Michigan Technological University

Career Services: A Case Study

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## Executive Summary

Michigan Technological University's Career Services department engages with students, alumni and corporate partners. Missions see staff stepping out for campus engagement, relationship-building and promotion of student success. This paper explores business, organizational and Information Systems/Information Technology (IS/IT) strategies of Career Services. Issues (prioritization and time management) and solutions are also explored.

Misalignment between business, organizational and IS/IT strategies exist. Prioritization and project management are root causes. Duplication of effort, misplaced tasks and following streamlined procedures also stem from, and could cause, this misalignment. However, there are rays of light in the dark. With thoughtful implementation and fine-tuning of time and project management platforms, Career Services can limit these situations.

Solutions (possible and recommended) are covered in this paper. Starting office, implementation of a project management methodology or following best practices (of one) are covered. Methodologies are structured, systematic processes of how a project will be completed. Useful tools, risk management and resource assessment blend together in this approach. Though this solution is intense, costly, and requires major departmental buy-in, it could create a culture of goals and achievement (that staff push towards), improve efficiency and add value. These carefully-cultivated methodologies are also useful when tacit knowledge is the only resource that moves projects forward projects. We've chosen agile project management as the best solution for Career Services. Of course, it'll be tailored in ways best benefitting the department.

A second solution involves implementation of time management strategies. Included among these are Pomodoro techniques, the Pareto principle and general best practices. Value-added benefits of implementation include increased focus and decreased procrastination. Deeper dives into analysis are presented further on. This team merged the best of both worlds (project and time management) and coupled efficient practices with a prioritization platform.

Several prioritization platforms were studied and one chosen. Task ranking, communication and ease of use were also key requirements. Along with the above management techniques, we recommend investing in a knowledge management system that stores valuable information (currently tacit and complicit). To deliver quality services and foster dynamic relationships, Career Services needs clean, well-defined procedures, tacit knowledge physically captured and available to all, and established routine that all staff buy in to.

## Introduction to Career Services

Career Services creates and bridges relationships with and between students, Michigan Tech staff and faculty, corporate partners and alumni. Engagement between corporate partners and students (or alumni) are critical focuses. Historically, this department's role was limited to student engagement and cemented by resume blitzes and career fairs. This narrow vision enforced the mistaken belief that career fairs are the only true benchmark of student success. After all, it's through these events that students gain career opportunities based on their academic mastery.

Career Services staff work diligently to shake that belief. New focuses show students 'what to do' with guidance running from admissions until post-graduation (alumni status). While Michigan Tech students have the academic background to start in industry, softer skills related to communication, etiquette and personality may be missing. University career- and industry-focused departments are starting to realize

this and our department is no different. Recently, programming offering events in informal settings (dinners, mixers, etc.) and small informational sessions have been implemented.

Here, company representatives (hereafter called 'corporate partners'), alumni and students engage. Early exposure to industry professionals occurring well before career fairs and/or major academic success gives current students opportunity to tailor communication and etiquette to expected standards. A polished image and communicative ability make the difference when students present themselves in those later, more formal situations (interviews, fairs, etc.). Such early exposure is also handled through events like CareerFest (personal engagement in small groups), Industry Days (focusing on specific industries and nested organizations) and other campus events. These chances for exposure are huge parts of Career Services' current programming.

One other view of academic success is also being shaken here. Students receive a diploma when graduating and that's considered one of the true, few marks of success. This diploma certifies master in a field. What may not be highlighted are the individual specialties gained along the way. Let's consider Mechanical Engineering, Tech's cream of the crop and most-sought-after degree. While enrolled in that program, students also have opportunities to join organizations (clubs, fraternities, sororities, etc.), gain skills (certificates, training programs, etc.) and miscellaneous awards. Career Services currently places more stock in students showing these specialties. These displays to organizations, alumni and other campus entities put desires to grow outside of normal academic pursuits and willingness to become more well-rounded individuals front and center.

Moving beyond those original student focuses, we see that gaining and maintaining corporate relationships are new spokes in the programming wheel. A pricing model allows corporate partners to host campus events. Services and return on investment (ROI) are governed by three distinct levels (copper, silver and gold) where each also gives usable 'cash back' towards event costs. Lastly, alumni engagement rounds out Career Services' programming. Contrary to other universities that charge for alumni/post-graduation services, Michigan Tech's unit offers services free of charge.

## Career Services Strategies

### Business

The focuses above drive business strategies with student-corporate partner engagement being a critical focus. General business strategies include organizing recruitment events, workshops and information sessions. More refined tasks (i.e., career counseling) push towards engagement goals and aiding students through the entire academic cycle.

### Organizational

The distinct specialties that employees bring lays the groundwork for Career Services' organizational strategy. The department is split into specific functions including career education, corporate partnership and recruitment. Function responsibilities are assigned to a manager who guides his/her team towards success. This 'entrepreneurial spirit' brings together like-minded people who never hesitate in any activities that lead towards organizational strategies. Self-empowerment and accountability are also tenets of this strategy.

Structurally, Career Services is a horizontal organization and quite flat. The structure has director Stephen Patchin at the top with managers for each of specific functions below. Team members and their various specialties are fully utilized and individual strengths taken advantage of as collaboration occurs.

However, some employees struggle to be heard. This returned silence has led to feelings of separation, general discontent and dwindling contributions.

**IS/IT**

Career Services takes advantage of technology to achieve business goals. They've embraced platforms that increase engagement and offer a variety of career-focused services. Platforms form external vendors and homegrown (MTU-delivered) programs, functions and reports are also embraced. This blended-vendor 'suite' is essential for accomplishing objectives, using data from multiple sources and offering customer (student, corporate partner, etc.) resources.

