

Strategic Opportunity Assessment

“Enhancing Career Readiness in the UO College of Arts and Sciences”

PREPARED BY Paré Consulting, LLC

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(Note: Summary below is excerpted from April 2024 Paré Consulting, LLC Assessment)

CAS Career Elevation Report Executive Summary

The College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) at the University of Oregon (UO) has an exciting opportunity to refine the way it prepares students for post-graduate success by amplifying the vital role of a liberal arts and sciences education in preparing students for meaningful careers. A transformative effort in career services for both the campus and CAS has the potential to elevate the institution's value proposition, making a compelling case for investment to prospective and current students, their families, and the citizens of Oregon.

GOALS FOR ENHANCING ARTS AND SCIENCES STUDENTS’ CAREER READINESS

CAS aspires to be a national leader in career preparation, instilling students with the ability to:

- Communicate their knowledge and skills.
- Identify paths to positive global impact.
- Prepare for diverse career possibilities.
- Engage in high-impact experiential learning.

This report explores strategies for achieving these outcomes at scale while respecting resource limitations. The strategies outlined include partnering with faculty to embed career readiness, skill-building, and experiential learning in academic programs; engaging students early; and creating new connections to resources—all while striking a balance between centralized and discipline-specific efforts.

NATIONAL TRENDS IN LIBERAL ARTS CAREER PREPARATION

Attacks on liberal education and higher education over the last decade have impacted students’ enrollment choices, driving down enrollment in humanities and social sciences

majors downward. In light of the urgency surrounding enrollment, retention, and the evolving nature of the job market, it's opportune for the College of Arts and Sciences to reevaluate its approach to career preparation.

Missed opportunities with career services: Liberal arts students, driven by curiosity and purpose, often delay engaging with career preparation until later in their college journey. As a result, they fail to make the connection between their majors and career opportunities; do not learn which skills they are developing through their course of study; and struggle on the internship and job market.

Employer perspectives on the liberal arts and sciences: Many of the skills employers consider crucial for strong job candidates are developed through an LAS education. To build a workforce capable of innovating in response to rapid change, employers look for the broad education and cross-cutting skills that are the hallmark traits of a liberal arts degree—and they may be willing to pay more for them.

Academic preparation for the future of work: While employers highly value the skills developed through a liberal arts education, they perceive a gap in students' preparedness to use these skills at work, underscoring the need for institutions to align their curriculum to the evolving demands of the workplace. To close this gap, institutions can work to translate the academic skills students are learning and relate them to the needs of employers while also strengthening the LAS curriculum with in-demand skills and technical skill development.

The crucial role of experiential learning and internships: Internships are key to preparing students for full-time employment after graduation, yet UO student participation lags national trends. As long as these high-value career readiness opportunities remain optional, UO will miss these vulnerable populations.

Return on investment for liberal arts and sciences graduates: Liberal arts graduates benefit from durable skills that equip them for success in a dynamic job market, fostering long-term career resilience, personal fulfillment, and societal impact. As such, the return on investment of an LAS education transcends immediate financial gains, underscoring its enduring value in shaping well-rounded individuals poised to thrive in an ever-evolving world.

ANALYSIS OF CURRENT CAS SITUATION

Through interviews with approximately 80 faculty and staff at various leadership levels from across CAS and campus, as well as one group of current undergraduate students and

one group of graduate students, consultant Rebekah Paré identified several key opportunities and challenges for CAS.

Opportunities

Prioritizing career readiness, CAS has a number of strengths on which it can build, including:

- A well-defined vision of success for career readiness with clearly articulated outcomes.
- Student-focused leaders who clearly understand the current challenges and opportunities in developing students' career readiness.
- Strong departmental support for career readiness.
- Successful models for experiential learning.
- The CAS career course, which recently moved from a department to a college-wide offering.

Challenges

CAS also faces complex and multifaceted challenges in its efforts to support career readiness for its students, including:

- Lack of CAS identity and value proposition.
- Lack of early career development support.
- Decentralization and lack of centralized support.
- Considerable variation in the availability of career support across departments, leading to unequal levels of assistance for students.
- Mixed messaging and lack of awareness of career services among students.
- Core education curriculum misaligned with employers' needs.
- Lack of faculty engagement and buy-in.

Addressing these challenges will require a concerted effort from faculty, staff, and administrators to improve resources, communication, and coordination across the college.

BUILDING A TRANSFORMATIVE MODEL TO SUPPORT ARTS AND SCIENCES STUDENTS

Through strategic collaboration and a commitment to continuous improvement, UO aims to create a student-centered ecosystem that empowers every student to flourish academically, personally, and professionally. CAS can capitalize on these efforts and ready students for working with the career center in more depth on industry and occupation-specific preparation.

To guide CAS in establishing itself as a premier institution for career preparation among both graduate and undergraduate students, the consultant, Rebekah Paré offers recommendations for crafting a dynamic liberal arts and sciences career readiness framework. The following recommendations build from campus-wide recommendations, leading to a more CAS-centric career development experience that will enable the college to celebrate the liberal arts and sciences and prepare students with the life skills to capitalize on their education and experiences.

The recommendations are organized into three key pillars:

1. **Develop and implement an early career engagement strategy:** CAS will benefit from a college-wide career engagement strategy that supports students during their early career development phases and prepares them to transition to the Career Communities in the new career center. Focusing on the early stages of career development for college students, particularly addressing the questions: "who am I?" and "where am I going?" is crucial for fostering self-awareness, exploration, and goal setting.
2. **Engage and support faculty and staff as career readiness advocates:** Engaging and supporting CAS faculty and staff as career readiness advocates is essential for fostering a community of support that empowers students to navigate their career journeys successfully. By clarifying roles, equipping faculty and staff with the necessary resources, and incentivizing their participation, CAS can create a cohesive ecosystem where everyone plays a vital role in preparing students for their professional futures.
3. **Amplify career readiness efforts through strategic marketing and communications:** A career readiness initiative serves as a powerful catalyst for fostering identity and unity within the CAS community, harnessing the collective commitment to student success and the transformative potential of a CAS degree. Through strategic marketing and communications efforts, CAS can amplify the impact of the initiative, reaching stakeholders both within and beyond the community to showcase the value of an LAS degree and the transformative opportunities it provides.

Following these recommendations should have a profound impact on CAS, enhancing student success, strengthening faculty and staff engagement, and improving CAS's reputation and alumni engagement efforts, positioning CAS as a leading institution for

career preparation and empowering students to thrive academically, personally, and professionally.

Editor's note: CAS will convene a working group in fall 2024 to review the report and provide recommendations for implementation.