

COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT AT PURCHASE COLLEGE

by

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Abstract

Across the board, people have questioned the importance of higher education. “Studies have shown that a college education is giving students the confidence and ability to take responsibility for their own continuing personal and professional development, preparing students to be personally effective within the circumstances of their lives and work, and promotes the pursuit of excellence in the development, acquisition and application of knowledge and skills” (Stephenson,1992). “Students should obtain critical tools that help them learn what it means to be responsible and accountable for their own learning and optimal performance in their personal lives and careers. The college or university experience should enhance their commitment to their studies, promote deeper understanding, build confidence in their ability to learn and help the development of high-level personal qualities and skills.” (Stephenson,1992).

Here, we will take an in-depth look at how the Purchase College Communications activities and courses are designed to help students prepare for their careers and real world experiences, as is the goal with any higher education institution, and what can be done to better equip Communication students for the transition. “The college-going stakes are higher today than at any point in history, both in terms of costs and potential benefits to students and society, therefore, students should know how important their investment is, logistically and financially, starting with what academic career they pursue. (Kuh, 2011).

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Introduction

The academic foundation of Communications studies began in the early 1950s by Wilbur Schramm, a well-known scholar and "authority on mass communications"(McAnany, 2017).

“Communications is the study that examines messages and how we interpret them through political, cultural, economic, semiotic, hermeneutic, and social dimensions of their context” (Pat J. Gehrke, William M. Keith). “While concern over undergraduate learning in this country has long lasting roots, in recent years increased attention has been forced on this issue not only by former Ivy League presidents, but also by policy matters, practitioners, and the public” (Arum, Richard, Roksa, 2011). The goal for any Communications student is to be able to comprehend messages being sent, and learn how to deliver clear messages in return. While some students thrive and succeed with standard curriculum work (essays, tests, quizzes, etc), one must wonder if unorthodox assignments would also benefit students; assignments such as Decks and Powerpoints that would still fit in the curriculum/guidelines, while helping students build their portfolio, should they need it during the job application process. “Every college aims to provide a high-quality liberal arts education while making certain that students engage intellectually, socially, and ethically ... by encouraging them to challenge one another to perform at high levels” (Arum, Richard, Roksa, 2011). Again, this is so they are prepared to address issues of their larger community and the world.

Thesis Statement

If professors help students focus on taking away new skills, from each completed assignment, this could increase their chances of succeeding inside and ultimately outside of the college setting; students would be better prepared for their career transition, which they may soon learn involves repeatedly acquiring feedback based on continuous skillset acquisition. This can be done by connecting today's real world scenarios to classrooms, allowing more opportunities for hands-on experience, and implement interactive learning experiences such as group discussions.

Research Questions

1. What are important resources that could better equip students for real world success?
2. What are key factors for having a successful curriculum?
3. How can colleges create a more significant learning experience for its students?

Methods

The literature review is used to answer the initial research question, what are ways that Purchase College can better equip its students in the communication department for real world success? In order to answer the proposed question, it had to be broken down into three questions. First, what are important resources that could better equip students for real world success? Second, what are key factors for having a successful curriculum? Lastly, how can colleges create a more significant learning experience for its students? The literature review focuses on answering those questions that result in findings from scholarly that explain the connections between the real world to classrooms, the exploration of self-efficacy, strategic curriculum change, student success in college, limited learning experiences, ways to create significant learning experiences, importance of higher education, and lastly, the importance of internships and hands-on experience.

Keywords: Successful curriculum, real-world, significant learning experience, efficacy

Literature Review

Wilbur Schramm and the Founding of Communication Studies

Wilbur Schramm is the founder of the first General Communications Arts department within American academia in the early 1950s. He tried to generalize the idea of communication as a field of study and “his published work and the various research institutes he founded certainly influenced subsequent growth of the communication field. He deserves study as someone who envisioned the future of communication study at a critical flexing point in its history.” (Glander, 2005). In this paper, Timothy Glander includes a statement from Everett M. Rogers that’s worth noting, “The field of communication study has been one of the fastest-growing academic units at U.S. university campuses for the past several decades.” (Glander, 2005). Wilbur Schramm began his career in communications as an Educational Director of the Office of War Information during World War II. He was also instrumental in the development of the U.S. educational broadcasting system in the 1940s and 1950s by organizing the Allerton House Seminars on educational broadcasting.