Technology that handles interactions between students, alumni and company representatives is used. These platforms include PeopleGrove, Brazen, CareerCruising and Handshake and functionality is split between virtual career fair hosting, student-alumni mentoring, personality and career evaluation, and student recruitment. Technology also gives Career Services staff ways to manage dozens or hundreds of interactions at a time. Interactions include job postings (via corporate partners), job survey submittals (by students) and campus event registration (again by corporate partners). Originally, that engagement was physical and between a requestor (student, company, etc.) and Career Services team member.

Increased engagement between students, alumni and company representatives is now possible because of these platforms. PeopleGrove provides channels for alumni to mentor current students and brings community and relationship into the limelight. Informal spaces for students and alumni to engage are available through this platform. Brazen, another recently-adopted platform, puts career fairs into a digital space. Through webcams or instant messaging (IM), students get a limited amount of time to interact with company representatives. Companies not normally at career fairs now have a chance to interact with, and recruit, students. Brazen launches later this year for graduate students.

Other in-house technology spreads news to the campus community. Career Services has dedicated monitors (spread through campus) that use Michigan Tech's EDS (Electronic Digital Signage) system. These monitors share information controlled by departmental staff and gives the campus community 24/7 access to specific recruitment, event and general news.

It's been acknowledged that a blended approach using technology and physical communication is best. Depending on the situation, students, alumni and recruiters use this blended approach to meet their needs. While communication, collaboration and advantage of services are wonderful if done digitally, physical interactions (in-person visits, phone conversations) also bring value to the relationships that Career Services so carefully cultivates.

There currently is some misalignment between the business, organizational and IT strategies of the Career Services department. Their current organizational strategy may be limiting the department in achieving their goals by not fully taking advantage of their employees' strengths. As mentioned above, some employees do not feel included or if their voices matter and therefore a more inclusive organizational strategy may lead to greater input from these people which may help the department better succeed.

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**Areas of Concern**

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Some misalignment between business, organization and IS strategies exist. Current organizational strategies may be limiting goal achievement by preventing employee strengths from being used optimally. As mentioned before, some staff don't feel included, a sense of inclusion or that their voice matters. Shifting towards a more inclusive organizational strategy could lead to increased input from these team

members. Through ensuring that staff have complete buy-in and a sense of place, Career Services' success improves.

Identified by interviews with Career Services staff, prioritization is a major departmental issue. Like any other campus unit Career Services is constantly trying to assess the value of projects and prioritize what will bring the most benefit. This assessment is rather chaotic and not formalized. Individual attitudes and current realities blend together and sometimes force snap decisions to be made. Formalizing a decision process and fully documenting the procedure would help reduce the chaos. Implementing a project management (PM) tool and rigidly using it could also bring more order. The project management tool would keep staff on track for high-priority tasks and allow the department to minimize time expenditures (while maximizing output and/or results). The tool could also streamline the process of employee and task assignment. While tasks are currently assigned, there's an occasional misstep where assignment doesn't consider staff specialties and skills.

Several project management platforms also offer communication (custom inboxes, IM functions, etc.). These features may trigger staff to share ideas more confidently and in mediums they'd feel comfortable using. Digital communication methods (email, IM again) all have unspoken rules of use, expectation and writing style. These individual mediums could cause feelings of resistance and lead to non-use (due to unfamiliarity of expectations and writing style). Bundling communication into a project management platform could reduce some of those roadblocks.

Prioritization from the top of the department down would strengthen business and IT alignment. Narrower focuses of project goals and clearing of confusion could be benefits of prioritization method(s) more suited to Career Services. Prioritization must come from a distinct leader (or set of) that makes decisions. Goals and priorities must flow from leadership and be clearly signaled to the entire department. By using clear communication, some costs and duplication of work (or effort) may be reduced. This entire approach also hints towards a hierarchical structure with distinct units supporting the higher mission(s) of Career Services.

## Possible Solutions

Several solutions were reviewed during this semester. Ranging from adopting a specific project management methodology, implementing a management platform and improving time management are covered below. This section only seeks to outline (numbered) solutions. The optimal solution(s), geared towards Career Services will be covered in the next section.

1.  Adoption of a full-project management methodology

There are many project management methodologies present today. Methodologies are very structured, systematic processes of how a project will be completed. Methodologies include tools to use, risk management and resource assessment. How well one organizes the processes and approach to a project helps describe a methodology.

This paper starts with focuses on IT methodologies (agile, waterfall, etc.) and underlines best practices, benefits and negatives. Methodologies purposes are also split between software development, corporate restructuring and general project management. Principles and best practices can be scaled and Career Services must focus on blending methods to create an optimal solution (tailored exquisitely to their free-spirited, entrepreneurial sense of self).

