The Council of Independent Colleges

Creating **Tomorrow's Institutions**, Together

2026 Institute for Chief Academic Officers with Chief Advancement, Enrollment, Financial, and Marketing Communication Officers

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From Classroom to Calling

Scalable Strategies for Embedding Career Readiness, Vocation, and Workforce Partnerships Across the Student Experience



Presenters

- Agnes Caldwell, Executive Vice President and Dean of Academic Affairs, Defiance College (OH)
- Marisa Greer, Vice President of Academic Affairs, University of Pikeville (KY)
- Chair: Monique Taylor, Provost & Chief Academic Officer, Champlain College (VT)

Presentation Plan

- Institutional introductions
- Career Readiness Strategies
- Tips for Embedding Career Readiness Models
- Q & A

Our Two Institutions

Defiance College

- Rural northwest Ohio
- 700 full-time undergraduates
- Two graduate programs (MBA and MAE)

University of Pikeville

- Rural eastern Kentucky
- 1,200 undergraduates; total student population 3,030
- Includes three professional medical colleges (Osteopathic Medicine, Optometry, Dentistry)

Career Readiness at Defiance College

Jacket Journey

(Required, year-round, annually evaluated)

- Jacket Points
- Jacket Days
- Jacket Summit

Addresses four concerns about career readiness in higher education:

- The senior visit problem: it's optional
- The disconnect problem: attending to what industry needs
- The articulation problem: Students are not prepared
- The disappointment: graduates do not feel prepared for their first professional position

Meeting and Exceeding Expectations

Finding #1: Students "buy into" Jacket Days and are engaged in their future career aspirations

- 94% actively participate over the past 4 years, including 84% completing J-Days requirements for GEN sections
- 99% of seniors completed financial literacy exit counseling either during Jacket Days or with Institute staff during 2025–26
- 74% completed the requirements to earn the Suitable App badge for GEN courses during AY 2025–26

Finding #2: Alumni are supporting Jacket Days

- Sessions offered during Jacket Days have grown from 75 to 128 over the past four years
- 53% of sessions in 2026 were offered by DC alums

Meeting and Exceeding Expectations

Finding #3

95% Average job and graduate school placement

Finding #4 Jacket Journey is helping us realize our job and grad school placement rate over the past 5 years.

- Outside of Jacket Days, staff held 295 individual meetings with students regarding career readiness during AY 2025-26
- Campus offices offered 106 workshops on career readiness during AY 25-26 outside of Jacket Days.
- The Institute offered 23 financial literacy workshops outside of Jacket Days.

Intentional and Incremental

Defiance College's strategy is driven by two pillars:

Intentional outcomes by year

Incremental in implementation



When and how did we do it?

2019-2020
Implemented
January 2021
(yes, during
COVID-19)

- Faculty involvement via committee
- Dinner and Dialogue sessions
  - Collaborative
  - Engaging
  - Outcomes driven
  - Recommendations from D and D to Divisions and Full Faculty
    - 1 credit hour course each spring (8 week only)
    - Start Spring term with this course



The Pikeville Story

We offered internships.

But were students actually experiencing them?

OPPORTUNITY → PARTICIPATION → IMPACT

- Who participates?
- Who doesn’t?
- Why, or why not?
- What happens when access isn't equal?

The Big Question:

How do we move from

"Of course, we offer internships" . . .

to

"Internships are part of how we educate students"

Our starting point

Where the University of Pikeville began:

- What already existed?
- What wasn't working?
- Who was participating?
- Where were the gaps?
- What did students experience?

