The reality is that a high-performing career center must be able to work with faculty effectively. Faculty are critical because they can have a major influence on students’ career paths, hold power on campus, drive students to our services, can have great connections in and knowledge of the field, and have important alumni relationships. And, above all else, we share the same students and have a mutual concern for their success. But faculty attitudes toward career centers can be misinformed, dismissive, and/or apathetic. What are the specific barriers inhibiting faculty connections, and how can we induce faculty to collaborate with our offices? This article identifies a range of practical, value-added communication and resource and programmatic strategies within the current faculty reward structure, which often emphasizes research and teaching.

Barriers to Faculty Collaboration

To understand how to work with faculty effectively, we must have a clearer idea of what barriers inhibit us from maximizing this important relationship, including faculty attitudes and perceptions toward career services, career services’ defensiveness, and our two distinct professional cultures.
Faculty Attitudes and Perceptions Toward Career Services

Faculty members often do not fully understand career services’ roles and responsibilities. Consequently, faculty view career services professionals as peripheral administrators rather than educators. This can be attributed to the fact that faculty as a whole have used career services the least of any professional group in their own undergraduate and graduate preparation, and may know very little about the “real world” possibilities for students in their disciplines. For some faculty members, career services’ focus is “too vocational” for some types of institutions (liberal arts in particular), and faculty’s interest in their most promising students is often to “create them in their own image”—to have them follow their disciplinary paths. All these mind-sets can contribute to faculty disinterest in working with career services offices.

Career Services Defensiveness

Career services practitioners are not blameless. In response to the lukewarm reception and perceived lack of faculty respect, we often adopt defensive and cloistering attitudes. Career services staff might sniff that our work is as important as faculty research and teaching. Additionally, many career services staff do not “get out” enough, so faculty members don’t know us. And, we might be hesitant to invite faculty to put on events with us, thus inhibiting the key interactions that promote collegiality.

Distinct Professional Cultures

Though faculty and career services professionals work on the same campus and work with the same students, there are some general differing worldview assumptions and drivers of our individual priorities. Faculty loyalties are often to their disciplines and departments, whereas career services’ loyalty is primarily to the institution. Faculty often research autonomously, whereas career services works cooperatively. The purview of faculty work is primarily students’ intellectual development, whereas career services must take the whole student into account.

Visioning

With a better sense of the barriers that might beset a productive faculty-career services relationship, let’s imagine what this relationship might look like ideally on your campus—because “you can’t get what you want until you know what you want.” If you could wave a magic wand, what would an ideal relationship with faculty on your campus look like? What would your programs look like? What information would you share? What resources would be available to enhance each other’s work?

Market Research

The next critical step in creating effective relationships with faculty is to do market research on your campus. To get a bead on what your faculty market needs are, you must define your campus priorities, assess your situation on campus, and identify the right brand that your office should represent to faculty.
Defining Campus Priorities

There are many important things for faculty to focus on—at any given time there are multiple and competing priorities. What does your institution value? Beyond the rhetoric, what counts? What is the latest strategic document for your institution, and how does your work connect to this directly? What keeps your president and your boss up at night? What motivates faculty, and how might you work with them to advance their priorities?

Assessing Your Situation

Next, get a realistic appraisal of your office in the eyes of faculty. How is career services regarded on your campus? What would your most ardent faculty supporter say? Most honest faculty critic? What are your perceived/actual strengths? Weaknesses? How do you know? What problem(s) do you solve—or contribute to solving—for the institution? What do faculty members think is the most important thing that you do? Who are your other external constituencies? These assessments will detail your relative strength/weaknesses and help guide your strategies.

Faculty Brand Positioning Statement

The Career Development Center (CDC) at Mount Holyoke College (MHC) wanted to know more about what career-related initiatives faculty would find most valuable. The CDC invited an external review team to campus, using the visit as an occasion to engage faculty. Career services staff learned the important lesson that, at MHC, the lack of discussing CDC work in terms of “learning” can be seen as an unwelcome encroachment on faculty turf, and that faculty only want the CDC to be in charge of “post-MHC experiences.” Additionally, the CDC developed a simple faculty survey to gauge their interests in a variety of programs, resources, and communications strategies. This enabled us to identify the most promising areas on which to spend our energies, and not incidentally, allowed us to lead efforts with “we surveyed faculty.” After gleaning information from the external review and the faculty survey, the CDC developed a “brand positioning statement.” A faculty brand positioning statement identifies who the target audience is, and segments the population as to needs and feelings related to your office, what the people in the segments need, and how to address that need in compelling terms. The goal is to become an undisputed expert of all things related to careers on your campus. (See MHC’s faculty brand positioning statement, page 31.)

