Mount Holyoke College Career Jam
"How do we attract and retain top talent in the Pioneer Valley?"
Synthesis of Ideas Generated by Elizabeth Long Lingo, Phd

"How do we attract and retain top talent in the Pioneer Valley?" This issue has long been a concern for local governmental leaders, recruiters, entrepreneurs, and educators. On February 20, 2015, the first annual Mount Holyoke College "Problem Solving" Career Jam was piloted to offer an innovative approach to generating solutions to this pressing, and meaningful problem.

A collaboration between MHC’s Career Development Center and Embedded Practitioner in Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation, Dr. Elizabeth Long Lingo, this first-of-its kind interactive Career Jam embraced the human-centered design thinking approach pioneered by IDEO and the Stanford d.school. In contrast to the typical career fair model, where recruiters stand behind tables and engage students in short, introductory conversations, the Career Jam offered local entrepreneurs, recruiters, heads of chamber of commerce, and Mount Holyoke College students the opportunity to work side-by-side to develop new insights and solutions to a regional concern. Students were able to actively demonstrate their problem-solving skill sets, and local leaders and recruiters were able to build relationships across industry areas, disciplines and markets.

During the first half of the Jam, participants engaged in one-on-one “deep dives”—a guided process involving empathic listening and rapid iteration of ideas—to elicit themes that were then the focus of group brainstorming sessions during the second half of the Jam. The event culminated in a sharing out of ideas from the group tables, yet many, many more ideas were generated than shared. The following report offers a summary of ideas and insights generated during the Career Jam.

Findings
One of the most compelling and actionable findings from the Career Jam is the need for better marketing and communication of existing Valley resources and benefits to students. Many of the suggestions offered by students already exist in the Valley—yet students are unaware of these benefits and resources.

Participants highlighted the desire for further resources supporting entrepreneurial ventures and creative enterprise (e.g., funding, office/creative work space, low rent housing, wifi), improved regional transportation, a desire for businesses that embrace innovative and purpose-driven work, and a vibrant community rich with opportunities for continued professional development and personal growth. Taken together, the ideas offer an integrated, systems approach to retaining and recruiting talent in the Pioneer Valley.
Insights from the Jam are presented below in six main categories: 1) Marketing and communication, 2) Infrastructure supporting entrepreneurship and creative enterprise, 3) Continued professional development, 4) Basic amenities/infrastructure, 5) a vibrant and diverse Community, and 6) Innovative, family-friendly companies.

I. Marketing and Communication
What became clear during the session was that students are often unaware of the myriad events, resources and opportunities that already exist in the Valley. A key finding emerging from engaging students in this process is that better communication of the Valley’s many resources and unique qualities—from entrepreneurial resources and jobs, to cultural events, farmers’ markets, natural resources, and safe, affordable housing—is needed. Suggestions offered by participants include:

- Create Valley passport/scavenger hunt to get students off campus and learn more about community
- Collaborate with local colleges to show prospective students beauty of area (besides focusing on 5 Colleges)
- Market what’s working #1: Marketing campaign that features benefits of Valley-focused on students and young professionals (jobs; entrepreneurial incubators; safe neighborhoods; low-cost, funky work housing; range of cultural opportunities and natural resources, etc.)
- Market what’s working #2: “What’s playing/living/working” pioneer valley that connects young professionals with all opportunities and what is happening
- Utilize range of technology (communicate using all types of media and “mavens”)
- Better market housing in Holyoke, Springfield to recent grads and refine perceptions of safety
- Better market and expose students to easy access to natural resources, recreation, and beauty

II. Infrastructure supporting entrepreneurship and creative enterprise
Expanding upon the impressive work of Valley Venture Mentors, the Small Business Development Centers, the Harold Grinspoon Entrepreneurship Initiative, and other local efforts, participants suggested further enhancing and building infrastructure supporting entrepreneurs, change agents and artists:

1. Idea incubators (for ideas, business, entrepreneurs and artists—includes both physical centers and virtual networks that support)
   - Western MA Fund and idea incubator (in workplace or community) to constantly refresh ideas and bring new perspective to a shared issues/opportunity
   - Create a community where you can develop new ideas and changes; gain feedback and insights
o Create network of people: tech → arts → communication → resources → creator → change agent → tech (all in circle); to develop and implement solutions/opportunities
o Help businesses that are already successful network inside and outside of Western MA, and inter-generationally
o Create a regional think tank focused on business development
o Develop an exchange program of local ambassadors and companies to see what is working at other places and bring them here.

2. Reimagine use of existing buildings for new ventures and artists, live/work creative spaces to support start ups/businesses/artists
   o Harness liquid space (rent unused space)
   o Develop buildings for new ventures to work/live and low cost offices for start up companies
   o Transition former mill buildings to innovative start up/collaborative spaces (in combination with funding for start ups that offer jobs to recent grads)
   o Foster college-community partnerships in community spaces
   o Foster collective/ community spaces where people can come together professionally (wifi hotzones)
   o Create gallery space for rent where artists can work side-by-side

3. Develop freelance creative skills and project match-up site/bank for Western Mass

4. Offer innovative approaches to funding/supporting small businesses
   o Incentives for start-ups: Loans, cheaper rent for main street store fronts for up-and-coming businesses?
   o Create a “Women entrepreneurship fund”
   o Raise capital to help new grads launch entrepreneurial ventures
   o Tax Incentives to bring businesses into this area
   o Create phone app that links entrepreneurs and donors (Go fund me like but also with full support of donor)

5. Support local grassroots projects
   o Call attention to local grass root projects or non-profits in our community; encourage donation/support
   o Encourage people to donate to the facets that provide the services/resources they use

III. Continuing Professional Development Opportunities
Participants noted the desire for further professional development and educational opportunities (and awareness of the rich opportunities that already exist).

