VCU College-to-Career Blueprint:
Career Readiness through the Disciplines

Three keys to infusing career readiness into the curriculum:

Universities with high performing career readiness programs and strong student outcomes have three characteristics in common:

1 **Organizational culture, staffing and support:**

- Campus and departmental culture actively supports career development, especially at leadership levels.
- Dedicated, collaborative departmental faculty staff members manage and promote internship experiences directly to students, work closely with campus partners, and recruit additional faculty and staff within their department.
- Faculty and academic advisors engage directly in internship opportunity development and employer/alumni relations.

2 **Curriculum integration and alignment:**

- Instructors infuse career information into introductory courses, recruitment events, and upper level courses and capstones.
- They also integrate National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) career readiness competencies into course curricula.
- Professional tracks or concentrations align with high demand, major related career pathways.

3 **Supporting student participation and intended outcomes:**

- Institutions design student centered internship experiences and provide participating employers faculty and students with clear instructions, timelines, learning outcomes, and expectations.
- Students initiate and secure their own internship experiences with support, contact leads, and guidance from faculty, staff, and career services.
- Institutions provide students, especially low income and first generation students, with direct support to engage in internship opportunities.
- Students are required to participate in ongoing reflection about their experience and complete an end-of-internship presentation, paper, or other applied learning activity, which supports their skills development and ability to articulate accomplishments.
- Internship programs integrate assessment and evaluation into their program design, growth, and improvement efforts.

VCU
Career Services
Strategic Enrollment Management
and Student Success

VCU
Relevant, Experiential
and Applied Learning

Ready to enhance career readiness and internship opportunities with your academic department?

Here are **8 key steps** and customizable implementation options for your consideration:

1 **Assess Your Department's Readiness and Interest**
Your department's willingness to engage in a self-study signals to your current and prospective students (as well as employers) your commitment to ensuring that they are ready for the workforce with skills that employers say they find most needed. The following are just a few of the benefits of engaging in a self-assessment as documented by the Quality Assurance Commons, an organization focused on "narrowing the gap between higher education and employment" (https://theqacommons.org/):

- Increased faculty and staff awareness of employability topics and best practices
- Faculty and staff begin to consider employability outcomes in their curricular development
- Inquiry, exploration, and dialogical group engagement inclusive of Career Services and Institutional Research
- Increased equity-mindedness

Elements of a self-assessment can include any or all of the following:
- Presentation to faculty and staff of the data behind the self-study: Why is a self-study needed? Why should faculty and staff in the department be interested in the employability outcomes of their graduates?
- Extensive self-evaluation exercise by multiple program stakeholders
- Employer, stakeholder and student surveys
- Independent reviewer feedback reports
- Action Planning exercise such as a SWOT or gap analysis or departmental strategic planning

Reflection
- What is the specific problem you would like to solve for your department and/or students?
- Additional questions to consider within your department

2 **Assemble Your Career Readiness Evaluation Team**
To get started with moving your initiative forward and ensuring sustainability, you will need to have a team of people to champion the effort, starting with departmental leadership and extending to campus and community partners. Consider the individuals you would need to fulfill the roles below in support of your goals:

- Department Chair
- Faculty Champion(s)
- Career Services Liaison(s)
- Academic Advisor(s)
- Staff Coordinator(s)
- Student Representative(s)
- Alumni/Employer Representative(s)
- VCU REAL Consultant

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Evaluate the Career Readiness Elements Within Your Current Curriculum Requirements
Career readiness is a foundation from which to demonstrate requisite core competencies that broadly prepare college-educated individuals for success in the workplace and lifelong career management. For new college graduates, career readiness is key to ensuring successful entrance into the workforce. Career readiness is the foundation upon which a successful career is launched. For higher education, career readiness provides a framework for addressing career-related goals and outcomes of curricular and extracurricular activities, regardless of the student's field of study.

Consider empowering a subgroup from your Career Readiness Evaluation Team to review your curriculum and consider whether relevant career-readiness content is present and/or could be added.

There are currently eight career readiness competencies, each of which can be demonstrated in a variety of ways.

