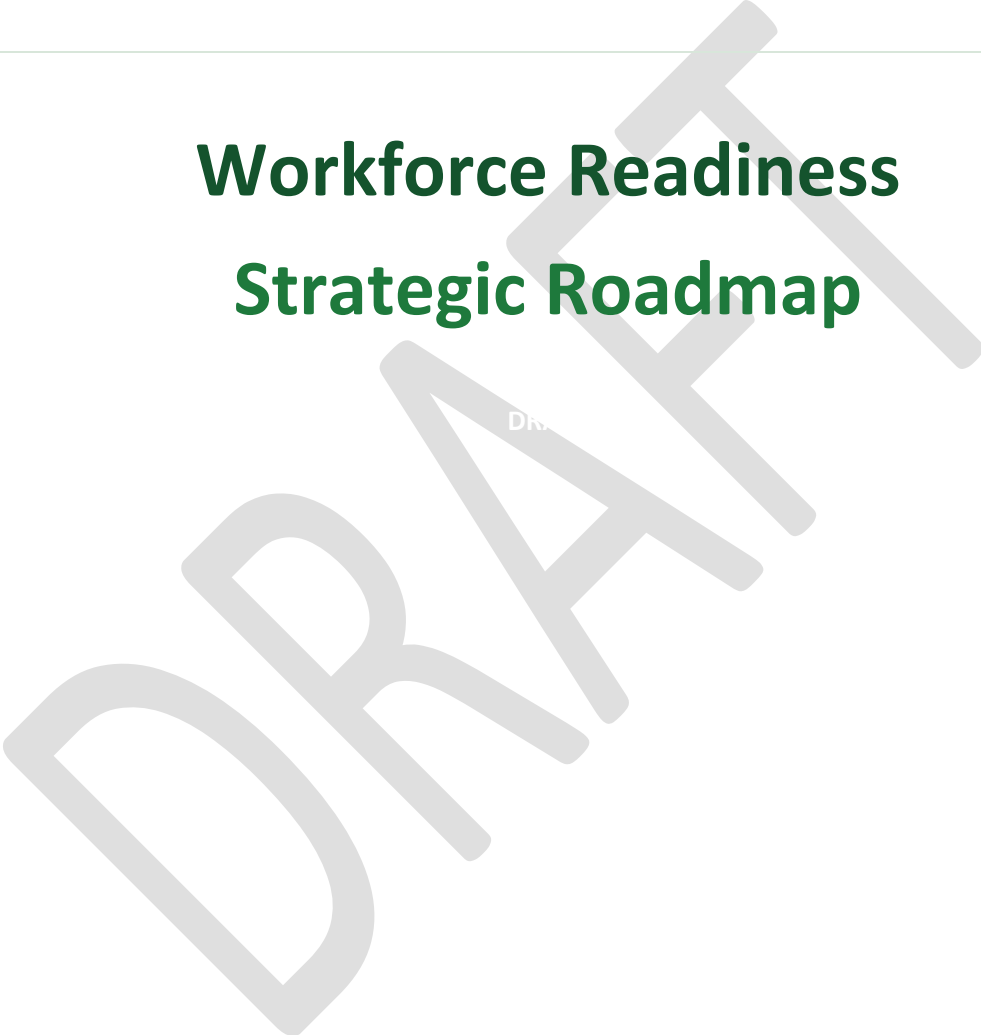


UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY

Workforce Readiness Strategic Roadmap

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Introduction

As the state's largest higher education institution, UVU stands at the center of a transformative moment. With strong state policy support, growing employer engagement, and a clear mandate to align education with economic opportunity, we have a rare opportunity to lead the nation in building an integrated, collaborative pathway from K-12 through higher education to meaningful work. By partnering with employers, K-12 systems, and our local communities to strengthen workforce readiness across the pipeline, UVU can model what it means to educate students not just for credentials, but for purposeful careers and thriving lives.

