

From Pupil to Professional

Steven Cates, School of Business and Information Technology, 2015

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From Pupil to Professional

Students spend years learning the information and skills they need to be successful in future jobs. But the move from classroom to cubicle is a big leap, and all too often students are not prepared to become professionals. Combined with a competitive job market, finding a job after graduation can be a daunting task for a student uninformed about how the business world works.

Universities' Roles in Preparing Students

Should universities take a larger role in preparing students for the working world? Kaplan University's Steven Cates, a professor in the school's [Master of Business Administration](#) program, believes so.

"In my work with Kaplan University, I have been fortunate to work side-by-side with some truly gifted students, as I'm sure my colleagues at other schools have," said Cates. "But the real question every professor ought to be asking is, how can I turn gifted students into successful professionals?" According to Cates, implementing programs that give students the opportunity to develop business skills and acumen, connecting them with established professionals in their field, and encouraging them to get real-world experience in the career of their choice are all great ways to help students take the first step into the professional world.

One technique that Cates has had success with involves helping students submit research papers to professional conferences. "I'm very proud of several of my students this year who have taken research papers from class and expanded them into scholarly articles," said Cates. "I helped them submit the scholarly papers to a professional conference. Three were accepted, and those students will now have the opportunity to present their papers in front of an audience of their future professional peers, developing presentation skills, public speaking skills, and networking skills." Cates finds that this strategy is also a great way to boost confidence, further an academic career, or to add credibility and expertise to a resume.

Professional Associations

Students can also benefit from becoming involved in professional associations related to their field of study. At Kaplan University, Cates secured the first ever virtual student chapter of the prestigious Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM). "Getting involved in SHRM has helped my students establish themselves in their field, build their connections, and learn how to network," says Cates, who even encourages students to get professional "business cards" with their name and contact information on them so they can build their professional circles.

When it comes to real world experience, Cates advises professors to suggest applied internships to their students, where they can get experience in and be exposed to all facets of a business, learn its critical functions, and get a feel for different corporate cultures and values. "This not only gives them a sense of what to expect from a company and what a company expects from them," said Cates, "but also a chance to develop their own sense of what kind of function and company might be the best fit for them."

Cates reiterates that professors are not just here to teach their expertise to students; they also have a responsibility to create and support future leaders. "At Kaplan University," he says, "we help students take their success in the classroom to the cubicle – and someday, the boardroom."