Creighton University Strategic Planning


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Introduction

On balance, Creighton University is preparing its students quite well for the world of work after graduation and for graduate and professional school acceptance, for those that choose that option. The following will be a series of opinions, some based on labor market facts and some based on anecdotal evidence, which can be used to fine-tune how we are preparing our students for the employment world beyond Creighton University.

The following topical areas will be discussed with regard to how we as a university may want to improve how we prepare students for the employment world. In no way should these comments be construed as critical – but rather as a means to improve a product (our graduates) that is already deemed to be of a very high quality by the employers that hire our students.

Additional labor market data, employment information and placement statistics of our graduates are available from the Career Center upon request.

Topic #1: Experiential Education – Volunteer Experiences, Shadowing Programs and Internships

Exploring different career fields and occupational areas is accomplished in a variety of ways throughout high school and college. Incorporating substantive experiences outside the classroom in as many configurations as possible will assist more students with making better choices about their major, minor and graduate school plans in the long run. There is one very basic, but very important thing that happens when students get exposure to different professionals and occupational areas while they are in school: They either get more interested or less interested in that type of work; it never is a neutral experience. This is why doing informational interviews, shadowing programs and volunteering in various roles can be so valuable to undergraduates.

Further, completing at least one substantive internship over the course of the undergraduate years may be the single most significant accomplishment that a student can do to improve their marketability for employment after graduation. And this is the case for students in every major – not just those that are pursuing employment in the corporate environment. In some cases, getting internship experience may even be more important than GPA.

Why is this so important for students and employers? Several reasons:

1. Substantive experience outside the classroom in an employment environment where the student has some initial interest provides very practical exposure to what the environment is truly like. Large numbers of students have a misguided view of what a particular field actually requires on a day-to-day basis. Doing an internship for a summer or part-time, during the school year can be very enlightening.

2. In fact, some students who complete substantive internships or experiences at an early point in their academic career actually use that experience to change their majors, add minors or otherwise fine-tune the academic choices they make. This is a great argument for exposing students to internships and experiences outside the classroom as early as possible.
3. Students even benefit financially from completing substantive internships. Some salary survey data indicates that students that complete at least one internship or co-op experience are more likely to receive higher initial offers than students that don’t have related experience on their resumes.

4. Employers that interview students with internship or volunteer experience in the field have much more confidence that the student will be engaged and will stay in the position longer. The most common reason recent graduates leave their entry-level positions is not a lack of competence; it is a mismatch with what they thought the job, position or industry was going to be like. Employers spend $5000 - $7000 per hire for college graduates and that doesn’t even include the training costs in the first 6 months. Most employers don’t expect college graduates to actually earn their salary until the second year on the job. So, if the student leaves before that, the employer has lost that battle. Employers, therefore, put a lot more stock in hiring graduates that have some related experience; not because they are necessarily going to perform better, but because they are more likely to stay in the position longer.

Recommendation: Consider making every attempt to build experiential experiences (internships/volunteer programs/shadowing experiences) into curriculum across all undergraduate colleges. Integrate multiple attempts at this throughout all four years of the undergraduate experience to allow students to “test the waters” on multiple levels while they are at Creighton.

Note: Shadowing experiences are part of the long-term plans for the sophomore year portion of the Ratio Studiorum Program.

**Topic #2 – Graduate and Professional School Preparation at Creighton**

As most everyone with even a mild appreciation for the institution knows, Creighton does an excellent job and has a great reputation for preparing students for graduate and professional school. This is particularly true in the College of Arts and Sciences, but not exclusively. The College of Business Administration sends more students directly into graduate and professional school than most other comparable business schools.

More than 60% of the College of Arts and Sciences seniors plan to pursue graduate or professional school. And, this percentage is even greater when including the students in CCAS that go on to OT, PT and Pharmacy School after sophomore year.

From a career office perspective, while this is admirable, we may want to consider that this may not be in the best interest of every one of the students that choose this option. Because so many students choose advanced study right away, or at least come to Creighton for the express purpose of graduate/professional school preparation, this tends to put pressure on those students that don’t have that as a goal. In other words, if you are a CCAS undergrad and you don’t have the goal of pursuing advanced study when you come to Creighton, you probably will be convinced that you should after your first semester.
So, what are we doing to provide students that think they need to pursue grad/professional school with some other options? What are we doing to actively work with those students and educate them that there are a multitude of options for them and that graduate school isn’t the only option? And, what are we doing for those students that don’t get accepted to their professional or graduate school of choice?

Recommendations:
1) Work to develop programs and classroom experiences that profile successful alumni with just undergraduate degrees.
2) Encourage students, particularly in the Professional Division of CCAS (Education, Social Work, Journalism, Communication Studies and Computer Science) to be much more actively engaged in the opportunities provided at the Career Center. (This includes internships for undergraduates as well as options for seniors preparing to graduate.)
3) Provide a venue for other CCAS majors who think they HAVE to pursue graduate school with other options as well so that if they choose grad school, it’s for the right reasons.
4) Educate ALL undergraduates that graduate school is always an option and in some disciplines it is preferable to get some work experience prior to pursuing a graduate or professional degree.

There is also some ethics involved in this particular issue. Many of our undergraduates are going through graduation with 30K, 40K and 50K in student loans. We have somewhat of an obligation to educate students about not only getting some work experience and building their resumes before graduate school, but also paying some student loans before pursuing advanced study. They need to be educated that going into debt even further right away after undergraduate school may not be in their best interest.

Recommendations:
1. Develop a culture at Creighton University that provides a broader exposure to options for non-business majors that includes advanced study as well as professional employment opportunities immediately after the undergraduate degree. Work to infuse more of these options at an earlier point particularly for candidates that likely won't get into professional school.

