



CAREER SERVICES EDITION · 2026

The Career Tech Buyer's Guide

Industry trends, vendor profiles, and a structured evaluation framework for career services leaders selecting AI career tech.

For: Career Services Directors, Managers & Decision-Makers

2026 Edition

How to use this guide

Career services teams are being asked to pick an AI career-tech platform — often without the time, budget, or vendor information to make the call confidently. This guide is built to help you turn vendor pitches and demos into a defensible vendor decision you can stand behind with the stakeholders who weren't in the room.

It's organized in three parts:

- **Part 1 — The market in numbers.** Ten data points from NACE 2026 research that should shape how you scope, sell, and budget for career tech this year.
- **Part 2 — The vendor landscape.** Honest profiles of the major AI career tech vendors — strengths, limitations, and the questions to ask each one.
- **Part 3 — The evaluation framework.** A five-dimension scoring rubric, built from career services interviews. Use the scorecard at the end to score vendors side by side.

A note on bias

Jobscan is one of the vendors profiled in this guide. We've tried to write each vendor's profile the way a peer institution would, not the way a sales deck would. If you're using this guide for a real evaluation, treat us the same way you'd treat anyone else: ask the questions, weigh the answers, and check references.

What's inside

- 01 The Market in Numbers — 10 trends shaping the 2026 buying cycle
- 02 The Vendor Landscape — 8 platforms career services are evaluating
- 03 The Evaluation Framework — 5 dimensions, scored 1–5
- 04 Vendor Scorecard — Side-by-side comparison worksheet
- 05 Next Steps — Booking a deeper conversation

PART ONE

The Market in Numbers

Ten data points from NACE 2026 research, the NACE Career Services Benchmarks, and Jobscan's ATS database — chosen because they should change how career services teams scope, budget for, and pitch career tech this year.



5.6%

projected hiring increase for the Class of 2026

More Jobs, Same Competition

Employers project a 5.6% increase in hiring for the Class of 2026, and 1 in 3 are actively growing headcount. But a growing market doesn't guarantee a growing acceptance rate — as hiring expands into Information, Engineering Services, and Construction, students need applications that can clear automated screens before a human ever reviews them.

NACE 2026 Job Outlook, Spring Update (n=166)

69.1%

of hiring employers cite talent pipeline as a key driver

Employers Aren't Just Filling Seats

Tied with company growth as the #1 reason employers are increasing hires: succession planning and long-term talent pipelines. Students applying to pipeline-oriented employers need to show they'll grow into tomorrow's role — not just that they can do today's. Materials that work signal potential, learning agility, and initiative.

NACE 2026 Job Outlook, Spring Update (n=55, employers increasing hires)

35%

of entry-level jobs require AI skills

The Requirement Isn't Always in the Posting

35% of entry-level roles require AI skills — but only 16.5% of job descriptions explicitly list them. Students reading the posting at face value are applying with incomplete information. If a student's resume doesn't signal AI fluency for a role that screens for it, they're invisible before a human reviews them.

NACE 2026 Job Outlook, Spring Update; Jobscan ATS database

44%

of employers have detected AI-generated applications

Not All AI Use Is Created Equal

44% of employers have detected AI-generated applications — but only 20% use formal tools to screen for it. The red flag is human judgment, not software. What reviewers flag isn't AI assistance; it's the absence of the person behind it. Students who use AI to align their real experience to a JD are doing what every strong candidate should.

NACE 2026 Job Outlook, Spring Update (n=159)

75%

of AI-seeking employers want tool-selection skills

AI-Ready Doesn't Mean Technical

Among employers actively seeking AI skills, 75% want candidates who can identify and use the right tool for a task. 72.7% want effective prompt development. Only 52.3% want AI tool development. The bar for "AI-fluent" is lower than advisors think — and higher than most students demonstrate.

