

## Editors' Note

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Career preparation is the bridge between higher education, post-graduation success, and the evolving workforce. As the spotlight on career outcomes in higher education intensifies, institutions have a growing need to make data-informed decisions about where to invest their time and resources in preparing students for careers after graduation. The first special edition in this series focused on key foundations in assessing career preparation programs and outcomes (Yousey-Elsener & Mann, 2025). It then explored various ways institutions can move beyond first job and salary data to dig deeper into an institution's impact on career outcomes. This second special edition delves into how organizations and higher education institutions shape career success pathways.

Career preparation is at the heart of many challenges facing higher education today. Whether that challenge is the public perception of the value of higher education (Heckman et al., 2023; Tomlinson, 2019), student success outcomes (Dumford & Miller, 2017; Strada, 2022a), addressing social justice and equity issues (Clayton & Torpey-Sabie 2021; Jackson & Reynolds, 2013; Yousey-Elsener, 2024), mental health (Dryda, 2019; Redekopp & Huston, 2018; Tang et al., 2021) or the impact of student loans on student success (Lightcast 2023; Strada 2021; Strada 2022b), well implemented and evaluated career preparation programs play a key role in addressing them.

The authors in this special edition have developed innovative models for advancing the assessment of career preparation at both the institutional and program levels. Our second special edition first explores strategies used at the institutional level through a model of creating and implementing a data-informed university-wide strategy. It next delves into embedding the assessment of career preparation into existing institutional data strategies. Then, we examine the impact of specific career experiences and interventions on student success. These articles connect career development programs, such as AI, micro-courses, internships, career search skills, site visits, and networking events, with assessment methods like interviews, course assignments, and measures of career confidence and career self-efficacy. Pairing strategies with assessment allows practitioners to learn more about effective career readiness approaches and how to assess their effectiveness. We hope this edition provides career and assessment professionals with valuable tools to enhance their practice.

Through these two special editions of JSAIII, we have aimed to bridge the work of career and assessment professionals, fostering stronger alignment to enhance student career

outcomes. Now, we challenge you to take the next step. What insights will you apply from the research, strategies, and perspectives shared by our contributors? Which collaborations have been most effective on your campus? How does assessment already shape your career initiatives, and how can deeper integration between the two fields strengthen both?

These issues have connected rigorous research with practical strategies, offering a foundation for meaningful change. We hope they inspire new collaborations, future research, and transformative approaches that ultimately empower the students we serve.

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