From idea to infrastructure

Employer partnerships	Student outreach	Faculty engagement
Advising	Funding	Application/support
Academic integration	Tracking & data	Reflection & assessment

What surprised us? The honest lessons:

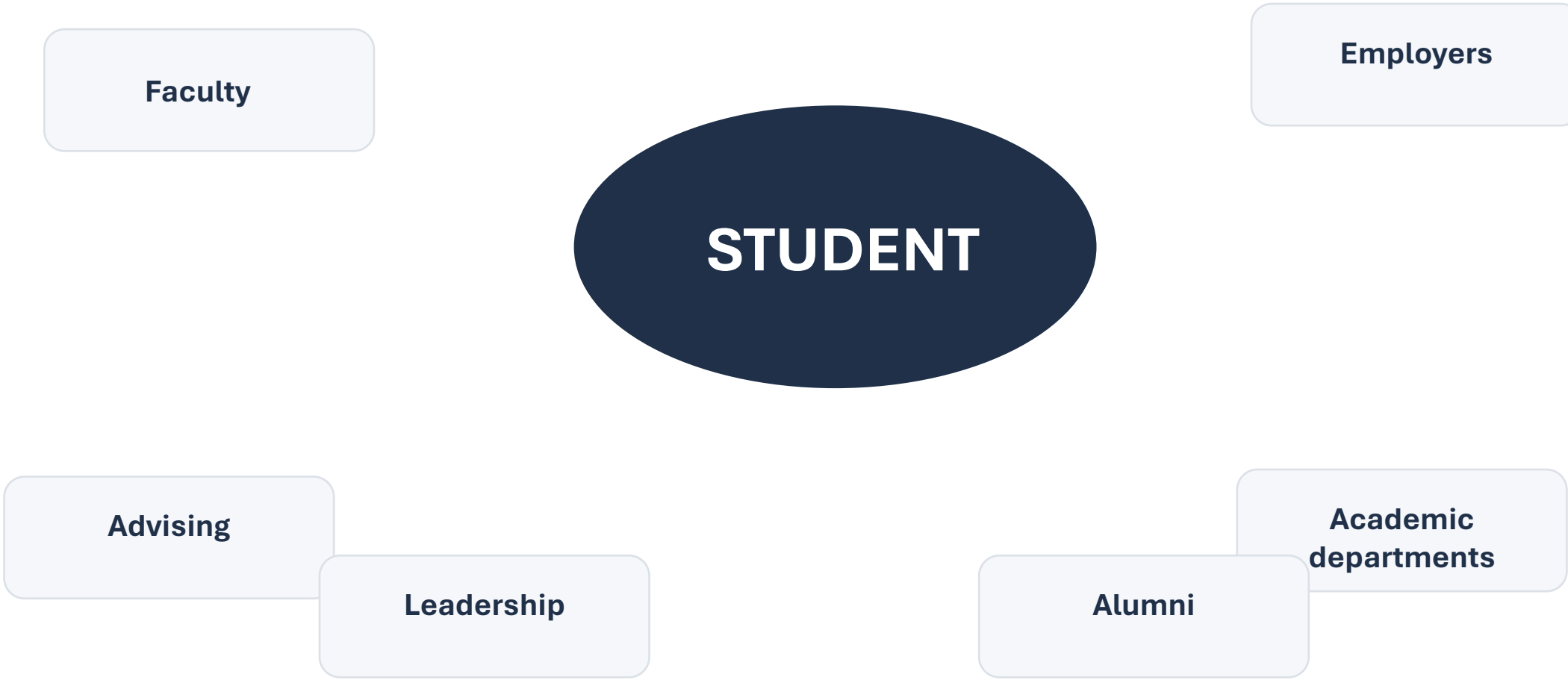
We thought...

- Students needed more opportunities.
- Employers were the biggest challenge.
- Funding would solve access.

We learned...

- Students often needed confidence and support.
- Internal coordination mattered enormously.
- Funding was only one piece.

The Center for Career, Vocation and Leadership ecosystem



If we were starting again tomorrow…

1. Start with the institutional problem.
2. Build infrastructure—not just opportunity.
3. Get academic leadership involved early.
4. Measure participation and outcomes.
5. **Start before the model is perfect.**

Q&A



Thank you for attending this session!

Contact us:

Agnes Caldwell, Defiance College

acaldwell@defiance.edu

Marisa Greer, U of Pikeville

marisagreer@upike.edu

