A YEAR IN REVIEW
2020-2021

A MESSAGE FROM THE ASSOCIATE DEAN & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Fewer staff members. Severe budget constraints. The uncertainty of a global pandemic. One of these alone could immobilize any department, let alone all three. Many would argue that just staying afloat over the last year would be a feat in and of itself, but true to who we are at Toppel, we accomplished more than anyone could have expected from any department. We didn’t do it for accolades; we did it for our students who faced the greatest amount of uncertainty. One of our values at Toppel is the Pursuit of Excellence, and our staff embodied it more than ever during a profoundly challenging year.

Though going virtual had its challenges, it also opened doors for us to reach more students, faculty, and staff than ever before. Our Career Champions Network continued to thrive in a virtual environment by allowing faculty and staff to learn and digest important career-related information and resources without ever leaving their house. Our efforts surrounding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) grew exponentially by partnering with student groups and departments such as Multicultural Student Affairs and Women and Gender Studies. We also created the first-ever BreakThru Hour specifically for our BIPOC students to have direct access to employers and recruiters. Recognizing that students were feeling anxious about the economic uncertainty facing the globe, we created the Skills Advantage Series (SAS), a self-paced program where they could add timely and highly sought-after skills that would make them stand out in the job search. The skills tracks included project management, graphic design, coding, digital marketing, and more.

Rather than go on and on, I invite you to take some time to read about the many other accomplishments and milestones we reached over the last year. As we come back to campus this fall, the reality is that we never left and the pages ahead are proof of this. Thank you for being part of the culture of career at the U, where career services is everybody’s business!

Christian Garcia
Our theme this year was #BreakThru. This theme means moving past any uncertainty, fear, apathy, or information overload surrounding your career. Throughout the year, we asked students about how they broke through and highlighted their answers each week in our e-newsletter, the Toppel Insider. Here are some of those answers:

**Landon**

Junior  
Political Science

Landon is the inaugural recipient of the 2021 Toppel BreakThru Award, given for his work in creating safe spaces for students of color. He is also the Student Government President for 2021-2022.

**Kristophe**

Sophomore  
Economics

Kristophe will be interning at NextEra Energy as an Economic Development Analyst - an opportunity he landed after attending a Career Crawl at Toppel. Kristophe also works as an Academic Liaison for Toppel through Student Government, and he says this experience has helped him develop leadership skills and made him more marketable to employers.

**Claudia**

Senior  
Neuroscience & Biochemistry

Claudia was part of the Professional Development Academy at Toppel where she polished transferrable skills in communication, networking, and interdisciplinary collaboration. These allowed her to secure an internship with ScribeAmerica where she supports doctors in the Neurology department at the Coastal Neurological Institute (CNI) by scribing information/notes during patient visits.

**Anan**

Sophomore  
Architecture

Anan took advantage of Toppel’s UShadow program to connect with a senior architect at Stantec Architecture Inc. Anan says that the connection is helping to guide her remaining years at UM, and that she is now able to set priorities to better prepare herself for the industry.

**Zachary**

Junior  
Human Resource Management

Zachary has attended career fairs, participated in the Skills Advantage Series, and met with Toppel staff for personal career advice. Today, he interns at Miami Jewish Health in Talent Acquisition, and he says the role has been everything he could have hoped for.

**Skylar**

Senior  
Entrepreneurship

Skylar has taken advantage of Toppel’s resume review services, interview preparation, and shadowing opportunities to advance his career. He spent this past summer as a Procter & Gamble intern on the sales team, where he was able to lead, assist, and create projects.
2,164
Students Attended Career Programs & Events (Fairs, Networking, Workshops)

1,727
Resumes Reviewed

44,648
Handshake Log-ins

155
Students Participated in Experiential Learning (TIP & InternU)

379
Campus & Practice Interviews

31,849
Applications Submitted on Handshake

61,644
Cane2Cane Log-ins

715
Mentorship Connections Made on Cane2Cane

195
Career Assessments Completed

1,450
Advising Sessions

* These data include enrolled undergraduate students only.

** Handshake is our online career management platform where students can find and apply to jobs/internships, among other things.
The Toppel Career Center seamlessly made the transition to offering our services virtually in Spring 2020 and continued to offer a variety of virtual options during this past academic year.

Drop-in advising was held utilizing Zoom with over 1,000 advising sessions that took place during the 2020-21 academic year. 99% of students surveyed indicated that they were likely to recommend the Toppel Career Center Drop-In advising to a classmate. 95% of students ended the session with a clear idea of next steps.

