

A Market Acceptance Study of the Graduate Employment Preparedness AssessmentSM



A whitepaper by Boyer Management Group

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Executive Summary

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"In ordinary times, a college degree goes a long way toward securing employment, even during a recession. It also offers some measure of job security: Workers with at least a college diploma are less likely to lose their jobs in down times. But college grads ... are now finding that a post-secondary education isn't necessarily enough.

"In fact, labor economists say the unemployment rate for workers with a bachelor's degree or higher is poised to hit a record high. This recession is so far-reaching, they contend, few are immune from the consequences."

College Degree No Shield As More Jobs Are Slashed

By Annys Shin
Washington Post Staff Writer
Sunday, January 4, 2009

Five macro trends began converging in 2009-2010 to create a perfect storm adversely impacting both higher education and the employment outlook for college and university students well into the middle of the next decade:

- § Costs for a college degree have escalated faster than income;
- § Competition for students among educational institutions has increased;
- § Student debt upon graduation continues to rise sharply;
- § Rapid changes in technology and methodology have transformed the way employers hire; and
- § Projected unemployment levels for graduates are greater than the unemployment rates in the United States.

Because of these macro trends, the Graduate Employment Preparedness AssessmentSM (GEPASM) was developed to measure a college student's knowledge and awareness of the best practices associated with a successful career search. It consists of:

- § A diagnostic assessment to identify what the subject knows and does not know about conducting a career search today; and
- § A self-directed development guide to assist the subject in closing the gaps in knowledge, leveraging strengths, and directing an effective career search.

Boyer Management Group began a Market Acceptance Study of GEPASM during the last half of 2010. More than 130 undergraduate and graduate students from a variety of majors at Cairn University participated in the study.

The Market Acceptance Study produced a number of key findings:

- § Expectations are mounting for higher education to justify the costs of a degree by better connecting graduates to employment
- § Most students are unaware of the challenges awaiting them in today's job market when they graduate
- § Most students are unprepared to conduct an effective career search upon graduation, and are unaware they lack the search skills
- § GEPASM was shown to be a reliable instrument to measure an individual's career readiness, identifying the specific gaps in an individual's knowledge of career search practices, and educating them on how to close those gaps

Navigating the Selection Process

In today's economy it is more critical than ever to hire the right individual. As Jim Collins says in his classic Good to Great, get the right person on the bus and into the right seat.

Blessed with an abundance of qualified candidates, new selection technologies, and a mandate to hire only the best, companies and organizations are in the driver's seat when it comes to selecting the right candidates to fill openings.

The selection process faced by the graduating classes of 2011-2015 will require them to have already developed career search skills and strategies in order to successfully navigate the career search and land the jobs they really want.

- Henry K. Boyer, CEO of Boyer Management Group and GEPASM
co-author

The study also found that career readiness is principally driven by the student, not the institution. As a result, many students start their career search too late in their education, some waiting until after graduation to begin what on average is a nine to twelve month job search. Yet a growing number of students are faced with student loan debt, which often requires repayment to begin prior to the graduate landing a job. Furthermore, projections from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics suggest graduates from the classes of 2011-2015 will be competing with college graduates possessing two to five years' work experience, placing the new graduates at a disadvantage.

The following recommendations should be considered for implementation:

- § Higher education should no longer allow career search readiness to be primarily student-driven.
- § Career services need a better diagnostic to identify the specific areas in which to assist each individual client.
- § Institutions of higher education should require all students to participate in a meaningful career search readiness curriculum about a year prior to the student's anticipated graduation.
- § GEPASM should be utilized to measure a student's career search readiness, and to measure the effectiveness of the institution's career readiness education.

The GEPASM Market Acceptance Study demonstrates GEPASM will significantly improve the subject's knowledge, awareness, and execution of effective career search strategies. Armed with a more complete set of job search skills and the confidence to execute a successful job search, GEPASM-trained students will have an advantage over their competitors for specific job openings. This should better position them for a shorter job search, increase the likelihood of obtaining the position they want, and positioning themselves for a better level of compensation.

Educational institutions that adopt GEPASM can realize a number of benefits:

- § Differentiating the institution from its competitors while making it more attractive to potential students, which increases enrollment and improves student retention.
- § Schools that better prepare their students for entry into the job market advance the school's reputation in the eyes of interviewers and the communities which the schools serve.
- § Schools that connect graduates to employment better position themselves for an increase in alumni support, versus those institutions not utilizing the GEPASM program.

This whitepaper sets forth the detailed findings from the GEPASM Market Acceptance Study.

