

Greetings esteemed faculty,

According to a **National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE)** study, students who had career conversations with faculty or staff reported more confidence in their knowledge and skills to transition to their career than those students who did not engage in career conversations.

So, it is with excitement that I write to share some of the work of UCR's **Career Readiness Assessment (CRA)** Team and invite you to participate in an innovative initiative designed to improve career readiness for first-generation and low-income students.

With your involvement, the CRA Team will pilot a fall 2021 **Faculty Ask Me Anything (AMA) Series** to take place in UCR classrooms. There will be four components to the series:

- **Faculty Career Story** (15 minutes of class time in week one of the quarter)
- **Industry and Academic Pathways Panel** developed with support from the Career Center (one hour of class time in week three)
- **Networking Tips discussion** (15 minutes of class time in week five)
- **Building a job search tool kit** presented with support from the Career Center (30 minutes of class time in week seven)

Participating faculty and students will engage in brief pre- and post-program assessments. As a thank you, participating faculty will receive a *Career Readiness Champion Certificate*.

The development, implementation, and expansion of this pilot program will connect employers, UCR faculty, campus organizations, and the Career Center and provide opportunities for first-generation, low-income students to prepare to successfully transition to their careers.

This effort will not be possible without the collaboration of our esteemed faculty. **We invite you to join us this fall for the Faculty AMA Series pilot and appreciate your consideration of our invitation. To express interest and/or for any questions, please contact Elizabeth Montgomery, Associate Director of Student and College Engagement** at the UCR Career Center.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth K. Montgomery

CRA TEAM HISTORY

In January 2019 UCR's **Career Readiness Assessment (CRA) Team** was formed by a grant from the **University Innovation Alliance (UIA) Bridging the Gap from Education to Employment (BGEE) project**, led by Undergraduate Education and the Career Center, with participants including Associate Deans from the four largest colleges/schools on campus, faculty from the Academic Senate, and leadership from Undergraduate Education, Residential Life, and the Career Center.

The Team began with a week-long, collaborative design thinking sprint with the goal of answering this question: *How can we better prepare first generation, low-income students to transition to career?* After conducting over 170 empathy interviews with UCR students, the team learned that students make a distinction between “jobs” to meet financial needs and those that offer career-related experience. While the students interviewed recognized the importance of prioritizing career-related preparation and experience, one student said there is “no time for internships” and other students shared they “struggle to identify opportunities that exist”.

To answer this question, the CRA Team created the summer 2020 bridge experience: a six week-long, paid, multidisciplinary group internship for UCR students with limited career-related experience. Students worked with the **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** to look at ways to reduce food waste at UCR and in the greater community. A unique component of this internship was that interns had both an EPA mentor as well as an academic mentor from UCR. Additionally, students received career development support throughout the internship from UCR Career Center staff through an integrated curriculum co-created with the EPA. Data from pre- and post- program assessments of student interns showed what made this internship pilot successful: **relationship building, increased public speaking confidence, development of National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) career readiness competencies, familiarity with a new discipline, career-related experience, and increased confidence in the interns' ability to explore and plan their career paths.** A post-program evaluation of the professional mentors indicated what made this pilot successful for the employer: Employers rated a 90% promoter score for the program recommendation. And, one employer mentor shared, “I have

been working with interns and intern programs for over 25 years and this is by far the best internship program I have ever participated in as a mentor.”

In January 2021, the CRA Team reconvened and decided to pursue two programs. First, continue and grow the summer bridge experience by offering two summer 2021 internship projects for UCR students co-led by UCR faculty including Dr. Alicia Arrizón (CRA Team member) and Dr. Sundararajan Venkatadriagaram as well as employer partners including the **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), City of Riverside**, and the **Greater Riverside Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (GRHCC)**. Second, we embarked on a mini design thinking sprint to answer the question, *How might we engage faculty as advocates for career readiness at UCR?* The goal being to raise awareness of the value of career conversations, to create opportunities for these conversations to take place between faculty and students, and to help students align career planning to classroom experiences. Students reported in empathy interviews that they go to faculty for career advice, and first generation and low-income students reported not dedicating time to career related experience due to competing commitments.

The CRA Team engaged in empathy interviews in mid-January 2021 to interview ten students and eight faculty members to learn more about the guiding question. Next, the Team met and identified the most surprising, interesting, and challenging data points from the interviews and decided, based on insights from empathy interviews, to further explore faculty career storytelling in the classroom as a small change that could make a big impact on students in the following ways: provide an example of career decision making and inspiration for students, increase students' comfort in approaching faculty, and help students connect learning to the real world. The team developed prototypes of faculty storytelling methods and conducted prototype testing with approximately 49 UCR faculty and students. Based on prototype testing, students strongly preferred a live Ask Me Anything (AMA) format due to the opportunity for more authentic, non-static engagement that “humanizes” faculty by sharing stories of adversity as well as success. The CRA Team has decided to engage faculty, students, and employers through offering a Faculty Ask Me Anything (AMA) Series pilot to take place in UCR classrooms this fall 2021.

UCR CAREER READINESS ASSESSMENT TEAM MEMBERS

Alicia Arrizon

Associate Dean, Student Academic Affairs,
College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences

Christine Bender

Director, *Residential Life*

Connie Nugent

Divisional Dean of Student Academic Affairs,
College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

Elizabeth Montgomery

Associate Director, Student & College Engagement,
Career Center

Marko Princevac

Associate Dean, Student Academic Affairs,
Marlan and Rosemary Bourns College of Engineering

Michelle Gomez

Associate Director, Employer Relations, *Career Center*

Sean Gil

Director, *Career Center*

Thomas Dickson

Assistant Vice Provost, *Undergraduate Education*

Thomas Kramer

Associate Dean for the Undergraduate Program,
School of Business

Thomas Sy

Faculty Member, *Psychology*

William Grover

Faculty Member, *Bioengineering*

**Reporting to Jennifer Brown, Vice Provost & Dean,
Undergraduate Education*