Communication as an academic effort has changed and evolved over time in the U.S. From face-to-face conversations to television broadcasting, radio broadcasting, written stories and so much more. Understanding the dynamics of good communications is important in any career. Whether a reporter, teacher, businessman, actor, anchor, or scientist, the ability to communicate effectively should be a priority at any educational institution. Communication courses should be tailored for the different tracks within a university or college, deliberately customizing the curricula to meet the needs of the students, grouping them by core areas of study. A student who wants to be a reporter is going to need a very different approach than a

student who is majoring in engineering but needs to learn to communicate with colleagues, present, and persuade others. Communications is a broad field and choosing the right sub-category is important. Preparing students for on-air camera, radio, written task, and project-based assignments will allow them to gain the necessary skills to be successful outside of a college campus. Instead of having a lot of courses that focus on the history of communications, there should be more that cover today's constantly changing media.

Limited Learning

Limited Learning on College Campuses by Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa focuses on how colleges and universities, for all the benefits they bring, accomplish far less for their students than they should. (President of Harvard University, Derek Bok) According to the president of Harvard University, most students today graduate college without being able to write well enough to satisfy their employers, can't reason clearly or perform competently in analyzing complex, non-technical problems." (Derek Bok, 2011) "Over the years it's been shown that students come to college not only poorly prepared by prior schooling for highly demanding academic tasks that ideally lie in front of them, but-more troubling still-they enter college with attitudes, norms, values, and behaviors that are often at odds with academic commitment." (Arum, Roksa, 2011) Students come unprepared without hardly any knowledge about their occupations, educational requirements, or what future employers will look for in their chosen occupation. "Entering college, we believe, largely academically adrift." (Arum, Roksa, 2011) It is the higher education's responsibility to help change those students and prepare them for their chosen occupation. A recent study of Collegiate Culture was done by Mary Grigsby who studied at Midwestern Public University. Mary expresses, "I hate classes with a lot of

reading that is tested on. Any class where a teacher is just gonna give us notes and a worksheet or something like that is better. Something that I can study and just learn from in five [minutes]. I'll usually do pretty good in. Whereas, if im expected to read, you know, a hundred-and-fifty page book and then write a three-page essay on it, you know, on a test let's say. I'll probably do worse on the test because I probably wouldn't have read the book. Maybe ask the kids, what's in this book? And they can then draw conclusions, but I rarely do the reading assignments or stuff like that, which is a mistake I'm sure, but it saves me a lot more time." After he expressed his concerns on the assignments that continue to take so much of his time, was able to save a great deal in class hours that could be "reapportioned to leisure pursuits." He was also able to do well by conventional standards, raising his grade point average and making progress towards his degree" (Arum, Roksa, 2011). Lastly, Grigsby states "You know I can get out of here with a 3.5 but it doesn't really matter if I don't remember anything.. It's one thing to get a good grade in a course but it's another thing to actually take something from it, you know."

As both authors - the president of Harvard University and Midwestern Public University, student Grigsby discussed in the book how limited the learning is at colleges. Beginning with how students enter college unprepared by previous schools. It is known that some students come from High School unprepared while others come ready and know what they want. Many students come to college undecided trying to figure out what path fits them best and which they will succeed in. However, there are also students who come to college well prepared, knowing exactly the career path they want to strive in. This needs to be considered when developing a curriculum that helps fit different types of students. Like Grigsby said, he was a student who wouldn't do the reading for the courses he took because it took a lot of his time. It is

important for professors to build curriculums that are flexible enough to meet the needs of different types of learners.

Does College Prepare Students for the Real World?

Eric Duffy answers the question we all ask: Does college prepare students for the real world. “Some people argue that college prepares you socially. That it’s a chance to learn how to deal with other people in a way that you couldn’t in high school or when you were under the dictatorship of your parents. There’s also a common refrain that it helps you mature, become independent, and learn to take care of yourself.” (Eric Duffy) Duffy doesn’t agree with this statement, though. He feels as if people will mature naturally just by the virtue of aging. Duffy doesn’t believe, however, that a university education is totally useless. He does feel as if it “broadens your horizons intellectually, giving you a chance to learn about things, places, and people that you might never have discovered otherwise.” Duffy, as a hiring manager, says that he doesn’t look at someone’s major in college but is more interested in their skills and experience. However, he knows that many other employers do use degrees and majors which could give you the leg up you need in the competition. So getting the diploma gives one a competitive advantage.

