

2023 Technology Fee Full Proposal

Title: uConnect: A One Stop Shop for the Future of Work

Proposer: UF Career Connections Center: Ja'Net Glover, Sr. Director; Julia Vollrath, Assoc. Director, Sara Jay, Sr. Assistant Director for Career Engagement

Sponsoring Organization: UF Career Connections Center

Purpose and Specific Objectives: The University of Florida's Career Connections Center (C3) serves more than 60,000 students and thousands of alumni representing all majors and degree levels. The C3 is a centralized, comprehensive unit providing a diverse range of services to connect job seekers to employers and vice versa. The C3 is requesting funding to launch uConnect, a virtual career center. uConnect would enable the C3 to provide all current and prospective students, alumni, and families with 24/7/365 highly scalable, self-guided career exploration experiences including up-to-date career data and resources, which is a current limitation in the C3's operating structure. The platform would enhance the student experience by creating an updated career services hub at UF, combining existing resources, such as Symplicity CSM and LinkedIn Learning, along with new services, such as Graduway, into a convenient source for information at any point in their career journey. Faculty and staff at the University of Florida who support students would also have access to this resource, allowing them to integrate career readiness into their interactions with students in a meaningful way. This would aggregate career resources, events, and opportunities from across campus, and easily curate them for students based on industry, major, or identity.

As a virtual platform, uConnect would allow on-demand access to university career services resources to all stakeholders, removing barriers to ensure career success for all UF students, including UF Online students and others for whom travel to campus may not be feasible. By providing a hub for career-related services and platforms, uConnect would also increase the usage of existing UF resources that students may be unaware of or have difficulty accessing on their own. This would help ensure that existing partnerships and programs, such as LinkedIn Learning and LightCast, are elevated and accessible to reach as many students as possible. Additionally, uConnect provides students with access to a curated database of articles on career-related topics from multiple respected sources, creating a virtual, comprehensive, online career community. These articles contain high-quality content from trusted third-party sources who are leaders within the career development industry like WayUp, The Muse, and Idealist, plus virtual simulations from Forage to expand the reach of career services past the four walls of the university.

In addition to providing access to these resources to students online, uConnect provides additional options to connect to students outside of website visits. Students can sign up to receive newsletters with data, information, and opportunities related to their careers of interest on a regular basis to support career education decisions. This type of proactive outreach ensures that career readiness and workforce preparation maintain topics of interest for students over time.

Expected outcomes include:

- Allow on-demand access to university career services resources to all stakeholders removing barriers to ensure career success for all UF students and enhancing the student experience.
- Provide relevant and comprehensive information about occupations, skills, career pathways, and labor market analytics, provided by LightCast, to support career and education decisions.
- Creation of cultivated and dynamic online career communities to support students in specific career pathways or identity groups.

Impact/Benefit: uConnect is a career management and marketing platform that will help the University of Florida leverage the resources, tools, and services they already have into one, online environment that enhances access and drives engagement. uConnect's powerful platform will help more efficiently engage faculty, attract employers, and collaborate with other departments on campus including admissions, alumni relations, student life, and UF online. This platform will provide a solution to brand employer partners and offer recruiters unique opportunities to showcase their companies and jobs to students. uConnect will seamlessly integrate every career resource across the university— from Symplicity to tools like Graduway and GoInGlobal- into one digital space. As such, uConnect is not simply 'another tool,' but rather functions as an integrative framework to engage stakeholders

(prospective students, enrolled students, faculty, staff, employers, etc.) by creating an institutional hub for career content that markets services, curates resources, and personalizes direct-to-student communications university-wide.