NACE 2026 Job Outlook, Spring Update (n=44, employers seeking AI skills)

57.8%

of employers assign interns AI-related projects

Internship Prep Needs an Update

A majority of employers now assign interns projects that use AI tools and skills. Students who arrive never having used a real AI workflow are behind on day one. Career centers adding AI literacy as a core internship-readiness module — not a bonus session — are the ones whose students convert.

NACE 2026 Job Outlook, Spring Update (n=159)

59.3% of career centers now use AI

Students Are Outpacing Staff

Nearly 6 in 10 career center staff use AI, but students are left to figure it out alone — leading to "flowery" cover letters, placeholder text left in drafts, and a false sense of preparedness. When evaluating career tech, the question isn't "does this tool use AI?" — every vendor will say yes. The question is whether the AI is purpose-built or a chatbot wrapper.

NACE 2024-25 Career Services Benchmarks (551 institutions)

7.0 median career center FTE

7 Staff Serving Thousands of Students

The median career center has 7 full-time staff. At a 15,000-student school, that's 1 staffer per 2,100+ students — responsible for resume reviews, mock interviews, employer engagement, career fairs, workshops, and now AI literacy. Career tech that requires significant staff time to implement is dead on arrival. The winning tools are force multipliers.

NACE 2024-25 Career Services Benchmarks

52.2% of employers say AI hasn't reduced entry-level task needs

The Fear Is Ahead of the Facts

Most employers say AI has not yet reduced the need for entry-level work. But more than half have had conversations about using AI to replace early-career tasks. The displacement isn't here; the planning is. A useful reframe for students experiencing AI job-loss anxiety — and for advisors navigating those conversations.

NACE 2026 Job Outlook, Spring Update (n=157)

52.6%

of employers decreasing hires cite economic uncertainty

When Students Don't Land, It's Not Always on Them

Among employers pulling back, 78.9% cite reduced business needs, 57.9% cite budget cuts, and 52.6% point to an uncertain economy. The hiring freeze isn't structural — it's situational. Career centers that help students distinguish "I need to improve my application" from "I'm targeting a sector that's paused" are offering strategic clarity beyond resume reviews.

NACE 2026 Job Outlook, Spring Update (n=19, employers decreasing hires)

PART TWO

The Vendor Landscape

Eight platforms career services teams are actively evaluating in 2026 — six dedicated AI career-tech vendors, the established interview-prep player most institutions also shortlist, and a candid look at the free AI alternative students already use. Each profile includes what they do well, where they fall short, and the questions to ask if you're considering them.



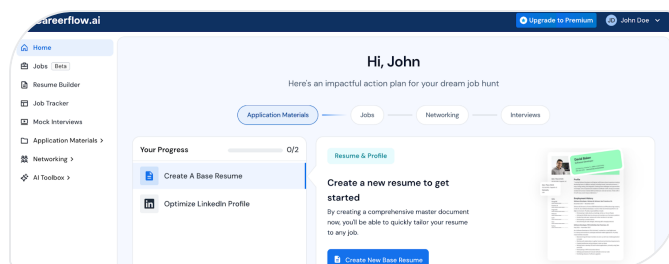
Careerflow.ai

AI Career Coach

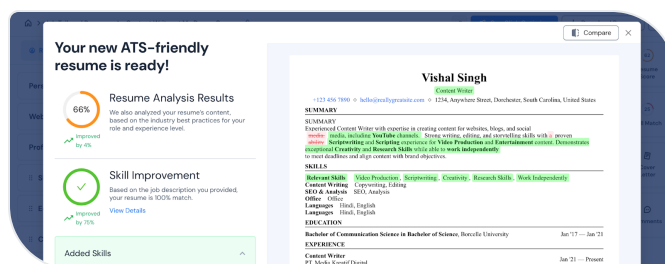
Resume

Job Search

Careerflow.ai positions as an AI career management platform with a focus on institutional integration. They are the only vendor with confirmed LMS integration (Blackboard), offer explainable AI that shows students why each suggestion was made, and provide a white-label option for schools wanting a branded experience.



