduation outcomes. The framework provides examples and strategies to help colleges design pathways that enhance regional workforce alignment, including the following:

- » improving college and career advising throughout the student journey
- » implementing work-based programs
- » creating credit for prior learning opportunities
- » developing partnerships with business and industry
- » improving data collection and reporting on post-graduate outcomes including wages and job placement

While many institutions have evolved student pathways to improve advising practices, establish meta-majors, and revise academic plans to include career outcomes, Guided Career Pathways suggests that further enhancements must be made to improve access to early and consistent career navigation and ensure all students have work-based learning opportunities. In addition, as colleges enroll more adults, they must provide customized career advising for adult learners by providing career guidance that considers their existing skills and access to credit for prior learning options.

Demonstrating promising strides in making these adjustments, several states across the Student Success Center Network are collaborating with businesses and industry to center the role of community colleges in meeting workforce and industry demands. New Jersey, Texas, and Ohio offer examples of state-supported initiatives aimed at reskilling and upskilling their workforce in partnership with community colleges. All three states aim to address the evolving needs of varied industries by sharing curricula, providing industry knowledge, and implementing work-based learning programs. Thus, they serve as timely examples of how to structure these collaborations at scale.

JFF, in partnership with CCCSE, hopes that this research will provide valuable insights to institutional leaders regarding how students make decisions about their program and career paths. Insights from students, such as those gathered through JFF's partnership with CCCSE, highlight the immediate need for community colleges to provide additional opportunities for career development, work-based learning, and embedded industry skills.