“There’s a great deal of theoretical learning, studying history, and exploring ideas. But if someone were to spend those four years in the job market actually doing the job, they would come out a lot farther along.” (Eric Duffy) It is important to understand that someone who has hands-on experience will come a lot further, a lot faster, than someone who is sitting down in a class for three to four hours long learning about the history of communication.”

Strategic Curriculum Change

Both editors address that “offering high quality education in an efficient and effective way requires the organization and management approach, at all levels, to be thought through carefully. At the same time, the individual and collective well-being of staff who are asked to deliver more, often without increased resources, needs to be taken into account” (Blackmore, Kandiko, 2012). Don’t rush the process; organize, manage and understand that all resources might not be there for use. “A learning organization has been claimed to have five characteristics: systems thinking; meaning of the conception that institutions are an interconnected, bound system; personal mastery, referring to the development of the abilities of individuals, mental models, consisting of the assumptions that are held in common; and shared vision team learning” (Blackmore, Kandiko, 2012). Within these five characteristics, institutions will be able to organize for change. Purchase College’s Communications department “is most likely to be successful if individuals, departments and the institution are flexible and self-motivated, with staff encouraged to take as much initiative as possible at all levels, while maintaining institutional coherence” (Blackmore, Kandiko, 2012). While staff are talented and intelligent, my observations say their priorities may be spread thin (blog, website, etc). One solution to shifting their focus towards students would be to create internships that relieve their work, while giving students something new to learn and look forward to.

Paul Blackmore and Camille Kandiko discuss the importance of having an effective curriculum. At each institution, major departments have different short-term goals. It is up to each department to take their time in altering their teaching techniques to better equip its students. It all depends on the resources each professor has to work with. When attempting to change “a” curriculum, is it key to be organized. In addition, staying motivated to doing what is

necessary to have a more effective curriculum. Beginning with gathering background, opinions, and feedback. Establishing a successful and proven curriculum is important and serves as a recruitment and retention tool, predicting more successful outcomes for the institution and its students.

Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter

Faculty and administration from a dozen different colleges and universities came together to discuss the institutional policies and practices they believe are associated with student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, 2011). The principle explored here is that what students do during their college career counts more towards what they learn and not who they are or where they decide to go to school. “Voluminous research on college student development shows that the time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the single best predictor of their learning and personal development” (Astin, 1993, Pascarella Terenzini, 1991, Pace, 1980). The more engaged a student is, the more they will contribute to their college success. In addition, “how an institution allocates resources and organizes learning opportunities and services to induce students to participate in and benefit from” makes an impact (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, 2011). Faculty states that the more extracurricular activities a campus offers, the more each student takes initiative in participating in them, leading to an enriched and successful campus culture. “If faculty and administrators use principles of good practice to arrange the curriculum and other aspects of college experience, students would ostensibly put forth more effort. Students would write more papers, read more books, meet more frequently with faculty and peers, and use information technology appropriately, all of which would result in critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, and responsible citizenship” (Kuh, Kinzie,

Schuh, Whitt, 2011). Many institutions have claimed that they provide high-quality learning environments that may explain how they are conducive to preparing students for real world success. “As evidence, schools point to educationally enriching opportunities they make available, such as honor programs, co curricular activities, and leadership development programs. Too often, such experiences are products of serendipity of efforts on the part of students themselves - the first component of engagement. Moreover, for every student who has such an experience, there are others who do not connect in meaningful ways with their teachers and their peers, or take advantage of learning or networking opportunities. As a result, many students leave school prematurely or put so little effort into their learning that they fall short of benefiting from college to the extent they should” (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, 2011). Students who are intensely involved in their education tend to have a lot more opportunities to apply when learning in different settings outside of school grounds. “Learning is deeper, more meaningful, and ultimately more useful because what students know becomes a part of who they are. First, talking with students with different religious beliefs, political opinions, or values. Second, talking with students of a different race or ethnicity. Third, using electronic technology to discuss or complete assignments. Lastly, participating in internships, community service, volunteer work, study abroad programs, and cocurricular activities” (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, 2011). The authors also discuss how colleges can effectively offer different opportunities inside and outside the classroom that complement the goals of the academic program. “One of the most important is exposure to diversity from which students learn valuable things about themselves and gain an appreciation for other cultures . Technology is increasingly being advanced to facilitate the learning process and, when done appropriately, can increase collaboration between