UVU's distinctive model of workforce readiness focuses on campus-wide ownership and co-creation with industry partners, eliminating silos and reducing friction points to ensure a seamless, integrated student experience from pre-admission to job placement post-graduation. With a strategy grounded in three pillars of workforce readiness: creation of a workforce-ready institutional culture, promotion of workforce-ready curriculum and programming, and provision of workforce-ready student support; every unit and team member at UVU is empowered to cultivate workforce readiness in their own sphere.



These workforce preparedness efforts focus on critical priority areas: development of durable skills, meaningful connections with industry, and acquisition of foundational literacy skills in applied artificial intelligence. Recognizing that these skills and connections are formed across the entirety of the student experience, in and out of the classroom, UVU prioritizes the integration of workforce readiness into all curricula, support services, and co-curricular experiences across every college and administrative unit.

Context: Why This Matters

The evidence points to a shared challenge across the education pipeline. Recent state audits reveal that approximately half of Utah's third-graders are not reading at grade level, reflecting a national trend affecting student readiness for college-level work.¹ Many students entering higher education struggle with complex texts, demonstrate limited reading endurance, and lack the contextual knowledge needed for college coursework.² These challenges are not failures of individual institutions but signals of a system-wide need to strengthen foundational skills and ensure coherent preparation across all levels of education. UVU's K-12 partners recognize this urgency and are investing heavily in early literacy initiatives. By aligning with these

efforts and creating clear pathways for students who need additional support, UVU can ensure shared ownership of student preparation and success.

The State of Utah has created a policy framework that enables and incentivizes this collaborative work. HB 265 (Strategic Reinvestment Bill) ties higher education funding to workforce outcomes, requiring institutions to demonstrate alignment with state economic needs.³ HB 260 (First Credential) explicitly mandates that secondary and postsecondary education work together to create transferable credential pathways leading to employment.⁴ The Governor's FY26 budget priorities condition state funding on evidence of workforce alignment,⁵ and the Utah System of Higher Education Strategic Plan establishes workforce development as a core institutional obligation.⁶ Rather than constraints, these policies represent an opportunity for UVU to deepen partnerships, align academic programs with regional economic needs, and demonstrate leadership in preparing Utah's workforce.

UVU is uniquely positioned to catalyze this integrated approach. We educate nearly a quarter of all Utah higher education students and directly shape the workforce pipeline for the region.⁷ The institution enrolls substantial populations of first-generation (37%) and adult learners (28%), many of whom require targeted support and benefit from clear pathways to employment.⁸ UVU demonstrates significant strengths: strong retention rates, growing employer partnerships, and solid alumni outcomes (83% employed within one year of graduation, 77% in jobs related to their degree).⁹ By investing in this work, UVU fulfills its mission of educating every student for success and ensures that Utah's largest higher education institution drives tangible economic benefit for the state and its residents.

Establishing a Culture of Workforce Readiness

Creating a workforce-ready culture requires sustained leadership from the highest levels of the institution. UVU's governance structure—a Workforce Executive Committee providing senior-level strategic direction and a Workforce Alignment Council of 35 leaders coordinating efforts across every college and administrative unit—ensures workforce readiness is a university-wide priority, not a departmental function. Through Program Advisory Board Leadership oversight, the Workforce Executive Committee guides all university program boards in actively shaping curriculum and career pathways in partnership with industry. By embedding workforce-aligned efforts throughout campus, UVU creates shared ownership and transforms workforce readiness from a discrete program into an institutional culture.

Empowering faculty and staff to lead workforce readiness efforts is essential to institutional change. Faculty and staff across all departments bring critical insights into the skills, competencies, and career pathways students need, and they are positioned to integrate workforce readiness into daily teaching, mentoring, and program planning. UVU supports this work through professional development opportunities like the Workforce Faculty Summer Institute, training that embeds workforce-readiness principles into annual goal-setting processes, and recognition programs that celebrate workforce-aligned contributions. By ensuring faculty and staff have a shared vocabulary, accessible resources, and meaningful support, the university equips its people to champion workforce readiness in their respective roles. This distributed leadership transforms workforce preparation from a central initiative into something woven throughout the institution, where every faculty member and staff person understands their role in preparing students for success.

