

Foundational Skills Collaborative: Creating the Liberal Arts Edge

Credo Education is developing a foundational skills collaborative to bring together liberal arts colleges and employers focused on solving the foundational skills crisis. Credo's unique approach to the college to career transition focuses on helping students build intentionality around foundational skills, improve knowledge transfer from courses to the world of work, and develop a personal skills narrative for employer interactions.

Foundational Skills Crisis

The foundational skills crisis is real. According to the AAC&U, **91% of employers state that a candidate's ability to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major**, but only 30% believe graduates have sufficient skills in these areas.¹

This foundational skills crisis has consequences for both students and institutions. Since 1990, **29% of all routine jobs ("rule-based" jobs with limited tasks) were lost from the US economy**, meaning graduates without critical thinking and related skills have much weaker job prospects.² The crisis is also segregating not-for-profit colleges and universities into winners and losers based on quality factors, including return on investment, student engagement, and academic resources.³

Credo Education's research shows that more than 9 out of 10 campuses recognize there is a foundational skills crisis and agree that student career readiness directly impacts recruitment, retention, and student success. However, only 1 in 10 are successfully making the organizational transitions needed to embed career readiness across the student experience.⁴ The impact of the foundational skills crisis is most acute for liberal arts colleges. The breadth of a liberal arts education should be an advantage in the early career transition⁵ but many liberal arts students are unaware of how to communicate the value of their education or how to tell their "career readiness story."

Signaling the Liberal Arts Edge

Over the last two years, Credo Education has conducted independent work and research with more than 100 campuses on their foundational skills strategies and with a dozen employer partners on improving the college to internship and first job transition. These two streams of work have led Credo Education to a unique approach to the college to career transition focused on employer signaling.

¹ Association of American Colleges and Universities and Hart Research Associates. (2015). *Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success Selected Findings from Online Surveys of Employers and College Students Conducted on Behalf of the Association of American Colleges & Universities*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2015employerstudentsurvey.pdf>

² Siu, H. and Jaimovich, N. (2015, April 8) Jobless Recoveries. Retrieved from: <http://www.thirdway.org/report/jobless-recoveries>

³ Belkin, Douglas. (2018, February 22). "U.S. Colleges Are Separating Into Winners and Losers". *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/after-decades-of-growth-colleges-find-its-survival-of-the-fittest-1519209001>

⁴ Credo Education. May 2018. *Campus Response to Foundational Skills Crisis*.

⁵ Sentz, Rob. (2016, Oct). What Can You Do With That (Useless) Liberal Arts Degree? A Lot More Than You Think. *Forbes*. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/emsi/2016/10/19/what-can-you-do-with-that-useless-liberal-arts-degree/#208b0b4b41b8>



Unlike resume, internship, or e-portfolio based approaches to job matching which focus on point-in-time experiences or work product, Credo's employer signaling approach focuses on building ***student intentionality*** around developing career skills, organizing student job or internship searches around ***personal career skills narratives***, and leveraging ***faculty, staff, and peer mentors*** to accelerate student activation.

A Foundational Skills Collaborative

Credo Education is developing a Foundational Skills Collaborative with institutions nationally to build a single, integrated employer signaling workflow. The specific goals of the collaborative include:

- Help ***liberal arts campuses*** connect their programming to career readiness in order to increase recruitment, retention, and relevance to employers, students, and parents
- Help ***employers*** build a deeper hiring pipeline of liberal arts students and increase visibility on the connection between liberal arts skills and career readiness
- Create a capture, connect and reflect process across high impact learning experiences to build ***liberal arts students'*** intentionality towards career skills readiness
- Identify strategies for teaching ***liberal arts students*** how to transfer knowledge from coursework to real-world experiences and signal achievements to employers through career readiness narratives

Credo is looking for campus and employer partners who are committed to solving the foundational skills crisis through development of an employer signaling workflow which links college programming to internships and early career opportunities. The collaborative's work will be carried out through an employer research project and a series of in-person and virtual meetings in the later half of 2018.

Deliverables and Expectations

Campus partners

- A demonstrated commitment to recruiting focused on a liberal arts-career skills blend and an interest in deepening messaging around a "liberal arts edge"
- A focus on improving retention and persistence by explicitly linking campus programming to career readiness and student intentionality around foundational skills
- A commitment to deploying employer signaling (including a capture, connect, reflect process and faculty, staff, or peer mentoring) via Credo's workflow or an existing campus process
- An ability to make 4-5 introductions to employers from the campus' connections in order to rapidly build an employer group which will drive the Liberal Arts Edge initiative forward

Employer partners

- A demonstrated commitment to recruiting from liberal arts campuses and interest in optimizing existing college recruitment processes
- An interest in investing staff time and budget resources in the development of an improved liberal arts student recruiting pipeline
- An existing approach to using employer signaling and student career skills narratives in the college recruiting process