# Companion piece to UPCEA-Blackboard Research
## Part 1: Partnerships
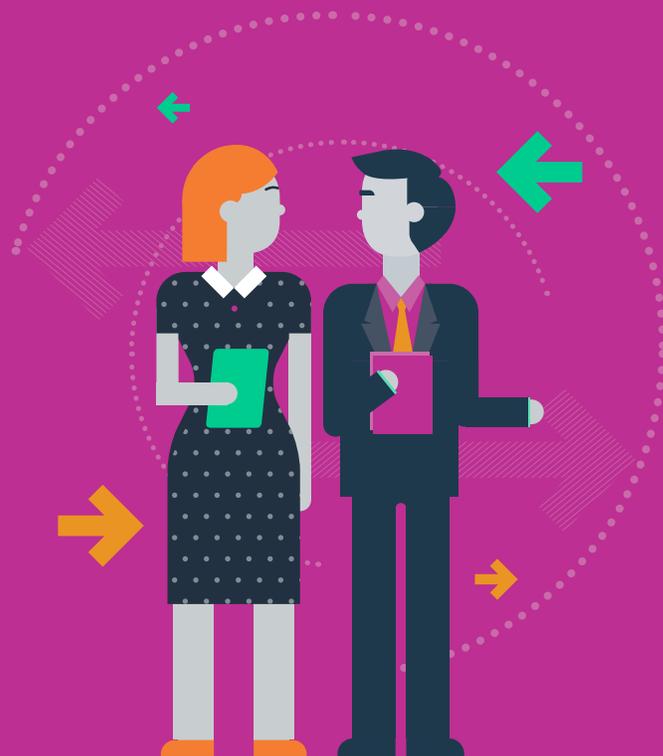
The 2018 UPCEA and Blackboard research included quantitative survey responses from over 250 professional, continuing and online (PCO) education units at colleges and universities across the US, focusing on the opportunities, challenges, and wins impacting these important and growing units. **Given the significant contribution that PCOs are making to their institutions, it is clear that the stakes have never been higher. Competition is fierce. Learners have high expectations. Resources are tight. And, innovation is essential to growth.**

With the recent partnership announced between University of Florida and Walmart, as well as the long-standing Arizona State University-Starbucks alignment, partnerships are easy conversations to bring up. However, with the cost of acquisition in marketing and students' increasing focus on ROI, many of us believe that we need to reconsider the power of partnerships. Are institutions and programs leveraging their brands and assets to the fullest capacities via partnerships?

**The 2018 UPCEA and Blackboard research uncovered some key takeaways:**

›  Community colleges are placing the highest importance on partnerships of all kinds.

›  Partnerships with other units on campus and partnerships with local/regional employers were the most popular types of partnerships, but partnerships with community organizations rose to the top at community colleges.

›  PCOs are utilizing partnerships most often to work with employers to customize or co-design curriculum or have an advisory board.

›  Partnerships result in community buy-in, increased tuition value, and a stronger enrollment pipeline.

To complement the quantitative research, the Student Services team at Blackboard hosted a series of workshops and meetings with university leaders to draw out deeper, qualitative insights on the five elements (Partnerships, Measuring Success, Planning and Resourcing, Innovation) with over 100 individuals participating. We found that the candid responses by participants brought numerous factors to light for PCOs to focus on over the next couple of years, especially regarding partnerships.

Through our open conversations, it was acknowledged that partnerships are important. Some partnerships are effectively essential, particularly advisory boards and internship programs—they are table stakes that everyone not only expects but are also part of the talk track of any institution. There is also tremendous executive leadership support for those efforts, including dedicated human resources. Other partnerships are created with the intention of driving enrollments, specifically employers' involvement in curriculum design or tuition discounting. While partnerships can create entirely new channels for recruitment and brand awareness, we have spoken with very few who can actually point to data or the specific partnership that drove those marketing and enrollment changes.

We found that while everyone is talking about partnerships, there doesn't seem to be a methodology for setting up a successful partnership. Rather, partnerships are opportunistic, based more on mutual connections or where an idea meets capital. Managing partnerships are also difficult tasks. While the reward often promises to be high, there is sometimes little to no defined process and institutions often have to figure out partnerships one step at a time. In some cases, there is no consistent model for success (centralized or decentralized) and there is little standardization across the institution on how a partnership should work. Therefore, it is important to choose partnerships wisely and with intention.

After our conversations to date, we need to figure out how best to develop a truly valuable, scalable, mutually beneficial roadmap to building a partnership. The first step in a successful partnership is to determine its goal. Partnerships are built on trust, compatibility, synergies, and mutual objectives. Finding the right partner is critical in terms of a program's foundation and long-term success. Compatibility can sometimes come down to solid communications and processes between leaders in each party.

**Once the partnership is identified, there are a number of important components to include in the agreement:**

› Establish standard operating procedures as part of the understanding

› Set up protocols on data utilization and sharing agreements

› Consider hosting any shared data in one central location

› Schedule regular intervals for checking in and monitoring the relationship—
at both the leadership level and at the coordination level

› Know what both parties are doing and have feedback loops

Take a look at the survey results to learn more about how institutions and units are leveraging and handling partnerships today.

**To learn more about the UPCEA Blackboard research or to find out more on how to leverage partnerships in your organization, visit blackboard.com/studentservices**

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