

NP 40 - How Institutions Can Measure Career Readiness in Real Time

Career readiness can no longer be treated as something students pursue only if they happen to walk into a career center. As colleges and universities face growing expectations around employment outcomes, institutions are being challenged to think differently about how they prepare students for life after graduation. That means moving career development into the broader academic experience and giving students the skills, experiences, and confidence they need to compete in a rapidly changing job market.

Joining me for this conversation is Mario Vela, Assistant Vice Provost of Career Engaged Learning and Executive Director of the University Career Center at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Mario is a longtime career services leader and a double alum of UT San Antonio whose experience also includes supporting mid-career Latino professionals through the Hispanic Alliance for Career Enhancement and serving as Director of Employer Relations at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. His work today is focused on making career preparation an integrated part of the student experience rather than an optional service students have to seek out.

We talk about UT San Antonio's classroom-to-career approach, the development of a Career Readiness Index, and how data can help institutions understand whether students are actually prepared for the workforce before they graduate. Mario also shares how leadership, faculty, colleges, and career teams can work together to build a campus-wide culture around career readiness, why this work is especially important for first-generation students, and how institutions can begin measuring which programs, technologies, and interventions are truly making a difference in student outcomes.

Show Notes:

[02:22] Mario Vela introduces his background in higher education and career services, including his current leadership role at UT San Antonio.

[03:50] Why the traditional opt-in career services model is no longer enough and how new accountability measures are changing expectations for universities.

[05:09] UT San Antonio's classroom-to-career strategy integrates career-engaged learning throughout degree programs, colleges, faculty partnerships, and the broader institution.

[07:42] The vision for a Career Readiness Index that brings student data together to provide a clearer picture of career preparation before graduation.

[09:10] Career development data can help institutions identify which experiences students are participating in and where targeted interventions could improve outcomes.

[11:41] Why preparing students for the workforce is an institutional responsibility and how skills such as negotiation, networking, resumes, and interviewing create a competitive advantage.

[14:13] Leadership support, relevant outcomes data, and partnerships with colleges and faculty helped turn career-engaged learning from a vision into an institution-wide strategy.

[18:43] How the Career Readiness Index could reveal which combinations of mentorship, career coaching, experiential learning, and technology actually improve student outcomes.

[20:53] The conversation turns to first-generation students and how real-time data could help institutions understand their experiences and provide more effective support.

[22:28] Advice for career center leaders, including building leadership alignment, creating institutional coalitions, and finding collaborative ways to fund new initiatives.

[24:18] Why the current focus on career outcomes creates a major opportunity for innovation in higher education career development.

Links and Resources:

[Civitas Learning](#)

[Mario Vela - UTSA University Career Center](#)

[Career-Engaged Learning](#)

[Mario Vela - LinkedIn](#)