CAREERFLOW.AI



CAREERFLOW.AI

STRENGTHS

- Only vendor with confirmed LMS integration (Blackboard)
- Explainable AI — shows reasoning behind each suggestion
- White-label option for branded institutional deployment
- Networking tracker for relationship management

LIMITATIONS

- Newer and smaller footprint in higher ed
- Fewer published case studies and peer references
- Less proven at scale (large enrollment institutions)
- Feature depth in resume optimization trails more established players

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Can we see the Blackboard integration live and in production at another institution?
2. Walk me through the explainable AI — what does a student actually see when the tool suggests an edit?
3. How many institutional clients do you have and can you connect us with two references?
4. How does pricing compare to VMock and Jobscan at our enrollment size?

Hiration

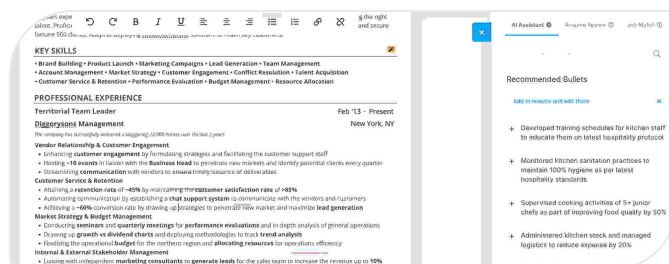
Resume

Cover Letter

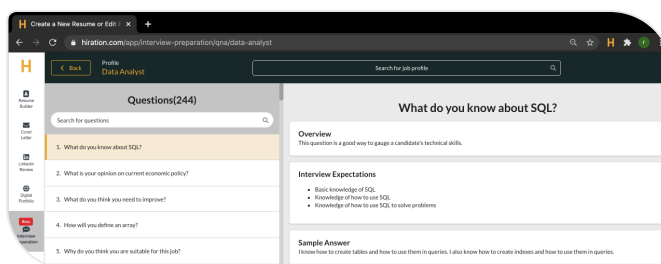
Interview

LinkedIn

Hiration offers the broadest feature set in this space — resume builder, cover letters, LinkedIn optimization, video mock interviews, and a digital portfolio. Their ChatGPT-powered engine provides real-time ATS-ready suggestions and JD-based optimization, which gives students immediate actionable feedback.



HIRATION



HIRATION

STRENGTHS

- Broadest feature set of any competitor (resume, cover letter, interview, portfolio)
- JD-based optimization with real-time suggestions
- Digital portfolio feature valuable for creative programs
- Video mock interviews with AI feedback

LIMITATIONS

- Consumer-first product — institutional admin dashboard is less mature
- Thinner higher-ed client base and fewer references
- No specific ATS identification or simulation
- Less established support structure for campus rollouts

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Do you identify the specific ATS behind a job posting, or just generic ATS-friendly formatting?
2. What does the institutional admin dashboard look like and what reporting does it provide?
3. How does the portfolio feature work for non-creative majors (business, engineering, nursing)?
4. Can you share case studies with documented interview completion or job placement outcomes — not just engagement?