Methodologies and general frameworks include:
- Agile: Agile methodology is quick, nimble and stresses adaptability to project constraints. Ease of changing requirements and customer needs are bedrocks. Agile focuses on productivity, creativity

and the collaboration of a cross-functional team. While it's most commonly used in software development, principles carry well into general project management. (Green, *Choose Your Project Management Methodology*)

- o Positives: Fast turnaround time, flexible structure and people-focused
- o Negatives: Very involved, massive time investments required from stakeholders and managers
- Scrum: Scrum is an agile framework and focuses on reducing risk. Daily meetings are held and short sprints (two weeks to a month) lock sets of tasks for completion (in that period). Similar to a project manager, the scrum master also sets the team's pace, controls the task list and leads meetings. (Carmichael, *Agile Methodology*)
  - o Positives: time based, fast development, open collaboration, flexibility
  - o Negatives: substantial initial planning, numerous meetings, very hands-on, substantial chance to negatively change
- Kanban: Kanban is another agile framework. It was originally created by Toyota to increase their factory productivity. It's essentially a large to-do list, based on priority and not time investment. Kanban includes having a visual board where columns represent the different stages of the project, sticky notes or notecards represent tasks and tracking is seen through the current project's stage. (Carmichael, *Agile Methodology)*
  - o Positives: Priority-based, team flexibility, open communication
  - o Negatives: Vague deadlines, challenging time management

- Waterfall: Waterfall methodology places stages and tasks in a specific order. Once a task is entirely completed, the next one begins. This works well with structured, rigid plans. A heavy load of time is spent in the initial phase of the project when outlining the project's needs. (Loonar, *5 Time Management Strategies*)
  - o Positives: industry-proven, rigid control, smooth project flow
  - o Negatives: not flexible, substantial upfront planning, chance of sunk costs from changing requirements
- Six Sigma: Originally created by Motorola, Six Sigma used specific tools and techniques for process improvement. Six Sigma improves quality by determining, and reducing, defects of a product or service. The lower the total defects (ideally zero) the higher the Six Sigma percentage rate. (Green, *Choose Your Project Management Methodology*)
  - o Positives: reduces variability, increases resources
  - o Negatives: subject area experts required, meant for large organizations
- Lean: Lean is the process of cutting out waste and ensuring efficiency. Processes are streamlined and more is done with less. (Green, *Choose Your Project Management Methodology*)
  - o Positives: waste elimination, redundancy reduction, elimination of duplicate work
  - o Negatives: incompetent labor can screw up the system, inflexibility, increased chance of internal disruption, chance of losing sight of goals

Of course, these methodologies and frames bring about advantages and disadvantages. While specific ones were discussed above, some general benefits exist for all. These methodologies create a culture of goals (that staff push towards), improve project efficiency and add value to the enterprise. These carefully-cultivated methodologies are also useful when tacit knowledge is the only way projects move forward. Contrary to that, documentation of such processes is also useful when tacit knowledge is missing from a project. Complicit knowledge captures and information and makes it available to interested parties. (Wells, *How effective are project management methodologies?*).

Costs from adoption and implementation are also present. Financial, time and human resource cost could seem insurmountable when managers are implementing methodologies. In and of itself, implementation is

tedious and requires huge (one-time) time investments. Selecting the optimal methodology for the organization and/or department could also be difficult. To combat, the selection should focus on standardization of work and management (instead of product development and services). Those last items will be delivered because of a project and the intricacies handled through it. A successful PM method doesn't focus on the deliverable, it focuses on how to get to the deliverable. (Wells, *How effective are project management methodologies?*).

Larger corporations employ project managers or have an entire PM department to manage projects. These required staffing costs must also be realized when implementing common frameworks. Project management processes are very formal and bureaucratic and their internal procedures require specialization and formal decision making. Structure is also well-defined and possibly resulting in decreased innovation. Focuses on systems (and not people) are also tenets. (Acquil, *Journal of Strategy*).

Although agile is geared towards IT and software projects, Career Services could adopt principles and practices. It's the best methodological fit due to the department's flexible and collaborative business strategies. However, agile must be tailored and appropriately scaled to the small departmental size. It could require a costly departmental overhaul with considerable investment costs. Proprietary software (pursuant to industry standards) will be required (Turner). Adopting a framework would lead to decreased innovation and more focus on systems (and not relationships, Career Services staff and customers). This strict adoption is not recommended.

Limited resources also restrict adoption. As an immature, small department, adoption doesn't align with current business strategies. Lastly, adoption should only be considered when the department is more mature.

2.  Time Management Investment

Time is a critical resource for Career Services. Departmental leadership must develop healthy, progressive time management habits. Although this development takes tremendous effort and investment, returned benefits could be exponential. Priorities towards learning this management focus should be stressed throughout Career Services. Failure to do so results in misdelivered outcomes, poor results not fitted to business strategies and sunk costs in getting those results. Time is a strictly-finite resource and if spent taking away from progress and outcomes, may cause negative ripple effects throughout entire processes and plans. Losses in profits, resources and departmental impressions may also suffer from poor time management.

Proper development of time management could entail hiring professional consultants, attendance of training or enrollment in online certificate programs. Let's also consider having staff displaying extraordinary time management skills (or management in general) share that tacit knowledge with others. This internal sharing of knowledge keeps it in-house and ensures that relationships between the exceptional employee and remaining staff already exist. Communicating knowledge and areas for improvement is always received better if shared from a trusted source. Compared to using external vendors and resources, this in-house sharing has considerable cost saving.

Several time management principles are described below. Positives and negatives are also shared. Strategies are also taken from Caitlin Sisley's "*5 Time Management Strategies Everyone Can Master in 24 Hours*" article.

- Pomodoro Technique: Work is divided into half-hour time blocks with complete dedication to the task(s). Repeating blocks are divided by five-minutes breaks after which the cycle repeats.

- Pareto Principle: Also known as the 80/20 principle, this method stresses that twenty percent of effort only produces eighty percent of output. Breaking it down further, a low amount of effort is actually tied to beneficial results. The remaining effort (while possibly delivering something) doesn't result in project-related goals. Tasks not goal-related will also be dropped.

