

BUILDING BRIDGES TO CAREERS

**A CAMPUS-WIDE STRATEGY FOR EMPLOYER
ENGAGEMENT AND WORK-BASED LEARNING**

Flex Day, Fall 2026

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Building Bridges to Careers

**Student Return on Investment
(ROI) and Using Data**



**Employer Engagement &
Work-Based Learning**



Career Center Services

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Understanding Return on Investment in Higher Education

The Federal Role: The U.S. Dept. of Education College Scorecard & ROI Data Tools

A Policy & Data Overview



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\$ What Is ROI in Higher Education?



ROI measures whether the financial benefit of a degree outweighs its cost. In essence, it compares what graduates earn against what they paid to attend.

Cost

Tuition, fees, and student loan debt incurred

Earnings

Median income of program completers after graduation

Premium

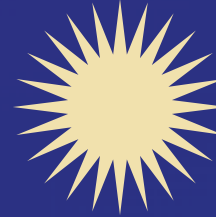
Earnings above a high-school-only comparison group

$$\text{ROI} \approx (\text{Graduate Earnings} - \text{Comparison Earnings}) \text{ vs. Cost of Degree}$$

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The College Scorecard



The Department of Education's primary public tool for reporting program-level outcomes. It aggregates federal administrative data so students and policymakers can compare institutions.

 Median earnings of program completers (1, 4, and 10 years out)

 Median federal student loan debt by program

 Graduation and completion rates

 Loan repayment and default rates

 Average net price of attendance

 Field-of-study level detail by credential

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Where the Data Comes From



IRS / U.S. Treasury

Administrative earnings match — actual tax-based income of completers

NSLDS

National Student Loan Data System — debt, repayment, and default figures

FAFSA / Federal Student Aid

Identifies Title IV–aided students and enrollment

U.S. Census Bureau (ACS)

Baseline earnings for high-school and bachelor comparison groups

Bureau of Labor Statistics

Occupational and regional wage context

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How the Federal Government Uses ROI

ROI data increasingly drives accountability — determining whether programs remain eligible for federal student aid.



Earnings Premium Test

Do completers out-earn a typical high-school graduate? "Do-no-harm" standard.



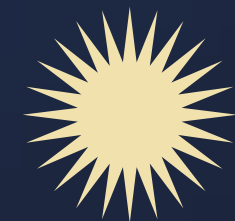
Gainful Employment

Debt-to-earnings ratio for career and for-profit programs.



Aid Eligibility

Underperforming programs risk losing Title IV funding.



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Translating Data into Action: oc-works.org

Beyond raw federal data, ROI-focused platforms help colleges and students interpret Scorecard figures and connect them to real career and workforce outcomes.



For Students

Compare programs by expected earnings, debt load, and career pathways in plain language.

For Colleges

Benchmark program performance against federal thresholds and peer institutions.

Workforce Alignment

Link degrees to regional labor-market demand and occupational wages.

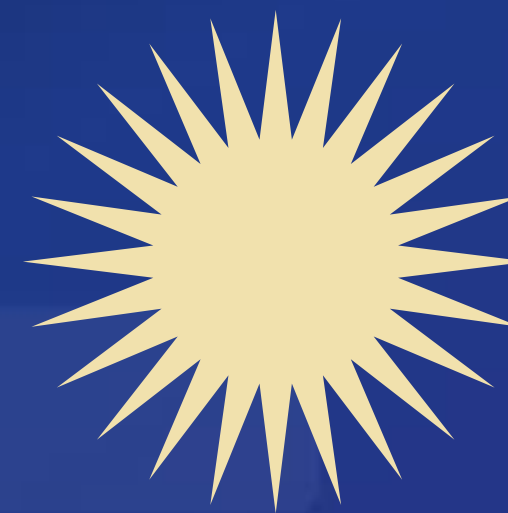
Decision Support

Turn complex Scorecard datasets into accessible, visual guidance.

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Key Takeaways



- 1 ROI compares graduate earnings against cost and a comparison-group baseline.
- 2 The College Scorecard is the federal hub, powered by IRS, NSLDS, FAFSA, and Census data.
- 3 ROI now carries real stakes — tied to federal student aid eligibility.
- 4 Tools like oc-works.org help translate data into clear guidance for students and colleges.



Reframing ROI: From Cost to Mobility



For community colleges, return on investment is too often reduced to completion counts or cost-per-student. OC Works reframes ROI around what actually matters to students: **does this pathway lead to a living wage, real demand, and upward mobility?**

By pairing program data with the Living Wage Calculator and percentile earnings, OC Works lets students, faculty, and IRPE professionals answer three ROI questions at once:

What will I earn?

Will there be jobs?

Is it worth my time & money?

This shifts ROI from an institutional accountability metric into a **student-facing mobility metric** — which is where equity work lives.

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Three Lenses on ROI



OC Works surfaces ROI at three reinforcing levels.

STUDENT ROI

Wage data makes a credential's **payoff concrete**.

PROGRAM ROI

Demand data builds a **defensible case** for investment.

REGIONAL ROI

Supply vs. demand shows where investment **closes gaps**.

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ROI in Practice: What the Pilot Showed



The pilot demonstrated that **ROI becomes actionable when it's local, visual, and personal.** When students saw the gap between a program's typical wage and the OC living wage, decision-making changed — they weighed pathways by mobility, not just interest.

\$27.63

OC Hourly Living Wage

\$114,951

Annual Living Wage

~\$69K

Median Earnings (Sector)

For IRPE, this reframes ROI evidence for **Program Review and Guided Pathways**: instead of asking only "*did students complete?*" we ask "**did completion move students toward economic security?**" — an equity-centered ROI standard other regions can replicate.

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Shifting Focus



Work-Based Learning



Employer Engagement



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Work-Based Learning

Why it's essential:

- Connects learning to practice
- Helps students determine their career pathway
- Provides work experience and networking
- Improves student job placement, earnings, and career readiness

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Work-Based Learning

What it looks like:

- Internships
- Apprenticeships
- Project-Based Positions
- Job Shadowing/Volunteering
- Work Experience Education

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Employer Engagement

Why it's essential:

- Aligns academic programs with workforce needs and in-demand skills
- Expands access to internships and other WBL opportunities
- Strengthens regional workforce pipelines and community partnerships



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Employer Engagement

What it looks like:

- Work-Based Learning Opportunities
- Guest Lectures/Demonstrations
- Career Mentoring
- Advisory Boards



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The Career Center



Current/Continuing Services

- Workshops
- Career Exploration/Assessments
- Individual Coaching
 - Resume Building
 - Interview Preparation
 - Job & Internship Search
 - Job Application Support

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The Career Center



New Services

- Work Experience Education (WEE)
- Handshake
- Employer Engagement
- Career Center Workgroup

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What YOU Can Do:

**Recruit industry
partners**

**Collaborate with industry
partners to align curriculum
with industry needs**

**Create WBL opportunities
within your classes**

**Share the Career Center
services with students**

Join an advisory board

**Join the Career Center
Workgroup**



...What else?

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QUESTIONS?

