

2017 MSI Measuring College Value Grantee Meeting

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Indianapolis



The Fantastic Five: Grantee Descriptions

Harris-Stowe State University

Students who enter college with already-established career goals are more likely to achieve workforce readiness while in school — and to complete their degrees. Those who know where they are heading are more motivated to be successful in college, ready for job interviews, and successful employees after graduation.

But many first-generation college students need guided exposure to career possibilities that align with their own skills and interests.

Assisting students in defining a career pathway, starting with the first year in college, helps students establish academic momentum and a positive mindset that are critical to success in college and the workplace.

Harris-Stowe State University will place career awareness and planning at the center of the student experience. First-year students will complete interest inventories and explore career options. Each student will receive coaching in career plan development that includes a mandatory internship. Developing a professional network of potential employers, alumni working in relevant fields, and career coaches will help ensure that graduates have meaningful connections to professional positions. Additionally, all HSSU students will have access to real-time information about jobs and internships.

The program starts with a career plan and builds momentum through engagement with real-world work across the university experience.

Martin University

Students who pursue higher education while working sometimes are called “workers who study.” But it’s more complex than that. Workers who study face a juggling act that often includes family as well as employment and school. Add to the mix the challenges that accompany being a low-income, first-generation student — and, too often in traditional college settings, the result is low graduation rates.

Martin University is shaping the college experience specifically with working students in mind. These students seek degrees that open doors for career success — and they want to quickly gain essential skills in office technologies that can immediately transfer to their current employment and beyond.

But careers aren’t the only motivation for these students. Martin University will engage students in exploring how college also empowers them to create meaningful and fulfilling lives.

Students will engage in life and career planning in both curricular and extracurricular aspects of their first year of college, shaping their lives on the values and outcomes they consider to be essential. They will focus on soft skills and technological literacy in addition to finances, physical and mental health, community and purpose.

St. Thomas University

College grades are an important indicator of subject mastery, but employers also want evidence that graduates can apply that knowledge to real-world settings. Internships and experiential education are promising practices. In traditional education formats, however, these practices also may add time and expense to degree completion — and that can be problematic, especially for nontraditional students.

The challenge is to make “authentic assignments” and engagement with potential employers part of the curriculum, so students don’t face additional time requirements or cost.

St. Thomas University is reforming its curriculum to include a course in analytics as well as in-class application of those skills to address community problems. With a plan that first focuses on a cohort of second-year students pursuing bachelor’s of business administration degrees in management, the effort aims to ensure that graduates have applied classroom learning to real-world scenarios.

These curricular reform efforts, coupled with university incentives for graduating in four years and work-study opportunities, will help to boost the number of students who are graduating in four years with a competitive advantage in gaining employment.

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

All university graduates are expected to communicate effectively. This communication is particularly vital for engineering graduates, who face unique challenges in conveying complex scientific and technical information to those who do not have technical expertise — including potential employers.

Engineers who cannot adapt their communication to different audiences can face hurdles to securing their first jobs, being effective in the workplace, and earning promotions.

“Communicating STEM” will engage Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi mechanical engineering students in theater improvisation techniques and other communication skill-building instruction. The strategy starts with a first-year learning community of mechanical engineering students and features a newly designed communication course adjusted to their needs.

Students will advance through direct engagement with successful engineering professionals and workplaces. They will learn about employer expectations through plant tours and work with potential employers.

Other activities for the students include mock interviews, resume development, and networking opportunities. All the efforts aim to increase the value of a mechanical engineering degree by adding communication skills to those gained through that program.

The goals for students include a shortened time to first employment after graduation, improved employer ratings of employees, and enhanced long-term opportunities for career advancement.

Wiley College

For first-generation college students, the concept of earning a bachelor's degree can seem distant and abstract. Too many lose momentum and focus along the way. But long-term difficult goals become easier to tackle when addressed as a series of milestones that reward short-term progress and motivate individuals to stay on course.

Wiley College will use the concept of "scaffolding badges" and certificates as milestones to document skill achievement and progress along the course of working toward a bachelor's degree. As students collect these certifications, they'll see tangible evidence of their progress and critical reminders of the links between learning and career skills.

Focusing on accounting and computer information systems students, Wiley College's initiative also will emphasize the importance of building professional networks and participation in apprenticeships and internships.

The desired result: Wiley College graduates who have degrees enhanced by certificates and real-world experience that employers are seeking in those they hire.