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness Competencies:
- Career & Self-Development
- Communication
- Critical Thinking
- Equity & Inclusion
- Leadership
- Professionalism
- Teamwork
- Technology

Career Readiness Curriculum Mapping Template
- Sample from VCU Department of Psychology

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Inventory Major-Related Employer and Industry Connections
VCU-specific data can help paint an accurate and compelling picture of where graduates from your department work and have access to job and internship opportunities, creating a warm network of contacts for your students, alumni, faculty, and staff members. Empower a subgroup of your Career Readiness Evaluation Team to utilize the following sources and approaches to compile useable reports and leads specific to your department:

- VCU First Destination Survey outcomes data -- supplied by IRDS and VCU Career Services
- Handshake postings stating specific preference for your major(s) -- supplied by VCU Career Services
- LinkedIn and VCU Link alumni (individuals and organizations) -- supplied by VCU Career Services and/or Alumni Career Programs
- Employer/Alumni Advisory Council (create or expand) -- support available from VCU Career Services
- Inventory employer relationships via current departmental faculty (research, professional networks, personal connections) -- consider a survey, meeting/discussion, or other feedback collection tool
  - Sample Employer and Industry Connections Inventory: VCU Department of Psychology

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Consider Where New Career Exploration Content Could Fit Into Your Curriculum
With career readiness and employer/alumni connections becoming a more clear and visible value for your department, the next step is to proactively infuse career exploration information and activities into one or more of your in-major required courses. There are also a number of ways for this to be accomplished, varying in scope based on interest and commitment level of your individual faculty members. Empower your Career Readiness Evaluation Team to identify and stage changes over time. Ensure that you identify initiatives for which you have adequate staffing to implement well.

Options for course sections to consider:
- **Introductory Course** (maximum student exposure, potential major selection/conversion, slightly less expected)
- **Sophomore or Junior Year Required Course** (more focus on in-major students, relevance to internship and experiential learning application/selection, may or may not relate to specific course focus)
- **Specific Internship or Professional Development Course** (likely later in students' trajectory, more expected and in alignment with course intent, may need course to be created or made required)

Options for delivery method(s) include but are not limited to:
- Pre-Recorded Video -- required assignment, extra credit, or additional resource (Sample)
- Reflection Assignment via major-specific VCU Major Maps and What Can I Do With This Major? Tool -- required or extra credit
- Assignment to Meet with a Career Counselor -- required or extra credit
- Live Faculty-Delivered Module (instructor, Dept. Chair, or other) -- (Sample)
- Live Guest Speaker from VCU Career Services -- introductory, topical, or customized (can also be a "don't cancel class" option if of interest ad hoc)
- Live Alumni or Employer Guest Speaker/Panel -- arranged by VCU Career Services Employer & Experiential Development Team

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Make a Plan to Create or Bolster One or More For-Credit Internship Courses
Investing time and resources into making internships part of your departmental curriculum takes intention and a focus on sustainability. Consider what needs to be built and who needs to be hired before you take this next step, how you can set participating students, faculty, and employers up for success, and how to weave in assessment and data collection at every stage in service of program effectiveness and continuous improvement.

Infrastructure Building
- Faculty Lead/Coordinator(s)
- Staff Lead/Coordinator(s)
- Career-Related Concentration(s)/Track(s)
- Consider whether the internship course(s) will be elective or required

Internship-Readiness Training and Reflection Materials
- Sample: SCHEV VTOP Employer Readiness Toolkit

Assessment Tools (Pre- and Post-)
- Handshake Internship Survey

Support students' applying for internship funding, as needed
- VCU Internship Funding Program
- CHS Experiential Learning Scholarships
- Dean's Undergraduate Research Initiative

Facilitate students' tracking of participation in the REAL Academic Regulation

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Provide Funding for Departmental Faculty/Staff to Join and Participate in Career-Related Professional Association(s)

As you infuse career readiness language and best practices into your curriculum and departmental culture long-term, ideally you will want to have one or more faculty and staff members in your department participate actively in a career-related professional association, at the national, regional, and/or state level. Membership to these organizations will provide access to webinars, networking opportunities, reports, articles, scholarships, awards, employer connections, and more, as well as member-specific pricing for the annual conference and other events and resources.

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)
- Tier Addition to VCU Career Services Membership: Variable Cost (contact the Director of VCU Career Services for information)
- Annual Conference: June/July

Virginia Association of Colleges and Employers (VACE)
- Individual Membership: $75/year
- Annual Conference: April

Southern Association of Colleges and Employers (SoACE)
- Individual Membership: $130/year
- Annual Conference: December

Eastern Association of Colleges and Employers (EACE)

- (Contact the Director of VCU Career Services, for information on adding to campus/group membership)
- Individual Membership: $150/year
- Annual Conference: June/July

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Share Career Readiness Resources and Internship Stories with Current and Prospective Students
- Collecting student and employer testimonials
- Website
- Social Media Posts
- Marketing Collateral -- provide to Admissions, Academic Advisors, Faculty, Alumni, Parents & Families
- VCU Major Maps -- update career information to match your students' recent experiences
- VCU News articles and other publications and presentation opportunities