**Topic #3 – Labor Market Needs and Capitalizing on Demand in the Undergraduate Colleges at Creighton**

The following are some suggestions based strictly on demand for certain academic programs by employers that hire undergraduates. Clearly, the extent to which we as an institution can contribute to this demand is a function of student interest, faculty availability and admission criteria. The following is just a statement of market conditions as of 2006.

1) Within the last 5 years, there has been a precipitous drop in enrollment of Computer Science and MIS graduates in universities around the country. This is attributed in the labor market press to three factors: a) the perception after the dot.com bubble that technical graduates were no longer in demand b) the perception that the “off-shoring” of
computer personnel to other countries will continue to erode the demand in the US for CS/MIS graduates. c) Computer Science and MIS majors are considered to be too difficult by some students particularly if the demand is soft and they aren’t going to be guaranteed a job.

According to most placement centers around the country, there is still a healthy demand for computer and technical graduates and there simply aren’t enough graduates for the number of positions that exist. This is the case with the Career Center at Creighton as well. We routinely have to tell employers that we simply don’t graduate enough CS/MIS majors and that most of them have positions by the time they graduate.

The labor market is telling us that we could place 2-3 times as many graduates as we currently produce each and every year. This is the case with internships as well with many employers sending us opportunities that we simply can’t fill because of a lack of qualified candidates.

2) Human resources, as an occupation, has developed into a field very much in demand as more and more employers are challenged with finding and retaining good quality employees in a job market that has been quite healthy for a number of years.

Creighton produces a small number of graduates with an interest in this field and could produce more graduates with this interest by collaborating more effectively across disciplines. Human Resources is a track in the Management major in COBA; it is a focus as part of the Communication Studies Dept. in CCAS; and there also is a specialized track in Psychology as well. These departments would be well advised to collaborate and present their graduates to the employment world more cohesively thereby benefiting all programs and students more effectively.

3) The teaching fields, in almost all disciplines, are predicted by the Department of Labor to have a large demand for new teachers well into the future. The need for Math and Science teachers and Special Education teachers has been well documented; there will continue to be a demand in all areas well into the future.

The numbers of Elementary Education majors and students getting certified to teach secondary school could be increased to meet more of this demand. And, a more robust certification program for recent alums not certified to teach might be a good investment. The MAGIS program is an alternative certification program for secondary education certification, but a broader program to include more students with undergraduate degrees would make some sense. Enrolling more students in masters degrees in Education that provides certification for those with previous undergraduate degrees should also be considered.

4) Students with Accounting degrees from Creighton have been enjoying a very healthy labor market over the past several years and will continue to well into the future. However, there is one challenge that the Accounting program needs to consider.
Several years ago, most states adopted the recommendation from the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) to require Accounting majors to accumulate 150 credit hours before sitting for the CPA exam. The theory behind this was to simply provide undergraduate accounting students with more coursework and another year of academic experience before starting in the profession. Many of our competitors have instituted a 5 year accounting program to accommodate this requirement which includes the option of a full-time spring internship experience with a public accounting firm as part of that 5 year program.

Many firms have embraced this because their real need for assistance from interns is during the very busy spring tax season. Our accounting students do not do full-time spring internships because the culture here at Creighton is to finish in four years and to do whatever is needed during summer school, etc. to accumulate 150 credit hours. Our students do complete internships, but they tend to be part-time during the school year or during the summer when the firms don’t need them as much.

This structure here at Creighton will eventually cause our students to be at a competitive disadvantage when being compared to students from schools that have five year programs. Our accounting students are currently still getting good positions, but we should consider implementing a five year program in Accounting eventually – at least for students to choose if they wish. Dean Hendrickson, in the College of Business, is aware of this issue and is in favor of ultimately building a five year program that would also give the Accounting student an MBA in addition to their undergraduate degree.

5) The greater Omaha business and corporate community is very interested in our students. Even students that are not in the College of Business are well-regarded after interviewing for corporate and business positions. In point of fact, we listed more than 20,000 positions on Creighton CareerTRAK (Career Center website) last year – this is more than 5 positions for each and every undergraduate student at Creighton. Many of these positions were internships and part-time experiences that could have been filled with Creighton undergraduates (see Topic #1 above.)

Part of this local demand is determined by geography. Creighton is the only traditional institution with a large number of undergraduates that is in very close proximity to the Omaha business community. (Many positions are truly within walking distance.) While UNO is close, a good percentage of those students are older students that are working and going to school already; they are not available in large numbers for serious internship commitments. UNL, while very large, can only provide internship candidates for summer experiences because 50 minutes is simply too far of a commute for most UNL undergraduates.

So, Creighton has a very healthy business community that wants to hire more of our undergraduates; we just need to capitalize on this demand by educating our students about how valuable these positions can be. There are even a large number of non-profit and government sector employers that are interested in Creighton undergraduates for intern
positions in Omaha. More students then, even beyond the College of Business, need to consider doing internships in Omaha as part of their undergraduate experience at Creighton.

(As an aside, the Career Center is working very aggressively with Enrollment Management to capitalize on and market the healthy business and internship market to prospective students and parents.)

**Topic #4 – Leadership and Extra-curricular Involvement by Creighton University Undergraduate Students**

Creighton, like many comparable private institutions, does an excellent job of engaging its undergraduates in a variety of leadership and extra-curricular programs. While this is admirable, many employers of college graduates would like to see resumes balanced with more part-time jobs and internships *off-campus* in addition to leadership experiences on-campus.

Many Creighton students are very involved with clubs, activities, student government, residence hall positions and the like, but need to consider building their resumes with more job and internship activities.

Recommendation: Encourage off-campus leadership experiences in addition to on-campus leadership opportunities. (See Topic #1)