Making Strategic Alliances

The next step is to inventory who the key players are on your campus. Who are the key faculty with formal or informal influence? Who might be some possible early adopters of your office’s initiatives and overtures? Some promising leads might be young faculty, those doing inter-disciplinary work, those associated with living-learning centers, and/or those engaging in service- and community-based learning. What existing faculty relationships might enable you to participate in important campus discussions? Some of these connections can be developed through your work on campus, but also casual relationships can provide opportunities to connect in the community (e.g., the dog walkers, noon-time basketball, shopping, or children’s school). Additionally, you can volunteer for campus committees or socialize outside of work with faculty. Another tactic is to use any time that you have contact with faculty to demonstrate your value and how you can help with their most pressing concerns. Any one-to-one overtures should engage the faculty in ways that they find meaningful. Also, when possible, lead with “yes” to faculty requests; the impression you have created will often reap benefits of this goodwill.

Implementing a Strategy

A savvy career office will marshal its finite human and fiscal resources to maximize its impact, which requires a clear alignment of office and institutional strategic goals and needs. This necessitates identifying the key processes in your area that add value to your major stakeholders and then creating a plan for continuous improvement. Career services staff should anticipate faculty issues, follow through on previous promises, close the communications loop, and identify problems and develop specific problem-solving plans—thus faculty will know they are being well served. A strategy must cover the areas of communication

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and information, relationship management, and programs and services.

**Faculty Liaison Program**

Students come to faculty about advising and courses, but they also come for much more. Faculty can help students clarify their values and interests, build confidence in their capabilities, and encourage them to make larger connections outside of the campus community. A major objective is to convince the faculty that career services staff is there to help them help students, no matter what role they wish to take in students’ lives. A faculty liaison program is an intentional outreach effort where a career services staff member is assigned to a given department. This type of program can help career staff comprehensively package their outreach and collaboration efforts. Recommendations in this section may be bundled together in a program, or implemented à la carte.

This program can enhance communications between departments and career centers by promoting the exchange of department-specific, career-related resources and opportunities, helping develop panels and programs for specific majors, and providing information on life beyond college for particular majors (e.g., data on internships, graduate school, and employment). An example is the “Career Directions” program at Middlebury College, in which the career services staff bring academic departments, students, and faculty together to discuss career opportunities related to particular academic majors.

**Communications/Information**

**Scheduling.** Often, there are too many competing offerings for students that dilute efforts and squander valuable time and resources. A way to make this more efficient is to share dates of key office events with departments and identify departments’ career-related programs planned for upcoming academic year and include them on the career center master calendar.

**Establish Consistent and Effective Means of Communication.** Career offices often have relevant information for academic departments, and vice versa. This information is largely lost because there is not an efficient system of exchanging resources.

Some strategies that might work within this reality are funnel information to department liaisons to distribute to students and faculty, add a link to your career center site to department web sites, share job and internship listings with academic departments, connect department pages on the CDC web site, and develop faculty-related web materials. Another strategy is to include career center information in faculty communications. For example, MHC sends packets to all faculty members before their monthly meeting. This faculty packet now includes a one-page CDC flyer that showcases the programs coming up and provides useful information that reinforces that we are, indeed, the place to go for post-MHC experience. Faculty members can get bored in these meetings and are more likely to flip through this packet while they are a captive audience, increasing the chances that they will read them (like flyers on elevators or in bathroom stalls!).

**Print and Electronic Resources**

In addition to establishing effective communication channels with faculty, career offices need to provide useful resources, such as guidelines for writing letters of recommendation. Additionally, career service can provide “go-to” resources for answering such student questions as “What can I do with a major in...?” For an example of this, see www.middlebury.edu/offices/cso/explore/major/, which includes an overview of links and resources. Other valuable methods are to identify the range of graduate/professional schools in the major, help articulate the major in terms of the skills that employers desire, and purchase pertinent career-related books for your career library.