Of course, Career Services may choose not to implement one specific time management methodology. With that, these general concepts (below) could be combined and tweaked to meet changing needs.

- Single-Task Execution: Work on a single task (and freeze all others) until accomplished. This is somewhat similar to scrum's freeze where external tasks (outside of the current sprint) are placed on hold. Multi-tasking must be avoided here and if not, results in lost productivity and wandering focus.
- List Creation and Engagement: classic management skill that focuses on ordered tasks, checklists or some other list variance. While very effective if followed exactly, distractions would result in lost focus and missed productivity. List items must also retain their natural order or relationships to following tasks (if that order is violated).

Positives and negatives also come into play when implementing time management practices. Value-added strengths include increased creativity, decreased procrastination and avoidance of tasks and tighter focus towards task and deliverables. Negatives could include failure to deal with outside events (not forecasted by planning timelines) and losing objectivity when personal views are used in creating those timelines. Realistic, current and (somewhat) flexible planning must associate work by the skills of the individual and not through personal attachments or owed favors and responsibilities. (Morgan, *The Pros and Cons*)

It's recommended that Career Services clearly show top leadership is invested in time management practices. Providing internal training, chats and other enlightenment about proper management skill is also essential. Squeezing optimal value out of each minute, setting time blocks towards realistically-related goals and chaining tasks into smoother flows are benefits to be gained. The bottom line is that time is a finite resource and task completion always subject to scope creep (leading to loss of productive time and usage shifts towards non-value-added tasks).

This department must also remember that more is not always better. Multi-tasking may lead to decreased employee performance and productivity. Threaded into that, overwhelming staff with several action items leads to poorly-divided attention that's fragmented among too many needs. Decreasing performance and productivity while lead to drops in quality and overall use. While Career Services believes they could 'do it all' and does bring teeth to their mission(s), it's not reasonable or feasible to balance the can-do attitude with providing quality services. Severely-limited resources also stress wise usage, and implementation, of those to meet objectives. Focusing on projects that bring the most value to students, corporate partners and the department is recommended.

We've identified three prioritization platforms that could benefit the department. Options are Asana, Quip and Flow. These have been analyzed below. Platform-specific links are also in the 'References' area.

| Prioritization Platforms | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Asana | Quip | Flow |
| **Cost** | Free (up to 15 team members) or premium subscription at $9.99 per month. | $30 per month for a team of five | $53 per month for 4-10 users |
| **Ability to assign tasks** | Yes | Yes | Yes |

| Ability to track task progress | Yes | Yes | Yes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ability to assign priority | Yes | No | No |
| Communication features | Chat and inbox features | Chat and inbox features | Project comments only |
| Google compatibility | Linkage to Google (Gmail, Drive) account | Linkage to Google (Gmail, Drive) account | No linkage |
| Document support (attachments or living files) | Attachment uploads possible | Living documents for team collaboration | Attachment uploads possible |

Now that possible solutions have been shared, let's dive into the recommended solution.

### General Recommendation

Given current cost restrictions, Asana's free option is recommended. This option still has many of the important features that Career Services values. Those features include communication, tracking functionality, project/task assignment capabilities and priority (low, medium, high) ranking. While individual staff may use prioritization tools, the singular department lacks a universal platform. This causes loose ends to remain unfinished, tasks to be dropped and forgotten and statuses possibly scattered across dozens of different locations and staff files. Though adoption of time management practices alongside a prioritization tool align, not all Career Services' needs are met.

This brings us to another recommendation. Combining time management techniques, best practices of project management and implementation of Asana is the optimal solution. Agile principles align with business strategies and still allow staff to flow with changing requirements. Career Services has always been a fluid machine that shifts gears towards the concrete end vision. Depriving them of flexibility takes away that movement and forces unfamiliar rigidity on processes. Agile cuts through those shortcomings, providing loose structure and encouraging focus on productivity, creativity and collaboration. Strategic alignment will blanket the department and provide staff clear ways to manage tasks. Let's remember that Career Services doesn't have as much capital, time or staff to implement project management methodologies like other organizational types (specifically small-to-medium enterprises). Practicing agile would still create that value.

Time management practices also increase productivity and cut down resource attrition. Tasks are completed on target (if not sooner) and procrastination not permitted to take hold. General time management principles including setting realistic time blocks and completing single tasks should be implemented. Finally, eliminating distraction is required. Some staff spend more time dealing with the unexpected than working on tangible goals. These team members arrive to work earlier, stay later or find closed doors that block those distractions. Implementing general principles will also add value to Career Services' operations. Proper time management could also see long-anticipated wish list tasks completed.

The last piece of this recommendation focuses on knowledge management systems (KMS). These digital platforms store knowledge and documentation on procedures, work instructions, forms and other tacit knowledge (as long as it's recorded). Searching functionality also aids in the retrieval of standard practices, insights and policy. Collaboration is more easily accomplished when all staff are keyed into the same informational repository. This KMS is a central space containing Career Services' explicit knowledge. (Frost, *Knowledge Management Tools*).

To consistently deliver high-quality projects and events, a KMS should be implemented. Creating common documentation is a separate order apart from providing clear, consistent access. With a knowledge management system in place, staff have that central location of all things related to Career Services.

How, though, could Career Services implement such platforms and strategies? Let's break that down while avoiding repetition of the above. Tacking Asana first, senior management should handle the payment, set designated users and provide training to rest of the department. Buy-in must still flow from executive leadership downwards. Staff should also be supported as they learn intricacies of this new system. The knowledge management system flows along the same veins. Though we don't have a specific recommendation, leadership should listen to staff concerns regarding communication, documentation procedures, accessibility and ease of use. These four tenets will trim down eligible platforms until one remains. After that, it's a matter of payment and user orientation. As a disclaimer, these recommendations assume that connections to Michigan Tech data are not on the table. Such connections are also grossly outside of KMS and project management scope.