Career Preparedness as an Integral Part of the Curriculum

Research shows that students and their parents increasingly view career readiness as a determining factor in their choice of college or university. Over the last decade, two presidential administrations focused on career readiness as a main element of the original and revised *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001*.

This emphasis on career readiness has not been fully integrated into many of today's colleges and universities. Some institutions view internships and the required courses in a major as sufficient steps towards career readiness, while others have established a career services department or offer an occasional class session devoted to career search. The results of the GEPASM Market Acceptance Study suggest there is not yet a sufficient level of career search education provided to students to adequately prepare them for what they will face upon graduation.

The authors propose that a one-to-three credit career preparedness course be required for a student to graduate. Such a course should ideally be taken approximately 12 months prior to the student's anticipated graduation date. Coursework and assignments should tie directly to the student's career search. As the assignments follow the career search process, students create their career search portfolio as they learn current, applicable content with high student engagement. For example, creating different versions of their résumé and cover letter, designing their career search database, and gathering references are appropriate assignments. These elements will become valuable parts of the student's search portfolio.

The GEPASM Assessment could be administered at the start of the course to establish a baseline of the student's knowledge and awareness of career search best practices. It could be administered again at the end of the course to quantify the increase in career search proficiency gained during the course.

The GEPASM Assessment includes the GEPASM Development Guide, which is suitable for use as a course textbook (see inset at left). It is flexible enough to adapt to both a physical classroom environment as well as a virtual distance learning program. It is designed to be an ongoing career search tool, full of examples, templates, and checklists to guide each step of the career search process.

The approach outlined above creates a favorable differentiator for students to consider when selecting their college or university of choice.

Career Search Readiness Suggested Curriculum

What is included in a robust career search readiness curriculum?

- § *Career Research: determining what kind of career to pursue and how to get prepared for it; how to perform research on an industry or employer; using career fairs, on-campus interviews and the career center.*
- § *Career Search Preparation: career search portfolio (both online and physical); templates for résumés; cover letters; references; job postings; online applications.*
- § *Interview Preparation: presenting the right appearance; one-minute intro statements; effective communication skills; question and answer strategy; and pre-interview research.*
- § *Effective Interviewing: opening and closing the interview; answering and asking questions; building rapport; body language; support documentation; and phone interviews.*
- § *Interview Follow-Up: thank you's; communications management; continued networking; responding to letters of decline; and negotiating offers.*



The GEPASM Development Guide is ideally suited to serve as a textbook for such a curriculum.

- Henry K. Boyer, CEO
Boyer Management Group

Concluding Thoughts

We have examined the issues surrounding the employment outlook for college and university graduates, as well as the challenges graduates can expect to encounter in seeking their first meaningful position following graduation. Our research indicates that today's graduates suffer from a lack of knowledge and awareness of the best practices associated with an effective career search. Much must be done to improve student career preparedness prior to graduation. Current methods for career search readiness need to be augmented with new and innovative approaches that address the needs of graduates seeking employment.

What Makes GEPASM an Essential Tool for Your Organization?

GEPASM is different from all other assessments currently available to career services in that it measures an individual's knowledge and awareness of effective career search practices. Traditional assessments utilized by career services (such as Strong, Campbell, Kuder, MBTI and DiSC) only measure an individual's behavioral preferences and vocational interests.



Simply put:

§ Strong, Campbell, Kuder, MBTI, DiSC et al all answer the question: What kind of work should I do?

§ GEPASM answers the question: How do I get the job I really want?

Thus, GEPASM complements existing assessments while strengthening the overall career services function.

Based on the results of the Market Acceptance Study, GEPA:SM

- § Reliably measures what students know about effective career search practices
- § Is suitable for use as both a diagnostic tool and basis for curriculum
- § Fills a critical need for better connecting graduates to employment
- § Is easily administered
- § Is viewed by students as an effective tool to prepare them for navigating their career search

Institutions that better prepare their graduates to conduct a successful career search will enjoy significant benefits and differentiation in the years ahead. Such benefits can include:

- § Becoming the educational institution of choice by students and parents concerned about career readiness and employment
- § Increasing student enrollment
- § Improving student retention
- § Enhancing the school's reputation among potential employers as producing higher quality and better prepared graduates
- § Better positioning the institution to receive more alumni referrals and grow financial support

How will your organization respond to the challenges of high unemployment, tight enrollment, rising student debt, and rapidly changing job search approaches? Often the greatest opportunities are realized through innovative solutions to pressing issues. In the case of GEPA, "necessity was the mother of invention" and an innovative solution to augment the career services function of America's colleges, universities, trade schools, and adult education initiatives.