peers and other valuable educational experiences including internships, community service, and senior capstone courses that provide students with opportunities to synthesize” (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, 2011). So one can deduct that if faculty and administration would offer more opportunities for its students to be more involved, it would lead their students to a more successful college experience.

The research found by George D. Kuh, Jillian Kinzie, John H. Schuh, Elizabeth J. Whitt in their book called *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*. Makes a case for institutions to make it a priority to provide more opportunities for students to participate in internships, community service, volunteer work, study abroad programs, and cocurricular activities. Even though many colleges do provide these opportunities, they don't make it a priority to educate the college community about these soft or added-value opportunities that are available for the student body at-large. These efforts make for a more well-rounded individual which in turn puts forth a better citizen into the community.

Creating Significant Learning Experiences

Creating Significant Learning Experiences by L. Dee Fink discusses ways to identify and create learning experiences that students and others can agree are truly significant and have made important progress with efforts to improve the quality of higher education. (L. Dee Fink, 2013) It is important that students take on information that will stick with them beyond the classroom and that could potentially apply to their career experience. Significant learning is learning that makes a difference in how people live and the kind of life they are capable of living. (L. Dee Fink, 2013) So what are ways that courses can incorporate significance is student learning experiences? First, challenging students to significant kinds of learning. Second, use active forms

of learning. Three, have teachers who care-about the subject, their students, and about teaching and learning. Four, have teachers who interact well with students. Lastly, have a good system of feedback, assessment, and grading. (L. Dee Fink, 2013)

L. Dee Fink emphasizes the importance of students having a significant learning experience and ways that institutions can take initiative in making sure that students do. Having a professor who is well organized, cares-about the subject being taught, has more than just knowledge on the subject and can interact with students well, will allow students to have a more meaningful learning experience. If a professor has knowledge on the course but seems uninterested in teaching it, students will then feel uninterested in learning the course material. In addition, it's beneficial for a professor's teaching technique to be broken down between group projects, individual projects, hands-on projects, and written projects. If a professor teaches a course that focuses only on written projects and has students who are not confident in their writing, those students are already at a loss. Diversifying the curriculum structure helps all students, not just a few. There are students who are great writers but can't present in front of an audience and vice versa. Having the "diversity in the curriculum" helps develop a better candidate into the workforce.

Exploration of the Relationship Between Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Purpose in Life Among Career Students

Exploration of the Relationship Between Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Purpose in Life Among Career Students by S. Joseph DeWitz, M. Lynn Woolsey, and W. Bruce Walsh. Self-efficacy is defined as individuals' confidence in their ability to successfully complete a task. An individual with high self-efficacy for a particular behavior is more likely to perform better, persist and

succeed at that behavior. On the other hand, an individual with low self-efficacy for a specific behavior is more likely to avoid that behavior and, therefore, less likely to experience those behavioral outcomes. Students with greater self-efficacy for behaviors important to college life are more likely to experience greater success during their college experience.

If a student who has high self-efficacy is more likely to experience greater success during their college experience, professors need to ensure the content they are teaching is being used effectively, allowing the student to feel confident in what has been taught. Once a student can easily demonstrate what he's learned, it leads to a more successful college experience as well as more skills than they entered with.

