

Reframing Student Employment as Professional Development

From “student worker” to workforce-ready professional

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Consider recent graduates

What do they seem to lack
when entering the
workplace?

The Post-Grad Gap

One of the most powerful professional development spaces on campus will no longer be treated as a timecard.

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Post-Grad Gap

65%

EMPLOYERS CITE SOFT SKILLS GAP

Communication, active listening, and resilience are the most frequently missed competencies in new hires.

85%

STUDENTS SEEKING PREPARATION

Students wish their college experiences better prepared them for the complexities of the modern workplace.



Post-Grad Gap

Important Experiential Skills:

- Accountability
- Ethical Conduct
- Communication
- Leadership
- Emotional Intelligence

How can we bridge the gap between academic and experiential development?

Types of Professional Development

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Academic vs. Experiential Development

DEVELOPMENT TYPE	ACADEMIC FOCUS	EXPERIENTIAL FOCUS
Primary Source	Structured Coursework	Student Employment & Internships
Knowledge Base	Theoretical & Conceptual Knowledge	Applied Peer Mentoring and Tutoring
Learning Model	Instructor Led & Curriculum Driven	Real-Time Problem Solving
Skill Application	Exam & Project Focused	Professional Communication & Accountability

The background of the slide is a photograph of a university campus, likely Glenville State University, with a semi-transparent blue overlay. The image shows several multi-story buildings, trees, and a clear sky. The text is centered and white, providing a high-contrast look against the blue background.

West Virginia Career Colloaborative -ARC Grant

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WVCC

- ❑ The West Virginia Career Collaborative (WVCC) is a multi-lateral initiative led team formed by Fairmont State University in partnership with Glenville State University.
- ❑ Our mission is to strengthen the STEM workforce pipeline across North Central West Virginia by dismantling regional barriers and forging connections between industry, faculty, and students.
- ❑ We build intentional mechanisms for productive collaborative work, ensuring students are the central voice in workforce co-creation.



Expanded Career Readiness

Pioneer Support Synergy

- ❑ Strategic integration with the GSU Pioneer Support team and STEM faculty ensuring a holistic approach to student development.
- ❑ Facilitate in class career skills presentation's & work alongside faculty to bring industry leaders in for career panel days.

Industry Access & Industry Database

- ❑ Facilitate Introductions between Students, Faculty and Industry personnel.
- ❑ Direct access to centralized WVCC internship databases, connecting GSU students to opportunities across the state

Job Awareness & Placement Assistance

- ❑ One-on-one support for resume building, interview prep, and direct placement into STEM-affiliated careers.
- ❑ Targeted outreach for "hidden" roles in WV

Pioneer Mentor Program

Transforming and improving the student worker experience into a more useful internship environment.

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Pioneer Mentor Program

Feature	The Previous Approach	The Advancement Model
Core Philosophy	Segmented Roles: Specialized tasks for specific student groups.	All Student Workers are Peer Mentors: A unified, leadership-focused identity.
Front-Facing Service	Administrative Focus: Greeting, phone-triage, and custodial duties.	Resource-Driven: Welcome and resource desk, resource referrals, and university process tutoring.
Academic Support	Isolated Tutoring: Content-specific knowledge provided at multiple campus locations.	Holistic Mentoring: Integrated peer tutoring, outreach, and content-specific support.
Operations	Manual Management: Equipment-loans and addressing academic questions.	Strategic Management: Facility management, outreach, and engagement tracking.



The Previous Approach

Student Workers

Front Desk Workers

- Custodial
- Phone-triage
- Greeting
- Equipment-loans

Tutors

- Content-specific knowledge
- Address academic questions
- Multiple locations across campus



The Advancement Model

Peer Mentors

ALL STUDENT WORKERS ARE PEER MENTORS

- Peer tutoring and mentoring
 - Outreach
 - Resource referrals
 - Content-specific tutoring
 - University process tutoring
- Welcome and resource desk
 - Phone-triage
 - Facility management
 - Engagement tracking



Our Program Design

The upcoming GSU Pioneer Mentor Professional Development Series is an experiential program for student employees that uses special topics workshops and assess post-workshop reflections. This program takes a tiered approach, with each tier (or pillar) targeting these core competencies:



Student Experience

Describe your professional development experience(s).

What do you believe you have gained from these experiences?

Is there any advice you would offer for professional development program designers?