JOBSCAN · THE PUBLISHER OF THIS GUIDE

Jobscan

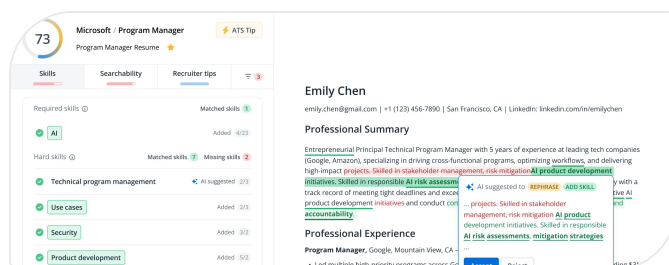
Resume

ATS Intelligence

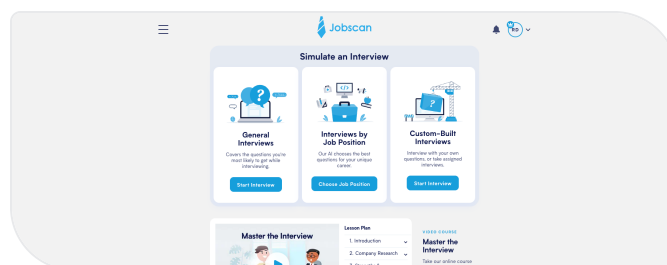
Interview

Job Tracking

Jobscan scores resumes against specific job descriptions using proprietary ATS identification across 70+ systems. Rather than a universal rubric, every scan is tailored to the target role and the specific ATS behind the posting. Also includes interview prep, job tracking, and a Handshake browser extension.



JOBSCAN — AI SUGGESTIONS



JOBSCAN — INTERVIEW PRACTICE

STRENGTHS

- Only platform that identifies the specific ATS behind a job posting
- Real-time scoring tailored to each job description
- Lower price point than most competitors
- Handshake browser extension for seamless student workflow

LIMITATIONS

- Historically leaner on resume builder UX (a dedicated builder is shipping this year)
- No LMS integration currently (on roadmap)
- Score gamification risk — students may optimize for numbers over quality
- B2C origin means the institutional layer is newer

QUESTIONS TO ASK

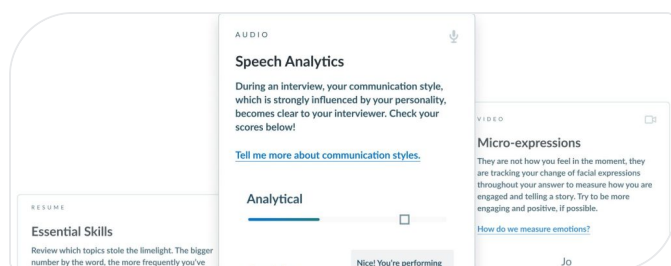
1. What are realistic adoption rates at institutions similar to ours?
2. How do you prevent students from gaming the match score?
3. Where is LMS integration on the roadmap and what integrations exist today?
4. How does pricing hold up if only 25–30% of students are active?

Quinnia

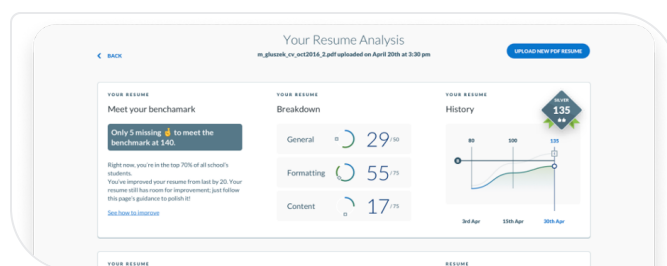
Resume Optimization

Interview Prep

Quinnia differentiates by sourcing evaluation criteria directly from employers, offering resume feedback, virtual interviews, and LinkedIn review. They support dual deployment models — campus-wide licenses and curriculum-embedded access — and their adaptive interview practice adjusts based on student performance.



QUINNIA



QUINNIA

STRENGTHS

- Evaluation criteria sourced directly from employers
- Dual deployment: campus-wide license or curriculum-embedded
- Adaptive virtual interview practice that adjusts to the student
- LinkedIn profile review included

LIMITATIONS

- Higher price point than most competitors
- Strong in classroom / curriculum deployments, less effective in 1:1 student coaching
- Per-student usage caps may apply per term — confirm what happens when students hit them
- Curriculum-embedded access may end when the course does

