

Understand, Align, and Partner So That Students Succeed and Employers Excel

By Elliot Felix

As the education and employment landscape rapidly evolves, students often face a fragmented and uncertain path from college to career. A white paper by student success expert [Elliot Felix](#), developed in collaboration with [Ellucian](#), provides a roadmap to better connect learning with labor market outcomes.

Drawing on interviews and insights from higher education and workforce leaders, the paper outlines six strategies to help students succeed and employers thrive. It showcases how innovative institutions, businesses, and states are already putting these strategies into action.

The paper underscores technology's vital role in aligning programs, understanding evolving needs, and guiding students with real-time insights.

Key strategies emphasized include:

Understand This Disruptive Moment in Higher Education

Shifting demographics, declining trust, and disruptive technologies like AI are forcing institutions to evolve into flexible, skills-based ecosystems.

Identify and Quantify Student and Employer Needs

Labor market data, alumni feedback, and employer advisory boards are essential for aligning programs with evolving expectations.



Find ways to get data that goes past graduation because this isn't the traditional way universities have looked at outcomes... What are alumni doing? What do they wish they had learned?"

– Catherine Wehlburg, President
Athens State University

Align Curriculum and Competencies to Employer Needs

Embedding durable and technical skills into academic and co-curricular experiences ensures career development is central to learning.

Develop Faculty to Deliver Aligned Curricula

Investing in professional development enables faculty to integrate career readiness into teaching and drive student success.

Partner with Companies in Your Community

Employer and alumni partnerships create feedback loops, co-designed curricula, and real-world learning opportunities.

Integrate Work Experience Within Learning

Internships, company-led course projects, and proactive career services embed practical experience throughout students' education.



If institutions want better career outcomes, they must get students out of classrooms and into the workplace to supplement career preparedness.”

– J. Noah Brown, Formerly Senior Advisor within the US Department of Education and Past President, Association of Community College Trustees

[Read the Full Report](#)

Roundtable and Interview Participants

The whitepaper reflects insights from leaders across higher education and workforce development, including:

- **J. Noah Brown:** Formerly Senior Advisor within the US Department of Education and Past President, Association of Community College Trustees
- **Tom Ellett:** Chief Experience Officer, Quinnipiac University
- **Elliot Felix (Facilitator):** Higher Education Advisory Practice Lead at Buro Happold and author of The Connected College: Leadership Strategies for Student Success
- **Sukhwant Jhaj:** Vice Provost for Academic Innovation and Student Achievement and Dean of University College, Arizona State University
- **Joshua Kahn:** Associate Director of Research and Public Policy, National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE)
- **Deborah Keyek-Franssen:** Associate Vice Provost for UO Online and Continuing and Professional Education, University of Oregon
- **Jeannie Kim:** President, Santiago Canyon College
- **Julia Michaels:** Director of Development and Strategic Partnerships, Association for Undergraduate Education at Research Universities (UERU)
- **Liesl Riddle:** Dean of the College of Professional Studies, George Washington University
- **Eric Skipper:** Former Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of South Carolina Beaufort
- **Maggie Tomas:** Executive Director of the Business Career Center & Graduate Coaching, University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management
- **Catherine Wehlburg:** President, Athens State University



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