

CASE STUDY

Coastline College

Coastline College uses Alumni Outcomes Data to Equip Faculty and Serve Students

Where are your alumni working?

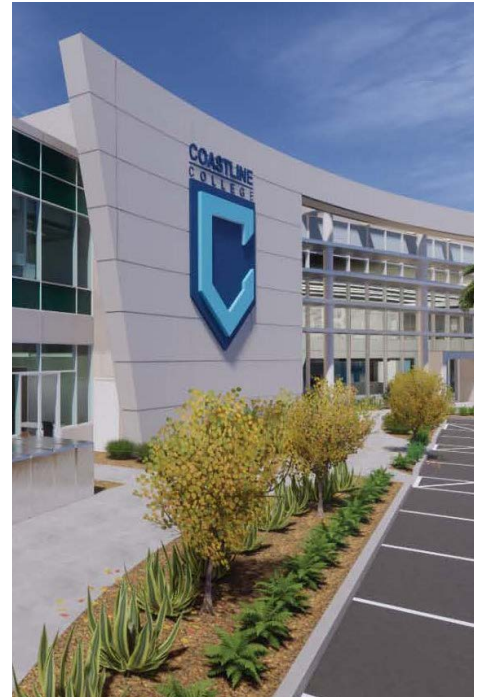
What jobs do they have? How much are they making? Colleges need reliable employment data on their alumni but acquiring and using it well can be challenging. To address this need, [Coastline College \(CC\)](#), in southern California, used an Alumni Outcomes study to support their data-informed strategy. CC shares their program specific data through a public Tableau dashboard which informs faculty-led program review as well as academic and career advising. CC can also view outcomes data by various demographics, allowing them to identify and address equity gaps. The questions will continue, but Coastline has the ability to offer compelling, data-rich answers to stakeholders within and outside the college.

Where are our alumni working?

What jobs do they have? How much are they making? The questions surrounding program outcomes are beginning to surface more and more frequently. Maybe it's the prospective student or their parents—trying to decide between your institution or the one next door; maybe it's a program Dean—Scraping together information for another review; or maybe it's a grantmaker or donor—asking if your program is worth the investment.

While the source may vary, the questions are the same at colleges and universities across the country. For some institutions the challenge is getting the data they need and for others it's organizing and sharing it with everyone who needs it when they need it.

Coastline College (CC) in southern California is no exception. What is exceptional, is Coastline's ability to offer compelling, data-rich answers to stakeholders within and outside the college.



THE CHALLENGE

Collect alumni data and communicate it with stakeholders in a way that is clear and actionable.



THE SOLUTION

Use Alumni Outcomes by Lightcast in conjunction with other sources to collect program specific data and organize for easy analysis.



THE RESULTS

CC's leadership and faculty are equipped with actionable outcomes data to help them better serve and inspire future learners.

Quality Data, in the Right Hands

A key part of CC's data-informed strategy was the Alumni Outcomes study. Lightcast delivered alumni employment information such as occupation, company, skills, estimated wages and more by matching CC's graduate records against Lightcast's professional profiles database of over 100 million online profiles.

The study included comprehensive Excel spread sheets complete with pivot tables and slicers for detailed analysis, as well as access to a user-friendly web portal for running schoolwide or program-specific reports. But it's one thing to collect data and another to put it to good use.

Dr. Aeron Zentner, who serves as Coastline's Dean of Institutional Effectiveness, has taken steps to ensure that the college's data doesn't collect dust. Using Lightcast's Alumni Outcomes data and other recent studies, he created a series of publicly available Tableau dashboards by piping in aggregate program information to provide a simple source of outcomes data. While there are many variables involved in measuring program success, the employment outcomes of alumni are an important piece of puzzle.

For example, his Occupational Outcomes dashboard allows the visitor to filter by specific programs and view outcomes based on factors such as demographics, graduation year, occupation, or degree type.

He also chose to condense overlapping programs to be grouped as comprehensive units which simplifies review and encourages collaboration. When traditional methods such as surveys or cold calls return fewer and fewer results, Dr. Zentner used Lightcast data and other studies to create a more substantial reference point for both faculty

and families to understand program trends and make informed decisions. "For us, there's no one core data source that's the best, but this was a very impactful study because it opened up the door not just for planning and decision making, but also—because of the unique student identifiers—to merge that data with our system so we could view it alongside complementary studies."