This virtual career center will integrate with Gator CareerLink, run through Symplicity, consolidating recruiting events, internships, job opportunities, event calendars, and employer profiles as a one-stop resource. uConnect combines content management, marketing, and artificial intelligence to deliver an institutionally branded “interactive career portal,” thereby allowing the University of Florida to promote services, resources, events, and recruiting opportunities more successfully in a modern and engaging way. Top-ranked universities, including almost half of the top 20 “Best National Universities”, across the country that have adopted uConnect have transformed student engagement rates and as a result, are spotlighting improved graduate outcomes. Just like at the C3 these top universities’ career offices’ services and resources existed across various sites: the office’s homepage, Symplicity, social media accounts, and a range of cross-linked digital tools such as “What Can I Do With This Major?” and GoinGlobal before adopting uConnect. Through uConnect, these schools took all the above and seamlessly integrated them into one user experience, wherein “login fatigue” was eliminated, potential confusion was replaced by system-guided pathways, and student engagement took off. At the C3, one of the top utilized services is the website, with 1,079,832 website views in the fiscal year 2021 alone. It is evident that students are accessing career services virtually and on demand. Through the implementation of uConnect, the University of Florida will be able to truly meet students where they are when it comes to providing streamlined career resources for their post-graduation success. To ensure that the C3 is providing the resources students need and meeting the expected outcomes outlined above, uConnect provides a detailed reporting module that infuses Google Analytics to showcase granular insights into usage and the measurement of impact.

The C3 sees connections going beyond the classroom, campus, and graduation; Gators are lifelong learners. uConnect will provide relevant and comprehensive information about occupations, skills, career pathways, and labor market analytics to support career and education decisions. Through uConnect’s Labor Market Insights module, a partnership with LightCast, uConnect will put real-time labor market data and analytics at the fingertips of students, as well as faculty, staff, alumni, and families, to guide students along high-impact career pathways and help achieve economic and social mobility. This resource offers self-guided access to location-specific data about trends in job and industry growth, in-demand skills, salary data, and emerging companies and roles. When people have the right data, they can make better choices. uConnect will help students make data-informed career decisions and allow them to see the trends and know what careers most closely align with their interests and areas of study. The labor market insights module is designed to inspire curiosity about what the future holds. This helps students connect what they are learning today to what they can do tomorrow.

Career readiness is at the center of many new and existing initiatives at the University and State levels. The adoption of House Bill 1261 by the Florida legislature requires students to engage with the C3 at the start of their time at UF. New students at the University in Fall 2023 will be given a pathway to connect with career through the Career Prep Process. Currently, students are expected to complete career-related assessments and reflection exercises in their first year at UF. uConnect will provide an additional option for meaningful engagement for these students, in their first year and beyond. Driving student engagement is at the core of what uConnect delivers. Through this powerful platform, C3 will be able to serve the UF community in more accessible, personalized, and impactful ways.

Sustainability: The Career Connections Center supports this proposal and has committed to providing ongoing resources, through auxiliary funds, to support the use of uConnect after the period of funding provided by the grant. The proposal for the acquisition of uConnect and C3 efforts in this area is also supported by the Vice President of Student Life and has cleared UF IT’s risk assessment process.

Timeline: The C3 has worked directly with uConnect to establish a launch plan and a contract between UF and uConnect could be initiated upon funding. Once approved by all parties, the start-up time needed by uConnect is approximately three weeks. Staff training within the C3 could begin during this time, with more in-depth training occurring once the system is launched. The expected launch date for uConnect, pending all approvals, is Fall 2023.

Throughout the Fall 2023 semester, the C3 will work to provide education and support for the UF community to engage in this platform, including marketing the platform to students, educating faculty and staff on how they can utilize uConnect to promote their career programming and engage alumni to share their industry expertise.

Budget: uConnect charges a flat fee based on the modules that each career center would like to use. For the C3 that would include the “Virtual Career Center” and the “Labor Market Insight” modules. The cost for launching both modules would be \$25,000 each fiscal year. There are no additional start-up, integration, or equipment costs associated with the onboarding of this resource. The C3 is requesting funding for uConnect for two years using this grant, therefore the total we are requesting is \$50,000.