Responding to COVID-19 Impacts: Expanded Career Support in LifeLab

What is LifeLab?
LifeLab is a dynamic, peer-driven physical and virtual destination where students of every year and major can drop-in to get immediate help to bridge their academic journey to a career destination. From "is this major right for me?" to "how can I get from here to that career?" to "can someone please help me prepare for an interview!" LifeLab is here to help. Our team of trained peers offers a range of on-demand services in real time designed to result in connections to a next step such as: workshops, internships, employer projects, resume builders, and relevant resources. LifeLab was created to support every University of Arizona student in creating lives and careers of opportunity aligned with their purpose and values, even if they don’t know where to start.

Context
After the onset of COVID-19, our team of professional and student staff have adapted to a fully virtual service delivery model. The team has delivered resources that are responsive to student needs and expanded flexible access to immediate support from live zoom sessions, quick chats, and email interaction. This addition of full service virtual LifeLab has scaled our reach and deepened our impact on campus, even while we are apart. However, we know we aren’t reaching all the students we can.

While LifeLab provides a space to build confidence and uncover next steps to keep students moving toward their career goals, many students don’t know the service exists or don’t see themselves within it. In addition, for many students, LifeLab is the only place to access personalized career planning support depending on the college their major falls within. With this in mind, our team endeavors to grow the awareness of LifeLab on campus, while constantly updating our services to directly respond to student needs.

Current Impact
Reach
In AY20, LifeLab served 2243 students. In AY21, we are on pace to exceed that number. During and following the COVID-19 pandemic, LifeLab aims to be the hub to help students navigate and transform these unprecedented challenges they’ve faced into the opportunities they seek. Additional context from our AY20 reach data includes: first generation students represented 31.3% of LifeLab visitors and students from under-represented minorities made up 45.1% of visitors.

Reputation
Net Promoter Score (NPS) is the percentage of customers rating their likelihood to recommend a service to a friend or colleague. In the Education industry, an NPS over 71 is impressive. In AY20, UA students gave LifeLab a Net Promoter average score of 80 – meaning that the vast majority of students would recommend coming to LifeLab to their peers. The quotes included in the additional information are in response to the question “Why did you choose that rating?”

Outcomes
• Students who engaged in at least one SECD offering were more likely (p<.05) to report full time employment in the 2019-2020 Career Destination Survey than students who did not engage in any SECD offering (50% v. 44%). Further robustness tests using logistic regression show that students
who engaged with SECD had 1.32X increased odds of reporting full time employment after accounting for other factors known to impact student engagement in SECD and post-graduation outcomes.

- Students who participated in at least one SECD offering reported an 8% higher starting salary in the 2019-2020 Career Destination Survey than students who did not participate in any SECD offering ($58,983 v. $54,289).
- Students who engaged in at least one SECD offerings within the year were more likely (p < .01) to report being accepted into a program of continuing education in the 2019-2020 Career Destination Survey than students who did not engage in any SECD offering (67% v. 54%).

Growing with SSF Funding
As we continue to adapt to the needs of students, we anticipate a return to modified in-person services. Through survey data collected by the university and anecdotal evidence, we know that students are experiencing immense uncertainty around entering the workforce. In Fall 2020, the UA Student Data Insights Strategy Team found that 27% of survey participants (n=920) indicated “Career, Internships, and Jobs” in response to the question “What types of support do you need at this time to be successful as a student?” In 2021 and 2022, we expect to see the need for career planning support rise higher than ever. LifeLab is the place students can drop in (in-person or virtually) and say “What am I going to do?” and leave feeling more confident and in control of their futures. In order to offer high-quality in-person services and expand virtual offerings to meet demand, we need more capacity.

The LifeLab team hopes to add a Graduate Assistant to the team for the next two years, funded through Student Services Fees. This position will help to scale our efforts while maintaining the integrity of the offerings. Our team is committed to the peer-to-peer model in LifeLab, and with additional supervision and guidance of this position we plan to increase the number of LifeLab student staff team members. With the help of a GA, LifeLab can grow awareness of our offerings and continue developing culturally-responsive resources for the diverse populations we serve. With SSF support, we can grow our impact to demonstrate the need for permanent institutional funding while meeting students where they are on their career journey.

Specifically, this new GA role will expand our student staff team, allowing us to provide the following critical services that are directly aligned with the Student Services Fee student survey (2019):

- Career development services, timely resources, and new tools that teach the skills students need to be successful, including time management and professional communication;
- Job search support including on-campus opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students;
- Career preparation consultations including resume review and interview prep, resources that connect students to opportunities such as career fairs, and searchable job listings; Career-based experiential learning and leadership opportunities.

This GA will be responsible for connecting students to the unique, applied learning opportunities on campus and in our community. These connections are grounded in understanding what our students’ needs, desires, passions and talents are and then helping students find the experiences that will both ground and grow them.

In conclusion, we believe that this additional team member could allow us to grow the awareness and relevance of our services immensely and therefore support more students in their career journey. Thank you for your time and consideration. Our team is grateful for the work the SSF Board does for the University of Arizona.