Editors' Note

Kimberly Yousey-Elsener, Ph.D.
Binghamton University
Visiting Research Associate Professor,
fHigher Education and Student Affairs
kyousey@binghamton.edu
LinkedIn | ORCiD

Lisa Mann, Ed.D.
University of North Carolina, Asheville
Director, Career Center
mann@unca.edu
LinkedIn

We are thrilled to present two special editions dedicated to assessing career preparation and outcomes in higher education. The idea for these editions took root a few years ago when we first met and discovered a shared passion for assessment and career advocacy. Lisa, Director of the Career Center at University of North Carolina at Asheville and a doctoral student, was exploring ways to enhance students' social capital through her research and career work. Kim, leading a national alumni survey at the time, was integrating assessment and high-impact practices to connect career preparation with long-term student success. As we discussed our work, we asked each other, "Is there literature on this?" The answer: not much.

These editions aim to bridge the gap between the meaningful assessment work in the field and the existing literature on this critical topic. Our professional journeys have shown us the importance of bringing together two of our favorite aspects of higher education—assessment and career services—at a time when career outcomes are becoming an increasing focus in higher education. The Strada Center for Education and Consumer Rights (2022) frames this well:

> We are now witnessing the beginnings of a movement that goes beyond completion and is focusing on post-graduation outcomes as the priority. Just as access without completion is insufficient, completion without the fulfillment of expectations for personal growth and improved opportunities leaves students, educators, taxpayers, policymakers, and employers alike less certain about the value of a degree or postsecondary credential. (p. 1)

This growing national conversation around career outcomes and preparation has raised the work of our career services colleagues to institutional and system-wide conversations and strategic priorities. Elevating this work requires innovative ways to scale career services, identify and address equity gaps, and integrate career preparation with other learning experiences that impact student success. At the same time, this focus has increased the need for stronger assessment measures and data to inform strategic priorities and practices.

Throughout our professional networks, we heard two themes. Our colleagues in career services have been talking a lot about data. Many are doing remarkable work measuring impact, student learning, and outcomes. Our colleagues in assessment and institutional effectiveness have been asked to gather data to inform strategic priorities related to career preparation and outcomes. They are searching for best practices, tested measures,

and examples of gathering meaningful data. In this dynamic, we saw a challenge and found an opportunity through JSAIII. The challenge was how to bring together these conversations. Many professional development opportunities do not create a bridge between assessment and career, and there is a limited amount of peer-reviewed published work to inform practice. These special editions of JSAIII provided an opportunity to bring these conversations together in one place where assessment and career professionals can learn from each other.

To our delight, others saw this as a great opportunity as well. We received such a great response from the call for proposals that the vision for one special edition expanded to two. We are honored to amplify voices from throughout the assessment and career "worlds" together in these special editions.

This first edition focuses on defining and measuring career outcomes. It begins with considering the ethics of first-destination data and calls us to consider measures of career outcomes that move beyond the first job and salary. The remaining articles in this issue do just that. Dumford and Miller (2017) rightfully noted that "while institutional administrators certainly want to see their graduates employed, and employed within fields related to the students' academic major, using income as the 'end-all-be-all' measure of career success may not be capturing a complete vision of successful outcomes" (p. 196). We believe that assessing career outcomes is at a pivotal point in its evolution through this recognized need to reach beyond salary and jobs. The articles in this issue first consider alternatives to at- and post-graduation measures, such as livable wages, measuring work-life balance, and subjective measures of career success. We test the validity of a national survey that looks beyond graduation to understand career outcomes through alumni's perceptions five and ten years after graduation. We reach beyond our borders to understand how career outcomes are measured and used in Australia and the United Kingdom, and provide many alternatives to measuring career success through career readiness, behaviors, and competencies.

While we are proud of what is covered in these two issues, it is also important to mention what is not included: an article on decolonizing assessment in career services. In collaboration with the authors, we have decided to place this piece on hold in respect for the safety and well-being of those involved due to the current political climate. We, the guest editors of these two editions, firmly believe that decolonizing career services and assessment by moving toward equity is vital if we are to truly serve the students who attend our colleges and universities. We encourage you to seek information on decolonization in sources such as Stewart (2017) and Okun (2021). Consider how your assessment practices may privilege some students over others, seek out the voices you are not hearing from, and continue to make the world a place where all students have an equal chance to succeed after graduation. In addition, learn from your colleagues, beginning with the many articles in this special edition, that speak to how they are seeking to engage in this work. We look forward to a time when it will be possible to share this piece, which provides practical strategies and critical knowledge for advancing equity and justice in career services and assessment.

The second special edition, coming in June 2025, moves this conversation to processes and structures for measuring career preparation at the institutional level and digs deeper into assessing specific career learning experiences. As editors, we would like to thank each of our authors and the assistant editors for sharing their work and their time to create a space for elevating this important topic. We hope you find their work as insightful and energizing as we do!

References

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