Elements of a workforce-ready culture:

- Shared campus vocabulary and language for workforce preparation that includes:
 - Core durable skills list with definitions

- AI fluency standards, general and by discipline
- Student-facing terminology that reflects student perspectives on workforce readiness
- Employee and faculty performance support:
 - Recognition for workforce-aligned efforts, such as through existing award programs, participation in the Workforce Summer Institute, etc.
 - Incorporation of workforce readiness efforts into the faculty journey
 - Training for those supervising and mentoring students
 - Workforce readiness elements embedded in training for annual goalsetting
- Student employment as a critical part of workforce preparation
 - Cultivation of a campus culture supportive of the student employment experience
 - Shared best practices for maximizing student employee skill development
 - Training for those who supervise and mentor student employees
 - Prioritization of providing student work experience when considering job classification
- Student success resources focused on:
 - Basic needs
 - Retention and completion
 - Workforce-aligned skill development
- Intentional incorporation of student voice and perspectives in workforce development initiatives and efforts

Providing Workforce-Ready Student Support

Providing workforce-ready student support is not the responsibility of a single department or office—it is a campus-wide imperative that requires intentional coordination, shared accountability, and dedicated resources across every school, program, and student-facing role at UVU. Meaningful change requires faculty, advisors, career services professionals, and student support staff working in concert to ensure that every student graduates with the clarity, skills, networks, and confidence needed to advance in their chosen path. This coordinated effort is an investment in both individual student success and institutional effectiveness, directly supporting UVU's mission and contributing to our students' ability to thrive in an evolving workforce.

Every student, regardless of background or circumstance, benefits from expert advising, faculty mentorship, career guidance, and access to resources that enable them to focus on learning and growth. Comprehensive support systems that provide knowledgeable guidance, meaningful connections, coaching, and basic needs resources, remove obstacles that would otherwise distract or derail student progress. When students receive consistent, intentional support throughout their educational journey, they are more likely to persist, complete their degrees on time, and graduate with both the technical knowledge and durable skills employers value. Moreover, comprehensive student support creates pathways for students to develop professional networks, gain meaningful work experience, and cultivate the confidence and clarity essential for workforce entry. Strong student support systems are not peripheral to workforce readiness—they are

foundational, ensuring that every student has the resources and relationships needed to navigate their path to graduation and beyond.

Elements of providing workforce-ready student support:

- Recognize and respond to needs of adult learners and first generation students, acknowledging that they are a core, growing percentage of UVU's student population
- Identify and eliminate points of friction in the student experience
- Educate faculty and staff across the university about best practices for student success, empowering every ONE to help students
 - Ensure awareness of support resources
 - Help faculty and staff understand unique needs of this generation of students, including impact of technological advances, COVID pandemic, etc
 - Provide training for specific support relevant to retaining and graduating subgroups of students:
 - Cultural competency
 - Students who are parents/caregivers
 - Trauma-informed support
 - Mental and emotional wellbeing
- Center academic advising as a key component of career planning and workforce readiness
 - Data-informed workforce readiness training for advisors
 - Involve advisors in class scheduling and sequencing decisions
 - Advisors as part of articulation and transfer reviews to ensure optimal stackability and timeliness of completion
- Prepare students directly for the workforce through:
 - Providing multiple touchpoints over the course of their educational journey, inviting students to intentionally own and plan their own workforce preparation
 - Job placement assistance, including resumes, interview preparation, job fairs & employer recruitment,
 - Graduate school preparation
 - Ensuring that students can articulate the skills and competencies they have gained

Promoting Workforce-Ready Curriculum and Programming

Workforce-ready curriculum and programming must prioritize workforce relevance both by creating new, co-created industry partnerships and by elevating existing opportunities that prepare students for success. This means grounding programs in experiential learning and designing pathways that meet students where they are, spanning from traditional degree paths to stackable credentials, work-based learning, flexible scheduling, and beyond. Intentional development of both durable skills and emerging literacies ensures that students graduate with the knowledge, credentials, and confidence to advance in their careers. When

curriculum and programming are responsive, accessible, and dynamic, they serve as a bridge between classroom learning and workforce entry.

