

Workforce Development Strategy – Colorado State University

CSU has built an institutional strategy to ensure students graduate with skills and clarity about employment. This begins long before a student steps on campus. Guided by our mission as a land-grant, we pay particular attention to societal needs, including the need for workforce development and innovation. We integrate employer input into our academic offerings and student learning experiences, and we have intentionally structured curricular and co-curricular experiences in a series of high-impact practices that effectively prepare students for their careers. This past year, CDHE designated CSU as a Career Connected Campus, and CSU graduates reached a record high of 68.6% employment rate with an additional 18.2% continuing their education.

Attention to Workforce Needs

- We continuously evaluate needs for workforce. We have recently developed innovative new programs in areas of high growth and need (e.g., healthcare – nursing, PT, new Veterinary PA degree, interdisciplinary “hairy problems” (e.g., climate science), Construction Engineering)
- Evaluation of workforce demands takes a two-pronged approach: Market analysis for all new degrees, and new degrees are developed based on market trends
 - CSU has invested in a suite of tools that provide regularly updated, peer-benchmarked market intelligence regarding employer demand, emerging occupations, and links between academic disciplines and the occupations that flow from them. This will help us continue to be responsive to emerging workforce needs and shape our existing offerings to align with workforce needs in the state, regionally, and nationally.
- We are investing in new types of program delivery (e.g., certificates, online innovation, integration of AI, re-skilling/up-skilling, non-traditional learners)

Integrating Employer Input

- All colleges utilize some level of advisory boards that inform curricular development and enhancement, but this does vary across colleges
- Many program accreditations require explicit connections to and experiences with industry. This ranges from internships to mentored experiences to hiring industry professors of practice as part of our faculty.
- We are growing our investment in internships and other external experiential learning opportunities that give students hands-on experience and give employers access to developing and hiring freshly minted talent.

Prioritizing Student Career Readiness

- Central to this work is the redesign of our All-University Core Curriculum, which explicitly integrates career-readiness competencies and experiential learning opportunities across every college and department. By embedding career preparation into the curriculum itself, CSU ensures that career readiness is a through-line in the undergraduate experience rather than a stand-alone service or final-year consideration.
- We respond to students’ career needs flexibly. For example, a review of mathematics requirements found that statistics and finance courses more effectively support the quantitative reasoning skills needed in many career fields than traditional calculus requirements. Today, approximately 2,000 students each year benefit from these more relevant course options.

- Beyond the curriculum, CSU's Career Center works closely with each college to cultivate employer relationships and connect students to internships, applied learning experiences, and career advising. To strengthen these connections, a Career Educator is co-located in every college, made possible through a shared funding model.
- CSU is deeply committed to high-impact practices that facilitate learning and career readiness. Chief among these practices: Internships, service-learning, mentored experiences, research experiences, and professors of practice who bring industry experience into the classroom. We highlight internships and research experiences.
 - Internships:
 - On the First Destination Survey, over the past 5 years, 70% of students report completing an internship (colleges range from 60-90%)
 - However, Institutional Research shows that only about 45% of graduates completed a **credit-bearing** internship or independent study (related to research)
 - This is an area of opportunity to further embed these experiences in the curriculum more directly
 - Research experiences:
 - The Office of Undergraduate Research and Artistry supported 658 undergraduate researchers in the most recent year, building career readiness skills and disciplinary identity through faculty-mentored experiences. Our MURALS Symposium provides a platform for students to showcase their scholarly work, serving 193 students this year, most of whom identified as racially minoritized, participated in the event. This directly supports student competencies in project development, management, communication, and leadership.
- Internships (and research experiences, particularly for those heading to graduate education) show tangible impact on students' careers:

Internship completed	Median Salary	Average Salary	%employed	%continuing education	%still looking
Yes	\$55,000	\$56,343	67%	19%	14%
No	\$45,760	\$50,660	60%	14%	27%

Outcomes

These high-impact career-readiness and workforce-development practices are related to many student success outcomes. The most telling outcome is that this year CSU graduates reached a record high of 68.6% employment rate with an additional 18.2% continuing their education. Importantly, Pell Grant recipients achieved comparable outcomes, with 65.1% employed and 18.4% pursuing further education. Career readiness at CSU advances equity and excellence and we have been recognized by CDHE as a leader in the state.