The Importance of Connecting Classrooms to the Real World

This article is by [Daily Newspaper Replicas](#). "The purpose of education is to prepare students for life. In the information age, our knowledge sharing economy is driven by the power of connectivity – changing the very nature of learning as education and technology go hand in hand, creating new opportunities for students to collaborate, network and spread ideas." The article introduces four ways that professors could connect the classroom to the real world. First, be current by creating engaging lessons to help students become more aware of the global issues. Second, use technology often. Recent studies show that students spend 30 minutes on their mobile phones during classes. Rather than completely not allowing students to have use of their technology, why not incorporate technology into the classroom. It further states that in the workplace, phones and other sources of technology are always being used so it would be more beneficial to prepare them for their future in a technology-driven world. Third, encourage group work, which is beneficial for students to get used to collaboration in the classroom which will

prove to be very useful in the real world. Lastly, teach authentic engagement “instead of teaching students to regurgitate information, teach them how to find it. What we need in our future workforce are students who understand the world and how it works. Connecting classrooms to the real world requires the education system to responsibly integrate technology into the academic curriculum in order to equip students with the tools they need to meet the demands of a knowledge-driven society.”

The Importance of Internships: How Students & Employers Benefit

The College of St. Scholastica wrote this piece as a way to guide students on the importance of taking an internship and how it benefits the individual student and employers. There are four important reasons for a student to do an internship. The first reason is for the students to apply their classroom learning into professional environments. “Students will have the ability to develop and apply the skills, theories, and concepts.” Second, students can gain exposure to their chosen field. “A way to get a taste of the actual professional experience in a particular field before you commit yourself to it fully.” Third, students can establish critical networking. “It is a stepping stone to many different opportunities.” Fourth, students gain more work experience. “An internship provides the work experience that helps students put their education into practice, develop their leadership skills and give them a competitive advantage as they pursue a permanent position.”

If internships have proven to be a valuable experience for entering the workforce, then colleges need to mandate student participation in internship preparation courses that provide the guidance needed for interviews, writing the perfect cover letter, and organizing their resume properly. Internships have become more competitive and coveted so ensuring a student has the

training to outdo the competitor is critical and that comes from confidence which is built off of training and practice.

The Importance of Hands on Experience

The Importance of Hands on Experience by Fred Longenecker. “The hands-on experience that was once thought of as key to building a well rounded student has now disappeared from the classroom.” The background of experiential learning has “been around since 350 BCE, when Aristotle wrote, "for the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them." This idea ultimately became popular in the early 1950's and thanks to the backing of famous psychologists such as Jean Piaget, Kurt Lewin and John Dewey, Experiential Learning quickly became a staple in American education.” (Longenecker, 2017) Many schools have be forced to get rid of programs that were designed for hands on experience, to focus on courses that are more lecture based curriculum. “Being hands-on is especially important in the classroom because it allows students to engage in kinesthetic learning. Studies have shown that kinesthetic learning, where a student carries out physical activities rather than listening to a lecture, is the most popular type of learning with students - 'doing' helps them to gain a better understanding of the material. It allows students to experiment with trial and error, learn from their mistakes, and understand the potential gap between theory and practice. And most important, it provides educators with a unique opportunity to enrich the minds of their students in new and engaging ways.” (Longenecker, 2017)

Colleges have failed to continue creating curriculum that have hands on experience. Many professors tend to stick to basic lecture tactics for their teaching techniques. However,

many of their students aren't walking out with knowledge that's practical and will help them be successful in or outside of college.

What's the purpose of college: A job or an education?

Longenecker poses "Is it solely a college's responsibility to make students job-ready?" He refers to the president of Wesleyan University, Michael Roth, "It doesn't matter what you take in college, it matters what you do," Roth said. "You should be able to show your teachers, and then anyone else, how and what you've made in a class, what you created, demonstrates your capacity to do other things and what you're going to do next." Roth was interested in making changes so that students better retain what they learned in class and are able to translate that learning to potential employers. He believes the best way to do so would be doing more project-based courses so that students can better learn to work in teams and apply their knowledge into the real world. Michael Roth is interested in making college courses more beneficial for each individual student.

Many professors do try their best to teach the students the book knowledge needed in their chosen field. However, don't spend much time teaching students useful skills that will help them outside of school grounds once they graduate. If professors were to provide more project-based courses, it would allow students to feel more confident when entering a job interview. Project-based courses can be beneficial for a student in building a portfolio and bringing that into a job interview. Employers want to see why each individual is a good fit. They don't want to know what courses you took. They want to know what you were able to apply to the real world from those courses. What your skills could bring to their team.