In this context, curriculum refers to what happens within academic coursework, including pedagogical approaches and interventions that strengthen students' preparation for the workforce. Programming is a broader term that may refer to both in-class experiences, such as service learning, and separate programs outside of the classroom, such as student employment or athletic involvement, that prepare students for the workforce in substantial and valuable ways in addition to their academic experience.

The emphasis on promotion is intentional. It includes the need to prioritize workforce relevance in designing and creating curriculum and programming, along with recognition that current curriculum and programming has much to offer students, and elevating awareness of these existing opportunities is critical.

Elements of promoting workforce-ready curriculum and programming:

- Involve industry partners as co-creators in curriculum and the student experience
- Ensure strong Program Advisory Boards for every program
- Create meaningful systems to capture employer feedback and utilize it in curriculum design
- Connect students directly to industry through work-based learning, including:
 - Internships and apprenticeships
 - Industry field trips and job shadows
 - Project-based learning and service learning
 - Recognition of relevant life and work experience, especially for returning or older students who may not be able to take time away from family and work obligations to participate in higher-investment learning activities
- Provide ways for students to experiment and “fail” as a critical part of the learning process
- Emphasis on development of durable skills, including assessment
- Consideration of class scheduling to accommodate student needs and ensure timely completion
 - Recommended action item—audit to identify where this breaks down and why
- Development of more stackable credentials and pathways
 - Align with tech colleges and K12 (First Credential) to ensure seamless transitions to UVU
 - Utilize and promote Credit-for-Prior Learning, including with industry partnerships
- Expand non-credit offerings to meet immediate workforce needs
- Build workforce readiness more clearly into the RTP process for faculty, recognizing and rewarding industry connections, alignment with workforce best practices, and intentional
- Establish strong non-credit-to-credit pathways
- Ensure development of key literacies throughout the student experience, including meaningful assessment:
 - AI fluency
 - Information literacy
 - Emotional intelligence

- Recognize the workforce-preparedness value of global engagement, such as participation with Education Abroad, UNESCO, and cultural competency initiatives

Priority Areas

Industry Engagement

Deep collaboration between higher education and industry is essential for ensuring curriculum and programming remain responsive to evolving workforce needs. According to the 2024 Utah State Workforce Alignment Study, employers recognize the strength of Utah's higher education graduates but identify crucial opportunities for improvement in how institutions partner with industry to shape program design and student experiences. This study reveals that while work-based learning stands out as the most valued form of collaboration, significant untapped potential exists in expanding industry engagement beyond internships to include classroom instruction, curriculum design consultation, and long-term partnership frameworks. When higher education institutions actively involve industry partners in shaping what and how students learn, students benefit from clearer alignment between academic preparation and workplace expectations.