QUESTIONS TO ASK

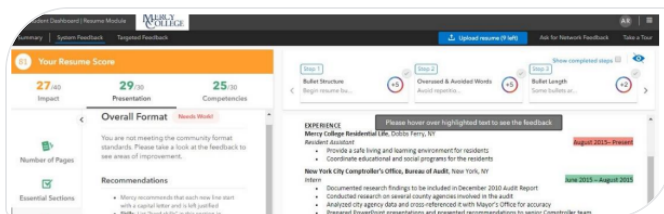
1. How are employer evaluation criteria collected and how often refreshed?
2. What does 1:1 self-serve student usage look like outside of a classroom deployment?
3. Is there a per-student scan or session cap per term? What happens when students run out?
4. What happens to student access once a curriculum-embedded course ends?
5. What differentiates your feedback from what a student could get from ChatGPT with a good prompt?

VMock

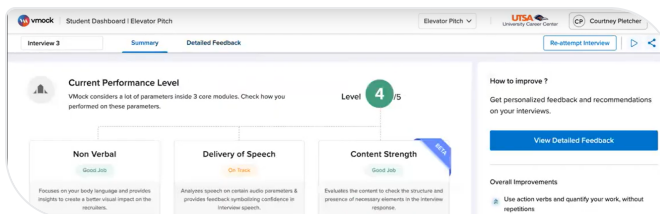
Resume Optimization

Interview Prep

VMock is one of the most established AI career platforms in higher education, deployed at 250+ global educational partners. Their scoring is benchmarks-based rather than job-description-specific, making it strongest for students writing their first resume. Modules span resume review (SMART Resume & Editor), video interview prep (Elevator Pitch), LinkedIn optimization (Aspire), and career matching / skill-gap analysis (Career Fit).



VMOCK



VMOCK

STRENGTHS

- Largest installed base in higher ed (250+ global educational partners)
- 10+ year track record in the career tech space
- Comprehensive module coverage beyond resume review
- Strong implementation support and customer success team

LIMITATIONS

- 10 uploads per student per agreement period — active students may hit the cap
- Pricing is per-module + per-benchmark — all-in cost across all four modules adds up at mid-size institutions

QUESTIONS TO ASK

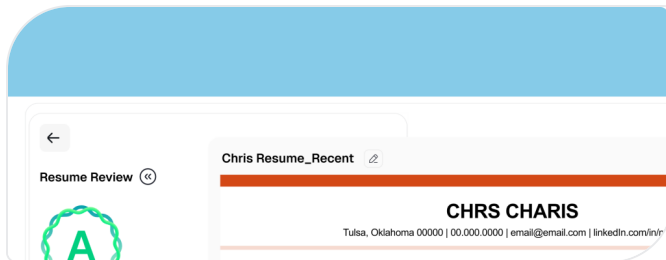
1. What is the total all-in annual cost across SMART Resume, Elevator Pitch, Career Fit, and Aspire, including setup and benchmark fees?
2. How do students handle running out of uploads mid-semester?
3. How does your scoring handle non-business majors (engineering, nursing, liberal arts)?
4. What are realistic utilization rates at institutions similar to ours?
5. Can you score a resume against a specific job description, or only against benchmarks?
6. What is your response when students say they can get similar feedback from free AI tools?
7. VMock's standard go-live is 5–6 weeks post-onboarding — can you connect us with a reference institution similar to our size to confirm their actual timeline matched that?

WriteSea

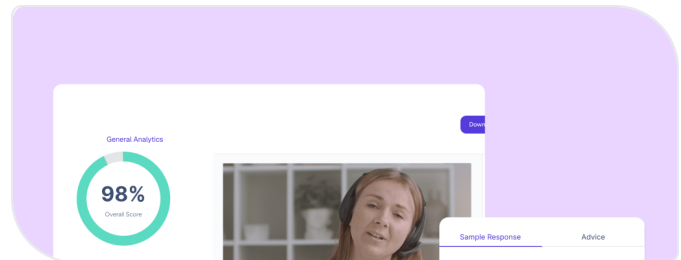
Resume Optimization

AI Resume Builder

WriteSea takes an ATS-first approach with a live editing experience that gives students real-time feedback as they write. Unlimited scans and JD keyword matching are included at a competitive price point (~\$5,500/yr for 250 students). Their template is designed specifically for ATS parsing reliability.