With knowledge and project management systems embraced by Career Services, it's time to develop transparent, ethical guidelines for use, maintenance and accountability. Decision rights and change management must be assigned where appropriate (based on executive decisions) and trust in documentation encouraged. On a sidebar, staff must also be encouraged to make choices according to higher standards placed (spoken or not) as conditions of employment, regulation and departmental reputation. Here, we dive into considerations of ethos, logos and pathos. Ethos (those ethical calls for action and adherence to community and culture) must trump logos (logical reasoning for such action) and most dangerously, pathos (allowing chances to be swayed by emotion).

Career Services must be involved through implementation of methods and platforms. Part of that involvement involves communicating the mission (departmental and university) and breaking the aforementioned barriers of silence felt by some staff. Unfortunately, these personal endeavors may be difficult and result in tense situations and conversations. In director Patchin, though, this department has tremendous potential that'll lead staff towards complete investment into the goals and missions of Career Services.

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**Appendices**

<u>Interview 1 - Career Services, MTU</u>

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**What is the purpose of Career Services?**
The purpose of Career Services is to foster engagement with and between students, staff/faculty, corporate partners and alumni. Engagement between a.) students and corporate partners and b.) alumni and corporate partners are key goals of that purpose.

We recently sat with director Stephen Patchin to discover more of what makes Career Services tick. The chat was peppered with the department's early history, technology usage, strategic planning and challenges. One clear lesson was also spread through the entire chat. Minute per used minute, Steve's staff pulls off more than any other team in any other university. That belief was only validated through external reviewers and campus review. Our conversation starts below and uncovers more about this Michigan Tech success story.

**What is the early history of Career Services? Where are they now?**
Traditionally, the department focused on resume blitzes and Career Fair preparation. The department was siloed away from the campus community and only performing those basic functions. The 'new' Career Services team runs with an entrepreneurial spirit where all team members mastering distinct specialties and always able to work collectively. This structure is commonly known as a flat (or horizontal) organization.

In recent years, though, they've become more involved in the entire student lifecycle. Starting with admissions and ending with the alumni phase, Career Services helps students define 'what to do'. Defining that forced the department to handle student engagement differently. As mentioned above, Career Fair was one of the only original focuses and that narrow vision started planting the idea that doing 'well' at the fair (by getting a job, co-op, internship, etc.) was the only benchmark that mattered.

Today, showing students 'what to do' includes a diverse set of programs and opportunities. CareerFest is one of the new programs and lets students, alumni and company representatives engage in small, informal sessions. Industry (manufacturing, energy, etc.) representatives and companies are given campus space and open for any and all students to walk up and engage. Resume blitzes, career coaching and more relaxed opportunities (cookouts, guest speaker presentations, etc.) also run for the entire program.

One goal of the new programming is to break that idea that Career Fair is the only goal that matters. While tremendous strides to shake that have happened, one issue remains. Career Fair attendees may have no experience interacting with company representatives until that day. Career coaching, exposure to professionals and proper communication all impact how recruiters see students and how those students act towards the recruiters. CareerFest was created to be that very first stepping stone towards mutual student and company engagement.

Those small doses of exposure also highlight student specialties. Previously, a student's mark of success was saying "I have this degree". Today, success is sliding towards individual specialties. These specialties highlight skills (certificates, training programs, etc.), activities (fraternities, councils, etc.) and awards (honors, class recognition, etc.). By showing specialties, students share personal engagement, desire to grow outside of normal academic pursuits and a willingness to change into the 'ideal' career prospect.

Targeting, gaining and maintaining corporate partnerships is another set of recent endeavors. At cost, the newly-launched corporate partner program provides extended services to registered companies. Three distinct levels (copper, silver and gold) define service availability. Copper enrollment prices at $2,500, silver asks for $5,000 and gold demands $10,000. The levels also give a flexible savings account where 'cash back' can be earned. Copper-level members receive $500, silver nets $1,500 and gold goes for $4,000. However, that account is only usable for campus events to support student activities. In essence, the account gives companies ways to engage with students for free (after paying the registration fee).

Alumni engagement is one more new focus. After graduation, most universities charge for services that were regularly free during a student's enrollment. Michigan Tech's Career Services unit bucks that trend and offers services at no charge. However, there are issues with marketing those services. Alumni may not be receptive to contact, have invalid contact methods or not understand the breadth of services offered.

Lastly, Career Services has embraced technological platforms to increase engagement, offer services and gain insight. Implementation of platform offerings from external vendors and use of custom, MTU-built packages helped accomplish those goals. Enforcing usage of one medium (physical, technological, etc.) to accomplish goals is a harmful strategy and early on, this department recognized the value of a blended-medium approach that uses personal interaction (phone calls, office contact) and IT (platforms, data collection, etc.).

**Is there an organizational strategy in Career Services?**
Those distinct specialties mentioned previously laid the groundwork for the organizational strategy. The department is split into specific functions including career education, corporate partnership and engagement, and recruitment. Function responsibilities are assigned to a manager who then guides his/her team towards success. That 'entrepreneurial spirit' brings together like-minded people who never hesitate in any activities that lead towards organizational strategies. Self-empowerment and accountability are also tenets of this organization strategy.