Durable Skills Development

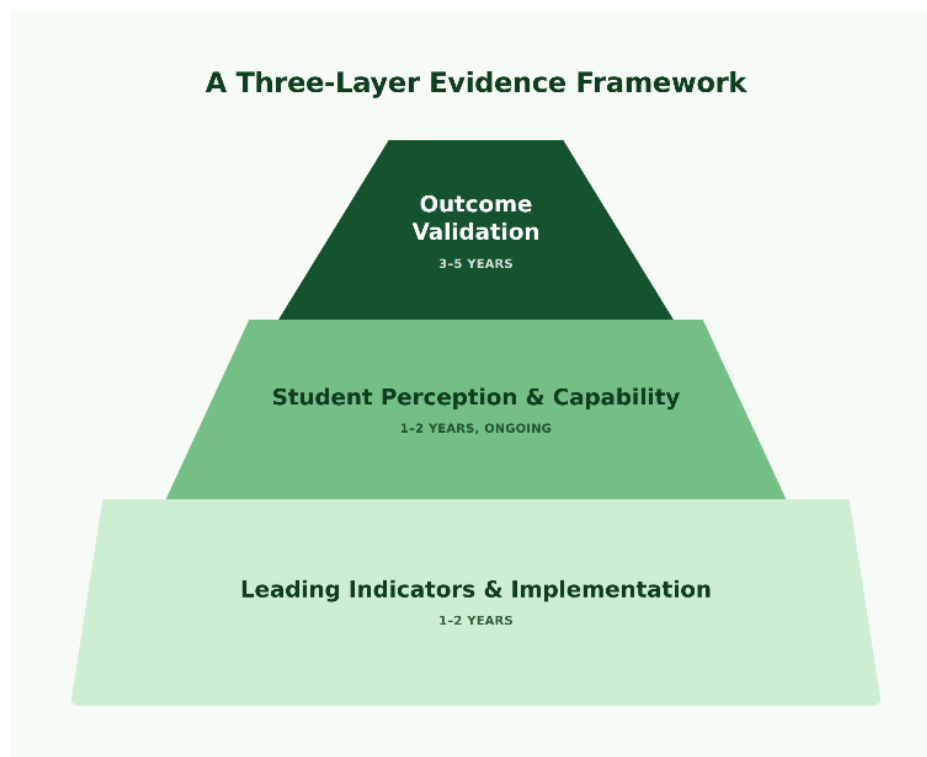
While UVU graduates demonstrate strong technical competence, employers across Utah industries consistently identify durable skills such as communication, collaboration, time management, and stress management, as significant areas requiring greater institutional focus. The 2024 Utah State Workforce Alignment Study found that durable skills development has emerged as a challenge noted across all industries in the state. Employers emphasize that intentional, rigorous development of durable skills should occur both within coursework and through ongoing mentorship and feedback mechanisms that mirror workplace learning environments. By embedding explicit opportunities for students to develop, practice, and receive feedback on durable skills, UVU strengthens graduates' capacity to adapt, lead, and thrive across diverse professional contexts.

AI Literacy

AI competency has rapidly transitioned from an emerging skill to a foundational workforce requirement, with employers across industries seeking graduates who can effectively use, evaluate, and think critically about AI tools. The World Economic Forum has warned that “AI skills are becoming more important than job experience,” signaling a fundamental shift in workforce demands. While UVU student data reveals meaningful gaps in AI confidence—with only 40 percent of students feeling confident explaining AI prompt engineering skills to a potential employer—this finding aligns with the emerging nature of AI as a competency across higher education nationally. According to the 2025 Global Student Survey, 69 percent of undergraduates across 15 countries expect their educational institutions to equip them with relevant AI skills. Strategic development of AI literacy across UVU's curriculum ensures all graduates, regardless of discipline, develop the foundational knowledge and ethical reasoning necessary to engage with AI in their careers.

Assessment: How Will We Know if This Roadmap Is Successful?

Evaluating this roadmap's effectiveness requires multiple evidence streams because attribution is inherently complex. Outcomes result from many factors, not a single initiative. We will track three layers of evidence, each serving different audiences and timeframes.



Layer 1 focuses on leading indicators and behavioral shifts visible within 1-2 years: enrollment patterns in strategy-aligned courses, participation in experiential learning, credential pursuit, and course-taking sequences. These metrics demonstrate that the roadmap is actually being implemented and that students are engaging with it, without requiring the full 3-5 year wait for outcome data.

Layer 2 captures student perception and capability growth, also measured over 1-2 years and ongoing: student confidence in explaining their skills, clarity about career direction, sense of resource access, and willingness to take productive risks. These satisfy faculty and learner-centered audiences by directly reflecting student experience and showing whether the strategy is resonating.

Layer 3—outcome validation—represents the summative assessment at 3-5 years: job placement in field-aligned roles, salary progression, employer feedback on skill readiness, credential completion rates, and graduate school placement. While these outcomes are hardest to attribute directly to the roadmap, we will connect them to intervention-level data through disaggregation—showing which student populations had greater exposure to roadmap initiatives and how their outcomes compare—allowing us to build a credible narrative about the strategy's contribution while honestly acknowledging other contributing factors.