**Programs**

Some career program offerings can be of great use to faculty. Many departments have open houses for potential majors, when students’ latent
Concerns about the “value” of their majors are most ripe to be expressed, explicitly or implicitly. Additionally, you can provide personnel and organizational support to programs such as alumni/ae panels on choosing a major, retiring faculty panels, and “Don’t Cancel Class Day” programs, where the career office will “pinch-hit” for an absent professor by presenting a relevant presentation. Other opportunities that take advantage of academic settings include presenting at study abroad departures/returns meetings, coordinating and/or attending meetings for senior majors in fall, and even joining the departmental programs already in place. You can also attract faculty with programs that involve alumni. For example, MHC has two new alumni program initiatives, “Your Next Big Thing” (a panel and networking program built into existing alumni leadership programs on campus), and the “Alum Drop-By Program.” We also offer on-campus alumni recruiting, and we can notify faculty, who are excited to reconnect with alumni, that they are on campus. Other programs like “Getting the Most Out of Your Academic Adviser” can add value to faculty, so students will use their faculty time better, a common faculty lament.

Career offices can also offer major-related workshops on demand, collaborate with service-learning classes, and work with faculty on internships (e.g., NYC and D.C. Study-Away Programs). Career services can also collaborate via institutional opportunities. MHC used to disperse a number of separate funds for summer opportunities, which was inefficient. A student might have to petition for up to five different sources on one campus in five separate processes, which often cannibalized each other. Therefore, the CDC worked with other academic departments and programs to develop a central distribution system. This collaboration has provided the CDC with opportunities to educate faculty on how to help students best use their summer opportunities and promote a better level of understanding among faculty of students’ need for purposeful reflection on their experiences.

**Relationship Maintenance**

The key to any successful faculty outreach effort is to effectively manage the relationship. Faculty can be motivated on three levels—individually, from their department stance, and from an institution-wide perspective. But, you must get to know faculty members as people who know you as a person. That’s what makes all of this work.

**Individual:** It is important to tap into the individual levers of motivation. An example is to recognize faculty accomplishments. Cull any campus publications (e.g., campus news and events pages, the alumni magazine, and notices in faculty notes), and send notes of congratulations to faculty when warranted. Another effective tool is to print any profiles of your faculty on your institution’s web site and make a “book” so you can better familiarize staff with faculty and increase the number of ways you may be able to connect with them. You can also help with a faculty member’s dossier by involving them in projects that may be professionally helpful to them (e.g., help with a study on career learning outcomes and publish results in peer-reviewed journal). If time permits, you can create goodwill by providing career advice to faculty members’ families.

**Department:** At the departmental level, encourage all academic departments to refer students with any career-related questions to the CDC faculty liaison. Contact academic-related student organizations and student liaisons representing academic departments for possible collaborations. Student peer career advisers can also be helpful in forging collaborations. If faculty members do help your office, ask them if they want you to send a thank-you note to the department chair to include in the faculty member’s tenure/promotion dossier for “service.”

Departamental assistants are another key constituency in the faculty arena. They should be your best friends. They handle the lion’s share of the organizational work, often have long service at the school, know how to get things done, have much day-to-day contact with students, and “know where the bodies are buried.” Many institutions sponsor a department brunch as a way to connect with these important people.

**Institution:** There are also ways in which faculty might be engaged institutionally, particularly around issues that may transcend individual departments. For example, you could serve on institutional committees with faculty (i.e., advisory committees on health, law). Create a faculty advisory committee to the career center, participate in new faculty orientation, or invite new faculty to your office for a small reception.

**Conclusion**

Faculty and career services have a shared desire and responsibility to promote student success. But too many tactics to increase faculty connections fail because career centers do not take into account the unique forces that form academic culture or understand the realities of faculty roles within their departments, colleges, and disciplines. When you are not dancing well together, dancing harder is not the answer. Consequently, many efforts to engage faculty are often errant and ill-conceived, out of touch with faculty interests and priorities, or contradictory to the rewarded values of the institution. Career services will be most successful if we identify barriers to faculty collaboration, envision an ideal collaborative scenario, gather market research to determine faculty needs, make strategic alliances, and implement strategies that marshal all of our resources.

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**Endnotes**