**How does Career Services use technology?**
Career services uses technology that handles interactions between students, alumni and company representatives. Technological platforms include PeopleGrove, Brazen, CareerCruising and Handshake. These systems also split purposes between virtual career fair hosting, student-alumni mentoring, personality and career evaluation, and student recruitment. Technology also gives Career Services staff ways to manage dozens, hundreds or even thousands of interactions at a time. With these platforms, interactions could include companies posting jobs, students submitting job surveys or employers registering for campus events. Traditionally, most of that engagement was physical and between a submitter (student, company, etc.) and Career Services team member.

Increasing engagement between students, alumni and company representatives is now possible because of some platforms above. PeopleGrove opens a channel for alumni to mentor current students. Through PeopleGrove, relationships and community are brought into the limelight. Informal spaces for students and alumni to engage also become available. Brazen, another new platform going live soon, puts career fairs into a completely-digital space. Through webcams or instant-message, students get a limited amount of time to interact with company representatives. This platform gives companies not normally at the physical fair a chance to interact with students. Brazen launches later this month for graduate students. Other in-house technology is also used to spread awareness to the campus community. Career Services has a few dedicated monitors around campus that use Michigan Tech's EDS (Electronic Digital Signage) system. These monitors share information that's controlled by departmental staff. This gives the campus community 24/7 access to specific recruitment, event and general news.

More recent generations of graduates grew up with technology (personal computers, mobile devices, etc.) in hand. Expertise and familiarity with such systems came easily and influence student life. Career Services has no hesitation when it comes to meeting students on those grounds and through student-embraced platforms. Of this interaction, director Patchin remarks that 'technology is where the students are' and that his unit has no difficulties 'meeting students wherever they are'.

Now that departmental technology has been implemented, the question of "Is engagement actually happening?" jumps to life. Platform offerings, digital services and alternative ways of engagement are great on paper. However, the only result is busy work if engagement between students, alumni and career representatives is not happening. Program evaluation is key to any endeavor and with technological platforms, raises entirely new questions and challenges.

To help answer that question, knowledge and placement rare tracked. Knowledge rates measure how many students responded to some request (survey, phone call, etc.) for information and placement rates track how many students accept employment offers. In the case of Handshake, students are encouraged to complete career placement surveys listing the current employer and starting salary. While that information is being collected, the fact that Handshake has only been in use for two years is considered. It hasn't reached maturity and provided information for one complete student class (starting with admission and ending with graduation). Once the first cycle is captured, a richer, more meaningful dataset could be used to gain insight.

However, using technology and maintaining activity through those platforms could cost the department. When asked how a clear divide is kept between platform and interpersonal engagement (departmental visits, on-campus events, etc.), stress was placed on the fact that personal interaction still matters. Students are not recruited by platforms and after accepting employment, are not headed off to work for a computer, server or webpage. Instead, these new employees work for companies and supervisors. Career coaching and mentoring all play a part in interpersonal communication and relationship-building; having students engage Career Services in-person is the best way to improve those skills.

**What challenges does Career Services face?**
Career Services faces a few issues. The first is getting student attention and spreading awareness of services offered (resume review, career coaching, etc.). The most successful method of spreading awareness was through the large banners placed around campus. Though it didn't spread specific service features, it prompted the campus community to visit the office or attend the event being promoted. The second most successful method is email with word of mouth falling after.

Career Services is always trying to answer the question of 'How do we create bells and whistles worth talking about?' These bells and whistles must drive engagement across the University and through other companies. Even if the whistle is known, priority must also be considered. Resources (financial, human and time) chip away at every endeavor. Director Patchin is always trying to answer "Which limited resources should be used to go after which thing first?" While campus and corporate partners could take some of that cost, a follow-up to "Who are those partners?" must be answered first.

Technological challenges rise up from gaps in data collection, analysis and the speed of those operations. Countless data points are collected through the department and many more available through Banner, Michigan Tech's enterprise resource planning system. Though 'we' have it, how could this data be used to paint pictures of student engagement?

Prioritization is another departmental issue. Like any other campus department, Career Services is constantly trying to assess the value of projects and prioritize that will bring the most benefit to Michigan

Tech. Implementing a project management tool and rigidly using it may bring order. The project management tool could also keep staff on track for high-priority tasks.

Prioritization from the top of the department down could also strengthen business and IT alignment. Narrower focuses on project goals and the clearing of confusion could also be gained. Prioritization must come from a distinct leader (or set of) that makes decisions. Goals and priorities must flow from leadership and be clearly signaled to the entire department. By using clear communication, some costs and duplication of work (or effort) may be reduced. This entire approach also hints towards a hierarchical structure with distinct units supporting the higher mission(s) of Career Services.

<u>Interview 2</u>

Career Services – Interview 2
10/31/2017

A round-robin strategy was used for our second interview. Select Career Services staff were asked to share thoughts on questions. Questions and summarized responses are below. All responses are also confidential and sharing limited to Alex Saari.