Next Steps

To realize the outcomes envisioned in this roadmap, the institution must establish clarity around what we measure and how. Currently, student support initiatives, faculty development programs, and curriculum changes collect valuable data about participation and engagement, but this data often exists in isolated systems across different departments. This fragmentation obscures our ability to see the full picture of how students experience the roadmap's initiatives or to understand their cumulative effect on student success. Recommendation: over the next 12-18 months, conduct a systematic inventory of existing data collection

across key intervention areas—identifying what metrics are already being captured, in what formats, and by whom. This audit will serve as the foundation for designing a lightweight aggregation process, rather than creating redundant new tracking systems.

Building on this inventory, we will establish a core set of participation and engagement metrics aligned with the roadmap's major initiative categories. Rather than attempting to track every intervention with equal precision, we will designate the 5-7 most strategically important initiatives and clarify the single most important metric each should report annually—whether that's program enrollment, faculty participation, course modification, or student awareness. These metrics will be standardized in format and collected on a consistent calendar (e.g., end of academic year), then aggregated into a dashboard that tells the institutional story of roadmap implementation. This approach respects the autonomy and local context of individual programs while creating the visibility needed for institutional accountability and course correction.

Finally, we will connect these intervention-level metrics to the robust outcome data we already track—completion rates, job placement, retention, and credential attainment. By disaggregating these outcomes by student exposure to roadmap initiatives, we will build an evidence-based narrative about effectiveness that acknowledges both what we can measure with confidence and what we can reasonably infer through logic and pattern. This integrated approach positions us to answer, at the 3- and 5-year marks, not just whether outcomes improved, but how the strategic choices we made contributed to those results—and where mid-course corrections may be needed.

An immediate first step is an annual compilation of self-reported workforce readiness efforts and outcomes across campus. This will be undertaken by the Workforce Alignment team with support from the Workforce Alignment Council. The first report will be available Spring/Summer 2027.

Throughout the strategy sessions and the efforts of the Workforce Alignment Student Taskforce this past year, one need surfaced clearly: students want more information and support taking ownership of their own workforce preparation. This includes understanding how their specific coursework and curriculum connect to industry expectations, guidance on how to strategically plan for and secure meaningful interaction with industry through job shadows, internships, site visits, and networking; and making deliberate choices about student employment and extracurricular involvement with a clear sense of the skills those experiences can build.

An immediate next step is the development of a student-facing workforce readiness roadmap: a companion resource that translates this institutional strategy into practical, student-facing guidance students can use to plan their UVU experience with intention and care. Created collaboratively with student-facing programs across campus, this roadmap will give students a sequenced guide to the decision points that matter, such as when and how to pursue experiential learning, how to evaluate and time an internship, and how to read their own coursework and activities as a developing skill portfolio, so that ultimate ownership of workforce readiness sits with students themselves.

Conclusion

This roadmap succeeds only when it becomes everyone's work. Whether shaping institutional culture through relationships, strengthening student support by removing friction and creating pathways to

success, or designing curriculum and programming that equips students with the skills and confidence to thrive, every contribution matters. The three pillars of workforce readiness stand together: culture creates conditions for positive change, student support removes barriers and accelerates progress, and workforce-ready curriculum and programming give students tangible knowledge and experiences they need.

Preparing students for work is preparing them for life. The same skills that enable them to succeed in their careers also prepare them to be better citizens, parents, neighbors, community members, leaders, and family members; to flourish in all dimensions of life. Every effort made to strengthen a student's readiness for work simultaneously prepares them to contribute fully to their communities and live with purpose.

The heart of this strategic roadmap is an invitation to each member of the UVU community to ask: how can I, in my role and area, help students be better prepared for the workforce and for life? The answers, on an individual and collective level, are how this vision becomes real.

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