

September 21, 2023

Campus Engagement Tip: Make Career Services Visible to Students Early

To engage younger students in career conversations earlier, the Binghamton University career center launched an engagement strategy, increasing outreach and conversations with first- and second-year students.

By [Ashley Mowreader](#)



Career services professionals can engage first- and second-year students through intentional outreach and data tracking.

SeventyFour/ iStock/Getty Images Plus

3/5 Articles remaining this month.

Sign up for a free account or log in.



Many students are unaware of the range of services available to them on their college campus, so higher education practitioners look for solutions to make their departments visible and useful to learners. This is often true for career services departments, which have long faced challenges in getting students to connect with them prior to the need-a-résumé stage.

A [July Tyton Partners survey](#) found only 54 percent of students are aware of career advising at their college or university, compared to 91 percent of administrators, advisers and faculty members who say career advising is available to students.

Binghamton University's career center team wanted to engage students in career conversations earlier—before they were second-semester seniors—and make them aware of how the institution, part of the State University of New York system, can support their goals after graduating. The solution: an early engagement strategic plan and team targeting first- and second-year students.

After a pilot year, the Fleishman Career Center saw a spike in first-year engagement, rivaling engagement rates of graduating seniors, making students better prepared for internships and careers.

Survey Says

Around 53 percent of students believe career options and interests are important to discuss with their academic adviser, according to [Tyton's report](#).

The National Association of Colleges and Employers [2022 Student Survey](#) found students who use career services, on average, receive more job offers than their peers and are more likely to participate in paid internships. Graduating seniors who used career services received 1.24 job offers on average, and those who did

career preparation was also 3.3 times higher than those who did not use the same services.

What's the need: Following the COVID-19 pandemic and remote instruction, university leaders put a spotlight on first-year student success, explains Kelli K. Smith, assistant vice president for student success at Binghamton.

Deeper early engagement is also a culture shift happening on many campuses around the nation, with employers recruiting students for internships earlier and earlier.

“For our students to be competitive and knowledgeable about those timelines, we need to create that curiosity early and foster opportunities for exploration, relationship and skill-building,” Smith says.

Binghamton leaders also wanted to ensure equity and access within the office. Career centers can be intimidating spaces to students because “they are equated to what they perceive to be really big and often stressful decisions and actions.” Smith says.

Career services staff hoped embedding partnerships around campus and developing messaging around career exploration could help ease fear and anxiety, reducing barriers.

How it works: The early engagement plan is a four-phase approach over two years, with the goal of increasing students’ awareness, exposure, engagement and career planning activity with career services.

For the first year, staff hope to increase awareness of the career center through presenting in “gateway” courses, large 100-level lecture courses or establishing a presence in students spaces on campus. Smith says. Messaging for first-years is

The second year, students are encouraged to take initiative and seek out career development opportunities—such as making an appointment with a career consultant or attending a workshop—ultimately establishing an action plan. An advisory council, the Early Engagement Guiding Group, involves campus partners and career services personnel, who reach out to students who have yet to engage with the center.

“We hope that, by engaging students earlier, we can contribute to the retention and success of Binghamton students,” Smith says.

Lexie Avery, senior associate director of student engagement and career readiness, launched the plan and integrated it into campus, while Brandy Smith, senior associate director, was responsible for data management and tracking.

The impact: During the 2020–21 academic year, first-year engagement at the career center was 28 percent.

After the launch of the engagement strategy—with the exception of a mandatory first-year orientation event—staff saw 55 percent of first-years in 2021–22 and 71 percent of first-years in the 2022–23 year. The 2023 graduating class, in comparison, had a 73 percent engagement rate across their four years at the institution.

During the pilot year, staff noticed some populations were utilizing career services more or less than their peers. Among underrepresented minority students, for example, 64 percent of first-years participated in career services activities—nine percentage points greater than the class average—but only 41 percent of international services engaged with the office.

As a result, staff leveraged campus partners to reach key populations including spring admits, Pell-eligible students, opportunity program participants (EOP, TRIO

“As we continue to pull data monthly, we are able to engage in conversations with partner offices to work on messaging or create programming to target specific population,” Smith says.

The office has also benefited from the additional strategy, earning a place at the table in larger conversations around student success and retention initiatives, increasing the university’s ranking in career placement, and boosting students’ feelings around the career center, Smith adds.

In the future, staff will track usage rates across the Classes of 2025 and 2026 after four years of participation, with hopes of hitting 100 percent.

This story was submitted to us from a reader just like you! [Share your student success initiatives with us here.](#)

Written By

Ashley Mowreader

Copyright © 2024 Inside Higher Ed All rights reserved. |