Career Services staff are also described below by 'colleague', 'staff' and/or 'team member'.
_____

**Some departments keep separate internal and MTU-specific goals and priorities. Are Career Services' goals closer to internal missions or broader and impacting Michigan Tech? Does Career Services have goals?**

*Career Services relies on outcomes they set and uses programming to steer towards success. Corporate partners also have limited input in steering towards outcomes.*

*Most goals revolve around employer relations. Sharing opportunities and tools to facilitate interactions between those career representatives and students is a common benefit from fostering Career Services-employer relationships.*

*The broadest goal is to help students achieve their full potential. Resources that aid in learning and growth through the Michigan Tech journey are offered. Putting students first with career building and education is part of that. Steps toward starting and maintaining a successful career are also emphasized. A key measure of success would be 100% placement (a job for every student and an applicant for every job).*

**A huge piece in accomplishing goals is using your voice to be heard. Whether it's your inside voice (to set personal/professional goals) or your outside voice (to set department goals) is used, are you always able to be heard?**

*Though it took a lot of effort and time, campus hears Career Services. Programs have reached such a scale and visibility that it's difficult for anyone not to.*

*While campus hears Career Services, some teammates struggle to be heard inside the department. That silence has led to feelings of separation (not being part of the team) and enhanced 'quietness' (staff eventually lowering their voice). A fix may be to involve others in projects or ask thoughts from specific people during staff meetings. Without such interaction, some staff also view staff meetings as unproductive.*

*Individual goals aren't dictated by leadership and those priorities are set dependent on the day's activities. They could be daily, weekly, semester-specific and annual. Priority is also assigned by deadline, needs of the department and other individuals.*

**MTU accomplishes a lot every academic term and year. Does Career Services accomplish goals by the same year or term? If there's another schedule, please share that deadline (specific date, week, etc.).**

*For departmental goals, the academic calendar/term schedule is followed. Emphasis on events prior to Career Fair is a common thread for timelines. Departmental goals for events are also set collaboratively. The entire team has a say in what to aim for during any given semester.*

*However, there's a caveat when saying that the entire team has that say. While they have the ability to have a voice, it doesn't signify comfortability in exercising it. Even without sharing thoughts, staff are fully committed to departmental goals. Personal and individual goals aren't addressed. A disconnect between asking about and sharing those goals also exists. An unspoken rule to follow departmental goals and sacrifice personal ones is at play. Inquiries on what personal goals the Career Services team has aren't asked.*

*If a staff member has a voice, they firmly believe that it goes towards a completely-collaborative effort. A loose schedule (for events leading up to Career Fair) is followed, other projects come up by someone saying "wouldn't it be neat if we could xxx?" Those spontaneous projects call for the team to get together and drive towards success.*

**With all those expectations, has there ever been 'too much' on your plate? If you've been in that situation, was it a one-time time or more constant? Are there specific projects that always bring it out?**

*Occasionally, work does pile up and come close to overloading staff. However, everyone understands that that's 'part of the job' and not unexpected. To offset that, downtimes for reflection and regrouping happen occasionally.*

*Fall CareerFest was identified as one constant event that unevenly distributed work. However, it doesn't result in 'too much' on a plate and settles for more frantic days.*

**Was time ever an issue to meet goals? Could you share how time/scheduling impacts priorities (personal and departmental)?**

*Time is sometimes an issue. Staff get bogged down in daily tasks and are forced to leave long-term goals until the last minute.*

*Far-reaching goals are also occasionally vague. A little extra effort is needed to shore them up, add sharper lines and bring expectations to reality.*

**Do distractions find you when working? On average, how many distractions come up daily, weekly or monthly? Have those ever pulled you away from current work?**

*Distractions are a daily constant in Career Services. Most steal time from larger projects whiles others roll through and drag in more tasks (and distractions) before completion. To focus on a task, staff close doors or look for 'hiding places'.*

*Scheduling more time than needed is a key feature of internal project planning. Besides working from hidden places, staff may also come in at off hours to minimize distractions. With some positions being so forward-facing, the pressure to get certain work done takes away from those interactions.*

**Having a specialized group of colleagues is a plus when splitting up work. Are tasks ever shared among your colleagues? Have tasks ever been (unknowingly) worked on by different people?**

*Tasks are sometimes shared detrimentally among colleagues. This sharing has team members trying to do things best completed by someone else. A common reason is to "not bother" other colleagues and when that happens, the colleagues left alone have to step in and undo what was done. Specialized skills aren't used or asked for, resulting in work being handled improperly.*

*Inter-office communication also affects how tasks are handled. Though Career Services has improved that, there are times when the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. This lack of knowledge is sometimes embarrassing when representing the department. The lack of communication also results in duplicate or wasteful work being done.*

**What does Career Services absolutely rock at? Examples could include 'physical' things (Career Fair) or less tangible specialties (fostering student relationships)? What helps you wake up each morning and walk into Admin 220?**

*Career Services rocks at events (Career Fair, Industry Days) and life-launching for students. Getting companies excited about Michigan Tech students is another thing this department excels at.*

*Knowing that their actions can change a life makes several team members want to come to work.*

**Are there any frustrations or concerns working within Career Services? Are these concerns specific to you or broader (across your team or the entire department)?**

*A few frustrations exist. Most often, it blends between not 'trusting' that someone can do a job well and staff asking each other to teach things that were already shared (sometimes over and over).*

*The first scenario results in work being undermined, staff getting 'micro-managed' or colleagues feeling constantly watched. Career Services always displays an outward-facing team mentality even when a common (frustrating) internal feeling may be that there's a lot of 'I' in 'TEAM'.*

**Could you share thoughts on departmental communication? Tips to get started include sharing mediums (email, phone call, etc.), frequency (too much contact, not enough contact) and flow (everyone receives message, message limited to key people). Communication issues and/or concerns should also be shared.**

*Communication is getting better—we use Teamwork to share tasks and try to keep everyone up to date with activities via email*

*Communication via email is used here. Huddles are attempted as often as possible but more often than not, some staff are always absent. Minutes aren't kept at those meetings, making missing members lose out on information. One other symptom of that is that the information is only shared between colleagues and not anywhere else (digital minutes, notes, etc.).*