WRITESEA



WRITESEA

STRENGTHS

- Live editing experience with instant feedback as students type
- Unlimited scans — no per-term caps
- Competitive pricing (~\$5,500/yr for 250 students)
- ATS-first template design for parsing reliability

LIMITATIONS

- Essentially one resume template available
- Separate implementation fee on top of license
- School is responsible for managing alumni access cutoffs
- Newer entrant with a smaller customer base

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Is there really only one resume template available, or are others in development?
2. How many institutional partners do you have, and how many are at 10k+ enrollment?
3. Is the implementation fee bundled or separate, and what does it cover?
4. How does your AI feedback differentiate from competitors — what is unique about the model?
5. How does access work once a student graduates — who manages that cutoff?

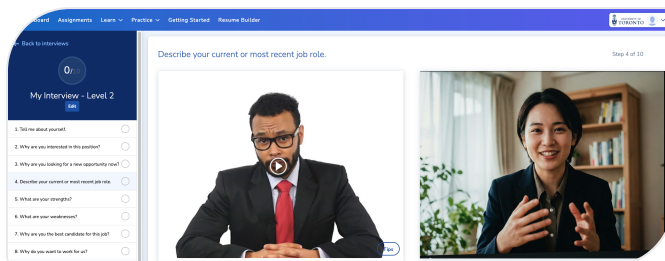
INCLUDED FOR HONEST COMPARISON

Big Interview

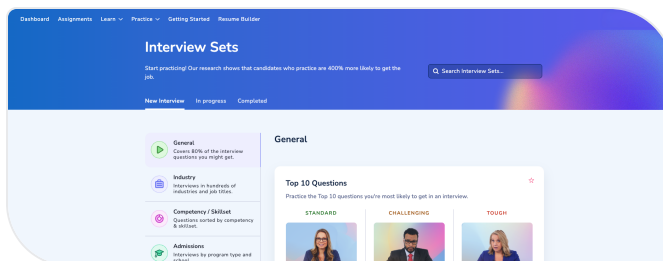
Interview Prep

Resume

Big Interview is a well-known interview preparation platform with a large question bank and recognizable brand in higher education. Career services buyers routinely short-list them alongside the dedicated AI career-tech vendors, so we included them here for honest comparison.



BIG INTERVIEW



BIG INTERVIEW

STRENGTHS

- Interview-first product with a large, organized question bank by role and industry
- Recognizable brand and established presence in higher ed
- Video recording and self-review workflow students can use on their own time
- Curriculum-friendly structure used by career courses and workshops

LIMITATIONS

- Resume scanner is newer and less powerful than dedicated resume platforms
- No ATS identification — generic "ATS-friendly" claims only
- Interview bank leans toward static prompts rather than adaptive AI interviews
- Less developed admin dashboard for career services reporting

QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. How does the resume tool compare feature-by-feature to dedicated resume platforms?
2. Are interviews adaptive based on student performance, or static question banks?
3. What reporting does the admin dashboard provide on student activity?
4. Can you share case studies with interview completion or placement outcomes at peer institutions?

NOT A VENDOR — BUT THE MOST COMMON ALTERNATIVE

ChatGPT & Free AI Chatbots

"WHY PAY FOR A TOOL?"

General-purpose AI

Free / Freemium

No guardrails

No serious vendor evaluation is honest without naming the elephant in the room: ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and Copilot are already what most students reach for first. Free, ubiquitous, and capable of producing a usable resume in minutes. Any paid tool you choose needs to explain what it adds beyond a well-crafted prompt.