1. Provide/market opportunities for gaining additional training and knowledge

Please address comments and questions to Elizabeth Lingo: Elizabeth.lingo@gmail.com
2. Create and promote mentoring and internship programs
   o Foster business partnerships with universities to offer paid and unpaid internship opportunities
   o Create a professional mentorship network
   o Create opportunities to meet industry experts in different parts of the northeast

IV. Basic Amenities/Infrastructure
Participants also noted the importance of basic infrastructure including safe, affordable housing, stable entry-level jobs, improved regional transit system, access to childcare and internet access.

1. Jobs—basic
   o More entry-level positions for recent graduates
   o Stable employment that pays livable wages/benefits

2. Housing/neighborhoods
   o Build walkable communities—in different neighborhoods
   o Access to affordable, safe housing

3. Improve local/regional transportation system
   o Entrepreneurship or other “interest” buses (take people to the action)
   o More efficient, improved regional transportation, especially improved connectivity between cities and small surrounding communities
   o Bike share program for dense areas
   o Create car share/ride share website service for Valley

4. Google fiber/internet café/Wifi infrastructure/access
   o Google fiber (high speed for everyone)
   o Public computer labs and internet café

5. Childcare
   o Access to available, affordable childcare
   o Affordable dog, cat and babysitting

V. Vibrant and Diverse Community
What makes for a vibrant and diverse community? Our participants want a community of passionate, well-rounded peers, a sense of history and connection to place (i.e. family), and
opportunities for personal growth and experimentation. Participants highlighted the importance of art and cultural events, access to natural resources, ways to engage in provocative dialogue, and opportunities to create a fabric of connection around interests, activities, and social justice.

1. Art and cultural events
   - Family and friend game nights (trivia, jeopardy)
   - Street fairs! Farmers/Flea markets
   - Tea gathering (every week sharing)
   - Cultural community website
   - Karaoke nights
   - Local choir or music groups/ensemble
   - Music night out; free music shows of all varieties all of the valley
   - Culinary groups/instructed cooking
   - Free/low cost art classes
   - Support for independent local artists who create original work
   - Arts night out around the entire valley- not just NoHo
   - Encouraging younger people (before college) to try new things! (Art project, playing a new instrument, hiking, anything!)

2. Access to natural resources

3. Cultural diversity (international)/ world culture events/support for global backgrounds
   - More social events for cultural awareness + relationship/connections
   - Support community development for immigrant families and workers
   - Offer world culture events to help expose people to different backgrounds
   - More diverse- keep international students

4. Finding your people: Ways to connect with other people
   - Meet and greets for young professionals every week at different locations
   - Networking events that have nothing to do with career/jobs (but instead interests or majors)
   - Themed book groups (social justice, etc)
   - Facebook groups for interests in the valley
   - Support group incubator- foodies, sports, outdoor groups, educators and women in science
   - Western MA pride

5. Access to travel—participants want to be close to airports and know about trips/buses to global and big cities
   - Community trips/bus/train to NYC, Boston and D.C.
   - Easy access to global travel
   - Must be easy and safe to get to the airport and trains
6. Ways to engage diverse opinions and in civic dialogue
   - Civic dialogue: “spaces” where ideas and responsibilities are shared
   - Women’s Political institute
   - Develop a better way to acquire ideas and opinions from the community
   - Workshops/discussion groups like this one! For people in the community
   - Organize more community meetings so people feel more confident and comfortable communicating with each other and expressing ideas

VI. Innovative, supportive, family-friendly companies
Many of our student participants jumped into this topic will full zest! What is important to MHC students? Students seek companies that embrace innovative problem solving and purpose-driven work, opportunities for continued mentoring and professional development, family-friendly policies, and fun, playful work environments.

1. Promote companies that embrace innovation, creativity, and purpose-driven work
   - Promote companies that generate social value
   - Encourage volunteer work

2. Opportunities for personal development and cross-skill training
   - Internship programs that send you to each department for a short period of time (cross-training)
   - Incentives for employees that did something life-changing at the company
   - 1 hour of personal development on Friday @ 3pm
   - Co-op work environment
   - Opportunities to travel for work, especially with senior team members

3. Fun! Rigorous and playful
   - Allow people to wear whatever (but appropriate) to get their work done!
   - More puppies at work
   - Fun work outings/ company parties, Group polar bear plunge, Retreats to six flags
   - Team building activities (and perhaps also for their families)
   - 5 minutes to play ping-pong and sports
   - Once a month pie day!
   - Every Friday is a different company event day (ex. Athletics day, bowling day, etc)

4. Companies that are flexible/family-friendly
   - Onsite childcare
   - Family Fridays
   - One afternoon off per week to pick up the kids at school
   - Way to bring family into the workplace
   - Where can work from home
   - Where don’t have to answer email after 7pm/boundaries/time off