Empowering Users to Make Sense of Data

But Dr. Zentner believes that outcomes data reporting should be more than just a digital artifact on your website. As the college obtained more data resources, it became more important that the faculty have access to some level of data analysis training. But faculty can rarely afford the time it takes to dig through terabytes of information, so the challenge becomes presenting data in a clear and meaningful way to minimize time and effort and maximize support. "We want to make data not just palatable but usable, and really put the information into the people's hands," said Dr. Zentner.

One method of overcoming this challenge was the Tableau dashboard series. In order to meet the needs of the faculty and encourage use, Dr. Zentner and his team collected the aggregate program data in the dashboards for easy access. Another strategy Dr. Zentner is using to help Coastline faculty is an optional data coach training course which he himself spearheads. The purpose of the course is to build data literacy so faculty can contribute in their area of expertise without getting lost in the details.

"It's for someone who infrequently needs to engage with data, but we want them to be able to serve confidently in that capacity and have a working and functional knowledge of data."

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Dr. Aeron Zentner,
Dean of Institutional Effectiveness
COASTLINE COLLEGE





Identifying Equity Gaps

Along similar lines, Coastline is able to filter the data by various demographic groups such as gender and ethnicity which allows them to critically analyze their equity initiatives and determine if there are any disparities they can address.

“For example, if you look at our business program, you see that there’s a wage gap difference within certain student populations, based on certain job types. Those are the kinds of key data points that we’re looking at to identify and close those gaps, to create equitable environments, and encourage a variety of students.”

They are still in the infancy stages of implementation, but the hope is that the data coaching will help facilitate an efficient process for review and that more faculty will utilize data in the future.

Recruitment and Retention: Outcomes Data Provides Career Vision

The impact of data awareness doesn’t end with the faculty but affects the student body as well. Many students have their eye on the future and Coastline can give concrete examples of the occupations of their alumni and trace that information back to their specific programs. This allows students to see real possibility in their options—not just because the college says so, but because alumni have proven it.

“We can say, ‘we’re seeing that people go through this particular program and here’s where their typical jobs have landed them. It may not be your job, but it’s an option.’” Not only does this help students decide what degree to pursue, it helps them stay motivated by developing realistic goals and this helps keep the college’s retention numbers up. Dr. Zentner gives the data to all the department deans so they have it on hand to share as they engage with their students.

“When students first come into class, especially in the online environment, we don’t just ask where do you want to go, but show them where they could go.”

Engaging Stakeholders with Real Outcomes Data

But it's not just students and staff who are interested in career outcomes. Increasingly, accreditors and grant-writers are also looking for solid evidence that programs prepare students for workplace success. The new Lightcast data further strengthens and supports their applications, especially in a higher education climate that's increasingly focused on outcomes. As a key indicator of program success, outcomes data can also give institutions a competitive leg up when applying for grants.

For instance, Coastline has utilized data to identify opportunities within various industries (e.g., cybersecurity) in the development of National Science Foundation (NSF) and Department of Education (DoE) grant proposals.

Dr. Zentner also shared Coastline's outcomes data with their career education advisory boards to help demonstrate the college's impact and to inform conversations around program changes.

Real outcomes data in addition to board members' industry knowledge creates a powerful source of information as they identify the best opportunities for Coastline students.

Every Number is a Student

As Coastline College's experience shows, outcomes data provides powerful transparency into the post-college experience of an institution's students. Sometimes these outcomes are exceptional—which can empower faculty and others as they see that what they teach is really making a difference. Sometimes the outcomes are not what you would hope, but even then, this insight can help inform decisions that can change your college for the better, and in turn, change student's lives. "Every number is a student," as Dr. Zentner likes to remind himself, and "every student has a story". By digging into your alumni outcomes data, you begin to see hard evidence of the impact that your institution has on their lives.

If you have questions about [Alumni Outcomes](#) or Lightcast's other solutions for higher education, please contact us at lightcast.io/contact. We'd love to learn more about the work you're doing and explore how our data can help!



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About Lightcast

Lightcast, formerly Emsi Burning Glass, delivers job market analytics that empower employers, workers, and educators to make data-driven decisions. The company's artificial intelligence technology analyzes hundreds of millions of job postings and real-life career transitions to provide insight into labor market patterns. This real-time strategic intelligence offers crucial insights, such as what jobs are most in demand, the specific skills employers need, and the career directions that offer the highest potential for workers. Visit lightcast.io for more information.