STRENGTHS

- Free or very low-cost at student scale
- Already in students' hands — zero adoption friction
- Conversational interface students already understand
- Highly flexible — resume, cover letter, interview prep, networking outreach

LIMITATIONS

- No guardrails — generates fabricated experience and placeholder text students leave in
- No ATS intelligence — treats all employers as a monolith
- No admin visibility — career services can't see what students are doing
- No institutional accountability — FERPA, HECVAT, VPAT all on the student
- Quality is entirely a function of student prompting skill

QUESTIONS TO ASK ANY PAID VENDOR IN THIS CATEGORY

1. Why should we pay for your tool when students already have ChatGPT?
2. What guardrails do you add that a general-purpose chatbot doesn't have?
3. How is your AI purpose-built for career outcomes vs. a chatbot with a wrapper?
4. What does the admin dashboard show us that ChatGPT can never show us?
5. What's your institutional compliance posture — HECVAT, VPAT, FERPA?

PART THREE

The Evaluation Framework

Five dimensions, built from career services interviews. Score each vendor 1–5 on each dimension. Each section includes the questions to ask, what good answers sound like, and the red flags to listen for.



1

Student Adoption & Engagement

The most powerful tool is worthless if students don't use it. "Shelfware" is the #1 fear.

What is your typical utilization rate at institutions similar to ours?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

They cite specific percentages at named institution types. They distinguish account creation from meaningful engagement. They share anonymized usage dashboards.

RED FLAG

They quote total accounts, not active usage. Can't segment by institution type. Say "it depends on how you market it."

Walk me through a student's first 5 minutes. How fast do they get value?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Clear low-friction first experience — useful output within minutes. Works on any device. Students start with what they have (existing resume).

RED FLAG

Multiple setup steps before any value. Requires downloads or training first. Can't demo the first-time experience on the spot.

What happens when students stop logging in? How do you re-engage them?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Built-in nudges tied to meaningful moments (deadlines, career fairs). Integration with platforms students already use (Handshake, LMS).

RED FLAG

Re-engagement is entirely the institution's responsibility. No reminder system. Answer is "your staff should email them."

Why should we pay for your tool when students already have ChatGPT?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

They acknowledge free AI and explain what they add: guardrails, context-awareness, quality control. Position as "AI with training wheels."

RED FLAG

Dismiss free AI entirely. Can't articulate advantage over a well-crafted ChatGPT prompt. Tool is essentially a ChatGPT wrapper.

2

Depth & Quality of Feedback

Staff are stretched thin. The tool needs to deliver feedback specific enough to act on without requiring a coach to interpret it.

Does your tool score against a universal rubric or against the specific job description?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

JD-based scoring that treats each resume as tailored to a specific opportunity. Compares against actual JD requirements and keywords.

RED FLAG

Single benchmark score regardless of target job. Hitting 100% requires ignoring what professors taught.

How does your tool handle ATS compatibility? Can it identify which ATS a specific employer uses?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Identifies the specific ATS behind a job posting URL and explains parsing differences across systems.

RED FLAG

Generic "ATS-friendly" claims. Can't explain how Workday differs from Greenhouse. Treats ATS as monolithic.

When the tool suggests a change, can the student see why?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Shows reasoning — why a keyword matters, where it appeared in the JD. Student must still edit and make content their own.

RED FLAG

One-click "fix my resume" with no transparency. Generates bullets from thin air students can't speak to in interviews.

3

Coach & Advisor Workflow

Career services needs tools that reduce workload, not add to it. If coaches can't see what students are doing, it's another system to manage.

Can a coach see inside a student's account, review their work, and make edits directly?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Admin impersonation / "view as student" functionality. Coach can enter any student's profile, see their work, edit directly.

RED FLAG

Coaches only see aggregate stats. Editing requires export-email-reupload. Admin view is separate from student experience.

