# Lightcast

Strengthening Enrollment
with Market-Aligned Programs

In survey after survey, learners have spoken loud and clear: **career outcomes are a main motivation for pursuing higher education, work-relevance is a key determinant of educational value, and ROI (in terms of tuition cost and placement rates) is a major factor when determining where to go to school.**

These findings yield a key insight for higher education leaders: the labor market is a **leading indicator** that shapes and informs the **lagging indicator** of student demand.

See example
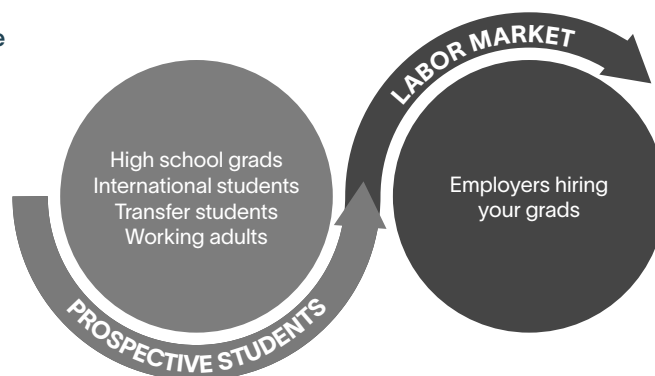
This insight has **two major implications** for colleges and universities looking to strengthen enrollment:

1) Achieving market alignment is a foundational part of enrollment marketing. If students care about career outcomes most, then aligning with those goals is the first step towards offering programs that will attract and enroll learners. Because you can't market what you don't have!

2) Demonstrating market alignment is a powerful marketing tool. Just because students want a good career outcome doesn't mean they know how to achieve it. Helping students 1) clarify their career focus and 2) see how your programs offer a bridge to their professional goals can give them the confidence and motivation they need to enroll.

From Theory to Practice

Achieving Market Alignment

To align with the market, you first need to understand it. Fortunately, the modern researcher has an array of available data to help in this task. You can think of this data as a pyramid, with the most broad, foundational data sets at the base and the most granular and precise at the top. By understanding the different layers and how they relate, you will be better equipped to identify your regional economy's unique strengths and areas of opportunity.

See example
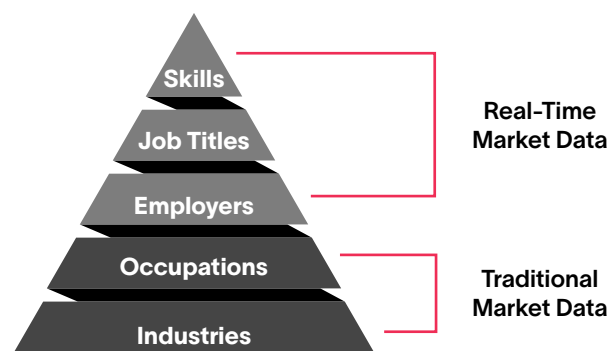
Traditional Labor Market Information

Industry: The broadest level of analysis. Indicates what kind of business activity is thriving in your region. Each industry has a NAICS code based on the North American Industrial Classification System.

- *e.g. (NAICS 52) Finance and Insurance*

Occupation: The kinds of jobs performed within various industries. Useful for identifying growing, high-wage professions in your region. Each occupation has a SOC code according to the Standard Occupation Classification system.

- e.g. (SOC 13-2011) Accountants and Auditors

Real-Time Labor Market Information

Employers: The businesses, non-profits, and public sector organizations hiring in your region. Answers questions like: "Where can our grads work? Who should we partner with for internship or co-op programs?"

- *e.g. IBM, Boeing, General Mills, etc.*

Job Titles: Compared to occupations, titles offer a more detailed picture of the

unique roles that individual employers are hiring for. Job title analysis helps institutions identify emerging, hybrid roles to better inform program and course decisions.

- *e.g. AWS Cloud Architect, Firmware Engineer, Sr. Tax Analyst*

Skills: The specific abilities, expertise, and competencies that employers are seeking. As the most precise, real-time level of labor market analysis, skill data is ideal for informing strategic curriculum adjustments, microcredential development, and targeted reskilling/upskilling initiatives.

- *e.g. Python (Programming Language), Financial Analysis, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)*

Demonstrating Market Alignment

Once programs are aligned to market needs, it's time to showcase that alignment so prospective students can see the value and relevance of your academic offerings. Here are two tactics to achieve this:

1) Embed career data directly into academic program pages

In today's digital-first world, an academic program's webpage is among the most important places to engage prospective learners. Along with essential information like cost and required courses, be sure to display relevant career information like related job titles, employers, or earning potential. This data helps visitors immediately perceive how an academic program translates into real-world opportunities — and demonstrates that your institution shares their focus on career outcomes.

2) Provide career-first academic exploration and advising

Just because students are motivated by career outcomes doesn't mean they know which career to pursue, let alone how to get there. To better reach and serve these learners, first help them explore labor market opportunities that align with their goals and interests. This career vision then serves as a North Star, guiding students to the right program and inspiring them to enroll.

▶ **See example**

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