

VOCARE: CONNECT TO CALLING
QEP, COLUMBIA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY (Columbia, SC)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The administration, faculty, and staff at Columbia International University desire that graduates leave CIU as mature adults capable of securing gainful employment in their chosen area of study and desired profession. Therefore, the purpose of this QEP is simple and focused: to improve how CIU aids in connecting undergraduate students with their next steps toward career placement. By placement, we mean such things as employment in the marketplace, in full-time Christian ministry, in mission work with nonprofit organizations, as well as acceptance to graduate school. In an environment of spiritual formation and academic and professional training, the CIU faculty and staff community aim to walk with students to discover their gifts and abilities, to connect with their calling, and to connect with career opportunities. While much rests on the part of the student to pursue career placement, in a few concrete and measurable ways, we aim to make the path clearer for our graduates.

As the QEP director and team began to meet and listen to various constituencies beginning in the Fall of 2016, two QEP topics emerged as the most needed — a writing center and a career placement initiative. While both are worthy issues that need addressing, the career placement focus took priority for a number of reasons. First, the data from the 2016 Barna Report compiled for The Association for Biblical Higher Education, of which CIU is a member, revealed that career preparation is the top reason why students and their parents were choosing a college. Second, the results of a Spring 2016 vocational placement survey conducted by CIU with recent graduates showed that a vast majority gained employment through non-CIU resources while others reported that CIU's resources were not helpful in their quest for a career. In addition to these studies, the QEP team observed that career placement questions were being raised by a number of different groups and departments within CIU. For these reasons, a career placement focused QEP was selected.

Given this overview of the topic, the QEP is focused on the following Student Learning Outcomes. That is, what will be true of our students, in their formation and learning, after having experienced this QEP?

The students will be able to:

1. Recognize their areas of calling (discover).
 - a. Identify their own interests, skills, and abilities.
 - b. Articulate connections between their own interests, skills, abilities, and vocations and possible career fields.
2. Discern a career path in light of their calling (explore).
 - a. Define specific types of work (i.e. ministry, mission, marketplace, graduate school) to which they perceive a calling.
 - b. Create an initial plan of action for one or more possible career paths.
3. Engage in a meaningful career planning process (focus).
 - a. Produce an interview-ready resumé, cover letter, and other job materials.
 - b. Demonstrate career-appropriate communication (written and oral) skills.

4. Apply internship experience toward a vocational plan (connect).
 - a. Evaluate one's vocational path in light of on-the-job experiences (i.e. completed practica, internships).
 - b. Develop a concrete plan for next steps (i.e. ministry, mission, marketplace, graduate school).

In order to reach these outcomes, the QEP team has identified three operational strategies, which will be described in detail in the planning report.

1. Embedding career focused assessments within the curriculum of each current CIU undergraduate program.
2. *Launch!* (a venture of CIU's business administration program).
3. Strengthening the services and offerings of CIU's current Career Services Office.

Obviously, the three strategic approaches overlap at points. The QEP team regards this as a benefit in order to expose students to career path reflections at different points in their academic journey and in different spaces within the university. Two of the strategies, Career Services and *Launch!* are centralized in nature. These are places that students go to for assistance. The embedded curriculum strategy is decentralized and emerges at different points along the student's academic career from the first year until graduation. The curriculum strategy drives students to *Launch!* and Career Services. While the QEP team welcomes the overlap as a good thing, some coordination and communication is necessary to create synergy between the three areas.

As the report will show, multiple annual surveys and assessments will help us to measure the stated Student Learning Outcomes. Further assessments will allow us to measure our operational strategies for helping students achieve those outcomes. These strategies will include: 1) improvements and new initiatives (i.e. curriculum changes); 2) how many students have participated in the offerings of Career Services or *Launch!*; 3) how many students are participating in practica and internships; 4) how many students have been placed in their desired field within six months of graduation. Through these assessments, we would like to show that we have strengthened our environment and tools for students to connect with their calling, and we would like to see an increase in the number of students hired in their chosen major within six months of graduating from CIU.