*Other online mediums (the Teamwork platform, Facebook, etc.) give more ways to keep up-to-date with activities and communicate. It's here that a communicative breakdown occurs. Those mediums also require extra time for clarifying messages and intent. While it's beneficial to have things in writing, it may not be worth extra effort or time reframing the message.*

*Putting more thought into communications/discussions is stressed. Choosing appropriate participants hasn't been a consistent element of collaboration. Without key stakeholders, the miscommunication breakdown comes back and fosters confusion. Other negatives of miscommunication include heated discussions, lack of relevant contributions and staff acting on assumptions that may or may not be true.*

**Which area(s) do you feel could use support or guidance? Areas could include industry relations, student advising and front-of-house support. How could that support benefit the area?**

*A few areas and services could use support. Student training was a big one. Career Services uses student employees as front-of-house support and customer welcoming. Sometimes though, student staff don't have the tools to answer questions and/or help customers. A departmental goal is to have a better student training program with the hope that it provides a better structure.*

*Industry Relations (specifically tracking and reporting industry spending accounts for corporate partners) could also use some support.*

*General job-shadowing was suggested as a way to improve. Minimally, management should shadow support staff.*

*Though shadowing may show that some positions should be reconfigured, redefined or split, the knowledge gained is a plus. That coverage could also provide management ways to make tasks more efficient. At the very least, clear knowledge of exact responsibilities aligns management and support towards the same goals.*

**How can Career Services be improved as a whole? From that improvement, is there any one thing you'd like to see changed or implemented?**

*A few improvements could help Career Services. Key among those were more staff and campus perceptions towards the department. The department wants to do several things, campus has needs and executive leadership is always prompting for goal success. However, there aren't enough staff or hours in the semester to accomplish all goals.*

*As with any organization, separate units have perceptions of others. All Career Services staff work extremely hard, get along well and do everything to put Career Services in a positive light. Sometimes, there's a campus perception of 'rudeness' or aggression. Staff are bundled together with those views and not seen as separate. Many team members would love to create positive relationships and it's hard to break present stigmas. Setting the campus' image towards one of 'helping everyone' and not simply bulldozing is desired.*

*Difficult conversations that could help in doing that are also perceived as not welcome inside the department. There's a wish to see that changed.*

**Presentation Notes**
**Date Created:** 12/11/2017
**Date Updated:** 12/11/2017

**Team** - Pranav

- Introduce team members

**Presentation Flow** - Pranav

- Introduce areas for tonight's presentation

**Overview** - Pranav

- Customers include students, campus staff/faculty, corporate partners and alumni.
- Corporate partners invest in campus events and recruit students through career fairs, industry days and blitzes
- Showing students 'what to do' starts with the student being accepted and runs until becoming alumni. This focus uses campus activities (mixers, etc.) to introduce students to industry, form relationships and explore career pathways.

**History** - Claire

- Originally, CS only used resume blitzes and career fairs to engage with students.
- Career Fair was treated as the 'end goal' for all students and the Michigan Tech education. That entrenched belief is now being combated and slow, steady professional growth through the student's entire career focused on.
- Unrelated student engagement (job hunting, interview preparation, etc.) wasn't offered
- Alumni weren't engaged and given chances to connect with younger generations of students.

**Current Practices** - Claire

- Priority is fading out the belief that career fairs are the only mark of success
- Alumni invited to mentor students, provide tacit knowledge and share experiences
- Corporate partners given more incentive to host on-campus events, create programming and mine student relationships.
- Programs include CareerFest (small informal company-student sessions) Industry Days (industry-specific meet 'n greets)
- Expanded programming also includes career coaching and more relaxed events (cookouts, guest speaker presentations, etc)

**Business Strategies** - Siva

- Strategies gear towards increasing student, alumni and corporate partner programming
- Corporate partner program offers different levels of service for campus events
- Alumni services offered at no charge (unlike other universities)

**Organizational Strategies** - Siva

- CS divided into units (career education, corporate partnership, etc.) with niche focuses
- Units highly specialized and encouraged to act as needed

**IS Strategies** - Siva

- External platforms (Handshake, PeopleGrove for alumni mentoring) used
- CS not afraid to meet students in those comfortable spaces
- CS also realizes that blending mediums (technology, in-person and voice) is optimal. Blend allows messages to be tailored for each audience and brings different, relatable messages.

**Areas of Improvement** - Sam

- The 'Wild West' attitude encourages 'one-for-all' activity where units act for themselves and not the best interests of CS
- Clear decision rights are missing and work is sometimes done without other key units involved. Error and redundancy could increase.
- Staff dealing with not being heard. The more that happens, the quieter they become until silence hits.
- Silence brings on feelings of separation, desires for more invitation/involvement and disconnect with CS mission
- Daily distractions take away from focused work and often take staff away from long-term projects

**Potential Solutions** - Sam

- Project management philosophies and best practices should be implemented
- Emphasis on prioritization and task management is a must
- Solutions don't have to follow rigid methodologies. Instead, blended approaches that let CS adjust on the fly are optimal
- Simply having a project management tool, defined action plans and clear channels of communication goes a long way towards helping

**Recommended Solutions** - Sam

- Provide Asana overview
- Encouraging staff to contribute and breaking barriers that lower voice are essential
- Breaking out of the 'Wild West' and setting clear accountability, decision rights and proper channels of communication is also stressed
- Process formalization involves documenting everything, making all work accessible and implementing proper change management