What reporting does the admin dashboard provide?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Shows which companies students target (useful for career fair planning), popular job titles, individual activity logs, exportable data.

RED FLAG

Limited to total logins and account counts. No insight into what students actually do. No export capability.

How much staff time does implementation and ongoing management require? Be honest.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Straightforward about effort. Describes typical rollout, what IT needs (SSO, HECVAT), what career services does. Offers onboarding support and marketing templates.

RED FLAG

"It's plug and play, no effort required." No mention of accessibility compliance or SSO. No awareness of HECVAT review timelines.

4

Integration & Technical Fit

Career services doesn't operate in isolation. A tool on its own island creates friction; one connected to your ecosystem drives adoption.

What platforms do you integrate with — Handshake, our LMS, SSO?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Named integrations with specific platforms. SSO (SAML). Handshake integration. LMS integration (Canvas, Blackboard). Browser extension for job boards.

RED FLAG

No SSO. No Handshake integration. "We're working on LMS integration" with no timeline. Standalone island.

Do you have HECVAT, VPAT, and FERPA documentation ready?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Completed HECVAT ready to share. Current VPAT. Clear FERPA posture. Track record of institutional security reviews.

RED FLAG

Don't know what HECVAT is. "We're FERPA compliant" but no documentation. No VPAT. Never sold to higher ed before.

Is the platform web-based? What devices does it support?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Fully web-based, works on any device with a browser. No downloads. Cloud-saved work accessible from any device.

RED FLAG

Requires desktop software. Mobile is an afterthought. Work saves locally, lost when switching devices.

5

Pricing, Pilots & Proof

Budget is the #1 obstacle. You need pricing that reflects real usage, a low-risk way to prove value, and real evidence from peers.

How is pricing structured — per student enrolled, per active user, or something else?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Usage-based pricing reflecting realistic adoption (25-30%). Transparent. Can give a ballpark on the spot.

RED FLAG

Based on total enrollment when only a fraction uses it. Won't discuss pricing without a formal meeting. Per-scan limits that create artificial scarcity.

Can we run a pilot before committing to a full contract?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Standard pilot structure (100-250 students, one semester, success metrics upfront, pricing path established). Sandbox/demo available.

RED FLAG

No pilot option. Pilot is just a free trial with no support. Multi-year contract required. Evasive about post-pilot pricing.

Can you connect me with 2-3 peer institutions using your product?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

References immediately — named institutions, named contacts you'd consider peers. Published case studies with real outcome data.

RED FLAG

No references. Testimonial quotes but won't connect you with people. Vague metrics ("students loved it"). No referenceable customers.

What does the contract look like? What happens to our data if we leave?

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Annual with renewal options. Transparent cancellation. Data export so students don't lose work. Year-to-year agreements.

RED FLAG

Multi-year required with no exit. No data portability. Auto-renewal with narrow cancellation windows.

Vendor Comparison Scorecard

Score each vendor 1–5 on each dimension. A perfect score is 25.

DIMENSION	VENDOR A	VENDOR B	VENDOR C	VENDOR D
1. Student Adoption & Engagement				
2. Depth & Quality of Feedback				
3. Coach & Advisor Workflow				
4. Integration & Technical Fit				
5. Pricing, Pilots & Proof				
Total (out of 25)				

Decision Notes

Once you've scored every vendor, capture the key takeaways here. This is the page you'll bring to internal stakeholder conversations.

QUESTION	NOTES
Top-scoring vendor	
What's the deciding factor?	
Biggest open risk	
Pilot or full deployment?	
Stakeholders to align with	
Target decision date	



PART FIVE · NEXT STEPS

Want a deeper conversation?

This guide is meant to make your evaluation defensible — not to push you toward Jobscan. If you'd like to compare what we do against the vendors you're shortlisting, our team will walk you through it honestly.

Bring your scorecard. We'll answer every question in this guide on the record.

Book a working demo →



Career tech for higher education · jobscan.co/organizations