Analysis

This research began with three specific questions. First, what are important resources that could better equip students for real world success? Second, what are the key factors to a successful curriculum? Lastly, how can colleges create a more significant learning experience for its students?

Previous journals explain that faculty and administrators “become so involved with delivering the curriculum that they fail to acknowledge how to deliver the curricula in a more effective way for its students” (Kandiko, Blackmore 2012). It is important to create curricula that will benefit a student within and outside of their college career. In addition to that: how could institutions guarantee their students a successful college experience, and better equip them for real world success? First, connecting the classrooms to the real world. The core function of education is “to prepare students for life,” and during the ever evolving ‘Information Age’, our knowledge sharing economy is driven by the power of connectivity – changing the very nature of learning as education and technology go hand in hand, creating new opportunities for students to collaborate, network and spread ideas” (Selingo, 2015). Professors need to take the necessary steps to apply real world scenarios to the classroom, to prepare students for the real world success. For example, the description for Purchase College course “Strategic Message Design” asks prospective students: “What are the different forms messages take in spoken and written communication? After examining actual messages in different contexts and assessing their impact on individuals and groups, students learn how to craft messages and select the appropriate timing, style, and medium for delivery. Participants have the opportunity to design, deliver, and test the impact of new messages” (Communications • Purchase College). These are skills that

students will be able to take with them and potentially use with a Communications job. Second, we need to question the importance of exploring self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as an “individual’s confidence in their ability to successfully complete a task” (DeWitz, 2009). It is important that professors make sure their teaching techniques, course materials, and assignments are allowing students to challenge themselves but also leave the course with an added skill. Students should be able to demonstrate effectively what they learned in the course without assistance. Third, let’s explore the role of a clear, cut and dry, successful curriculum. Every institution is different and has different values, beliefs, and goals. In addition, connecting the diverse backgrounds of students that attend their schools, from race, age, religion, and, these days, identity. Not every curricula works for every student, it depends on a student’s retention ability, whether they retain best through hands-on work or written assignments. Discussing these things carefully will challenge and educate students about the world and themselves; itching to learn new skills. Fourth, let’s validate the importance of internships. They are a means “to get a taste of the actual professional experience in a particular field before you commit yourself to it fully” (Scholastica, 2018). One might think for this reason that a required course focused on internships would be beneficial for long-term goals, where students learn how to prepare for interviews, write cover letters, and build their resume. If we truly want the youth to be the future, this should not be optional. The more experience, the better for the students and the college. Lastly, creating significant learning experiences on campus by “first challenging its students to significant kinds of learning; second, use active forms of learning (team building and project-based); Three, have teachers who care about the subject, their students, and about teaching and learning; Four, have teachers who interact well with students. Lastly, have a good

system of feedback, assessment, and grading” (Fink, 2013). The more professors stick to this way of ‘significant teaching’ their students the better outcome for the students. By examining these sources I was able to gain further insight on the topic. After carefully doing research, it is shown in literature review that all these steps could potentially allow students to become more equipped for real world success after college.

Personal Reflection

Based on my personal experience in the Communications Department at Purchase College, I have had the opportunity to learn a lot on the history of my major. However, I feel as though the department lacked on preparing me for real world success and transitioning into my chosen career path. I believe professors at this institution have shown great enthusiasm when teaching their courses which has been very beneficial and has kept me motivated with my chosen profession. However, while their subject-matter knowledge and enthusiasm was strong and allowed me to succeed inside of college, professors did not create great learning environments that provided hands-on experience and prepared me to succeed in the “real world.”

Conclusion

After carefully doing research based on my hypothesis, I've found solid proof and facts to support that the steps taken above could potentially improve the Department of Communications at Purchase College.

The idea of preparing students for the real world would be beneficial to students, employers, and even our professors. Although it would take more time for professors to create these projects and grade them, students will have better outcomes after college because they acquired more tangible skills that will prepare them for their careers. Isn't that what college is all about? The more focus is placed on the curriculum being a "preparatory or academy style" structure, the more likely students will succeed outside of colleges, and that will benefit everyone - students, parents, academics, and the workforce.

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