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Implementation Strategies

Words

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Start Small

- Pilot with one department or student worker group
- Focus on existing responsibilities before creating new ones
- Start with:
 - One workshop,
 - One reflection activity,
 - One supervisor conversation,
 - One student worker team.



Embed Development Into Existing Roles

Academic Support Roles

- Peer tutors
- Supplemental Instruction (SI) leaders
- Writing center consultants
- Peer mentors
- Library assistants

Administrative Roles

- Front desk assistants
- Department secretaries
- Student ambassadors
- Call center/student support workers
- Admissions office assistants

Campus Operations Roles

- IT help desk
- Event staff
- Residence hall workers
- Recreation staff
- Student Organization officers
- Campus tour guides

Specialized Roles

- Lab Assistants
- Research Assistants
- Social Media Creators
- Interns
- Athletic Assistants



Focus on Skill Development

CONSIDER: What problems are students already solving? What responsibilities already require professionalism? What moments require communication or leadership?

- Identify Transferable Skills
 - Communication, Teamwork, Problem-Solving, Adaptability, Time Management, Leadership
- Connect With Employers
 - Ask local employers, partners, and alumni, “What skills do you wish graduates had more experience with?”
- Target Power Skills (prev. soft skills)
 - Professionalism, Reliability, Initiative, Conflict Resolution, Collaboration



Build Scalable Structures

- Keep it Flexible & Maintain Sustainability
 - Consider offering modular workshops or short-term experiences that allow students to progress at different rates.
 - Workshops
 - Mentorship
 - Reflection activities
 - Cohort experiences
- Create Campus Partnerships
 - Collaborate with Career Services, Academic Support, and Faculty to utilize existing trainings and workshops.



Measure Growth

- **Define Clear Outcomes**
 - What should students be developing?
 - What does successful demonstration look like?
- **Select Consistent Forms of Assessment**
 - What and how many assignments will be reasonable for an evaluator to assess?
- **Measure Growth Over Time**
 - Focus on development: Beginning → Developing → Proficient
 - Track confidence, engagement, and skill application
- **Keep Evaluation Consistent**
 - Consider setting clear expectations, rubrics, standardized reflection prompts, regular check-ins.



Recognize Success

- **Certificates (not certifications)**
 - A simple starting point that is great for pilot programs.
 - Can be issued internally through departments or Student Affairs.
- **Digital Badges**
 - Allow students to demonstrate verified skills online.
 - Shareable on LinkedIn, resumes, and portfolios .
 - Platforms like Credly or Accredible can support badge creation.
- **Leadership Recognition**
 - Recognition does not always need to be formal credentials.
 - Awards, Leadership distinctions, campus recognition events, supervisor recommendations.
- **Resume-Ready Experiences**
 - Help students translate their work into professional language.
 - Reflection prompts, portfolio artifacts, skill inventories, resume workshops.



Microcredentials in WV

- **Check Institutional Policies**
 - Continuing education frameworks, certificate approval processes, badge or credential initiatives.
- **Connect with Statewide Networks**
 - Credential WV listserv
 - Workforce development initiatives
 - Other WV institutions already offering microcredentials and/or badges
 - WVU Mountaineer Micro Academy
 - Marshall University Skills Exchange
 - Concord University
 - Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College



Use Data to Improve Programs

- **Track Participation**
 - Attendance, Workshop completion, Engagement levels
- **Measure Student Growth**
 - Reflective responses, supervisor evaluations, skill assessments, portfolio reviews, self-evaluations
- **Identify Strengths**
 - Which workshops have the strongest engagement? Which skills do students value most? Where are students struggling?
- **Use Feedback Consistently**
 - Gather input from students, supervisors, campus partners, and employers
- **Use Data for Sustainability**
 - Grant reporting, Institutional support, program expansion, funding opportunities, strategic planning

Make Changes Based on Evidence



How You Can Start This

1. Start with what students already do
 - Identify skill moments in their jobs
2. Add light structure
 - Short trainings or guided topics
3. Build in reflection
 - Journals, discussions, or portfolios
4. Recognize growth
 - Feedback, evaluation, and (optionally) credentials



Consider...

What is one realistic “start small” step your area could try next semester to improve the post-grad gap?



Think of a student worker role on your campus...

**What part of that job could
be framed as professional
development?**



Consider...

**How could supervisors
help student workers
explain their work on a
resume or in an interview?**

Questions?

Thank you to the WVCC and First2 Network!

Direct any other questions to Pioneer.Support@glennville.edu

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