

Please read the below frame and the corresponding questions to prepare for the 1st breakout group on the agenda for Thursday.

False Dichotomy?

One of the key tensions from both the last task force meeting as well as alignment committee discussions is whether an increased focus on industry-valued career pathways comes at the expense of the traditional college experience (aka the liberal arts) and the critical thinking, problem solving and multi-disciplinary skills this education offers? Many of our 1330 conversations have promoted greater industry involvement in preparing students for high-demand, high value, high-wage jobs, by creating more flexible, alternative career pathways that allow for easier on/off ramping as learners/earners move more readily between the workforce and more traditional post secondary learning options. Many other 1330 members see/hear that as an attack on the value of a more traditional liberal arts curriculum.

Perhaps this is a false dichotomy? An alternative lens on this discussion is one grounded in the student perspective - while the postsecondary ecosystem increasingly offers many different roads, students expect all of them to enable access to enhanced professional and personal opportunities... and they all can and should - regardless of if a student is pursuing a STEM field, a high-value field like teaching, nursing, or social work or is pursuing a liberal arts education - all students should expect their education to help them attain their career goals.

However, our current postsecondary success measures, and therefore our strategic focus, centers around credential attainment, stopping short of "career attainment" (*this phrasing is a potential substitution for the prior "economic opportunity realization" based on helpful input from this group*). The logic for evolving from a focus on credential attainment to career attainment is as follows:

- With the decline in state funding for postsecondary institutions, students now pay for the majority of the cost of their postsecondary education
- Students are not paying for a credential-they are paying for what that credential enables
- Students expect a credential will enable them to access enhanced professional and personal opportunities
- Students hold this expectation regardless of their field of study - liberal arts students reasonably anticipate that the critical thinking, problem solving and multi-disciplinary skills they are learning will help them access better professional opportunities
- When our measures of success stop at graduation, they do not align with what matters most to students (the customer who is paying the bills)
- Upstarts entering the postsecondary ecosystem tout employer relationships and job placement data - they do this because this messaging, and the offering that backs it up, aligns with student needs

- This is critical for all students, but it is profoundly important for students of color, first generation, and low-income students who often lack inherited professional networks. Wealth gaps are larger and more critical than enrollment and graduation gaps for students from these backgrounds, and they have profound societal implications - our current lens into “equity gaps” tells an incomplete story and understates its magnitude

Key questions for discussion breakout groups on Thursday November 4th:

- How do we help others not participating in this conversation today appreciate that evolving from a postsecondary focus on credential attainment to a focus on career attainment is just as important for liberal arts students as it is for teaching, nursing, or social work students as it is for STEM students?
- What structural barriers exist that inhibit the development and maintenance of a system which focuses on career attainment, and what can be done to dismantle those barriers?
- How do we design measures that better assess the success of postsecondary pathways in meeting the diverse needs of Colorado’s learners/earners?
- Do you feel like the label “career attainment” properly captures the intended spirit of this new success measure? If not, do you have other naming ideas? Alternative name ideas suggested by others include: *Placement Rate*, *Bridge-to-Career Rate*, *Next Step Rate*, *Path-to-Prosperty Rate*