Ensuring that students had opportunities to connect with employers during the pandemic was a top priority. Toppel utilized the Handshake platform to host 10 virtual career fairs, providing the opportunity for students to connect with recruiters in group and one-on-one sessions. In addition, Virtual Career Crawl events connected students with recruiters and UM alumni from a variety of organizations. During these crawls, over 200 students experienced company culture firsthand, learned about current and emerging career paths, and engaged in interactive activities with representatives from Nike, Google, Netflix, Microsoft, Tesla, Citrix, SiriusXM, Bloomberg, and ESPN.

A new series, The Job Search Power Hour, was launched in Summer 2020 to help recent graduates gain an edge in applying for jobs in the current job market. Eight weekly sessions offered tips, resources, discussions, hands-on activities, and proactive approaches to help alums navigate the employment search. In Spring 2021, Toppel debuted The 8-Step Job Search Toolkit, a self-paced workbook full of strategies, advice, and resources created to help students and recent alumni prepare and execute their individualized job search plan.

Although we never dreamt of going completely virtual prior to 2020, we’re proud of how we were able to deliver top quality services and continue to meet students’ needs. Going virtual even inspired fresh opportunities like Virtual Career Crawls. In the future, we will continue to offer some services virtually as we navigate the transition back to in-person services.

The Toppel Career Center does not have a monopoly on career advice for UM students, nor would we want one (career services is everybody’s business, after all!). We know that students rely heavily on faculty, staff, and peers for guidance on career decision-making due to their mentorship, expertise, experience, and even proximity. What Toppel can do is help to strengthen the quality of that advice by providing resources and education to UM faculty and staff. To that end, the Career Champions Network (CCN) was launched in Fall 2020.

New members of the Network participate in a series of workshops on a range of career-related topics. We also rotate a variety of Lunch and Learn sessions to cover hot topics that members want to learn more about, such as Using Technology to Navigate Careers.

Faculty and staff appreciate the professional development and networking opportunity that CCN has provided. In addition, all members receive a special CCN decal (physical and digital) they proudly display so students can recognize them as being a champion in their careers.

As of its first year, CCN has 62 members and growing. If you would like to become a member, email carly@miami.edu.

Advice from current Champions to their colleagues who have yet to join:

“This is a valuable opportunity to become a more impactful supervisor.”

-Marisa Hightower
Associate Director, Office of Civic and Community Engagement

“Join the Career Champions Network to further transform the lives of our Hurricanes!”

-Paul Bongarzone
Manager, Advising, College of Arts and Sciences

“Get involved. Update your knowledge about our campus resources and tools. This network will only make you a stronger educator and mentor to the many students seeking your expert guidance.”

-Kimberly McGrath Moreira
Senior Lecturer, College of Arts and Sciences

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I'M A CAREER CHAMPION
SKILLS ADVANTAGE SERIES

In the early months of the pandemic, the Toppel Career Center made it our utmost priority to make sure students’ needs were being met in a virtual environment. How could students continue their professional development during a time when work experience was more challenging to come by? Contrary to popular belief, there were still thousands of job and internship opportunities available, often involving remote work. However, these positions became even more competitive, and hiring freezes were also a reality.

As part of our mission at Toppel, we help students navigate the ever-changing landscape of careers – and it was changing fast! We wanted to give students easier access to opportunities for professional growth at little to no cost for them (many specialized trainings and bootcamps come with a hefty price tag). So, the Skills Advantage Series (SAS) was born! Our staff designed a curriculum of external skill training materials that students could utilize for free, along with paired reflections and exercises to improve their professional branding and career management.

Essentially, SAS is a virtual, self-directed skills training program for UM students. The program’s main goals are to serve students who want to learn beyond the classroom by honing specific transferable skills or students who aim to proactively gain a new skillset that otherwise would not be available to them within their respective major(s).

SAS is offered between semesters during summer and winter breaks, is free of charge, typically requires 5-10 hours each week of training, and includes weekly reflective activities. Participants gain an understanding of current industry knowledge and practices, learn to articulate and apply learned skills to future academic and professional opportunities, and maximize resume potential as a current student.

The program materials were shared with a total of 604 applicants. The applicants can complete the material on their own time throughout the year, making the knowledge accessible to a wide range of students across UM. Approximately 240 students participated in the formal program, submitting reflections in Summer 2020 and Winter 2021. Here is what some of them had to say about SAS:

“I am so grateful to have been a part of the inaugural program for the Non-Profit and Grant Writing Track. It provided me with insight I wouldn’t have gotten elsewhere this summer.”

“Thank you all for putting together such a wonderful program. I found all of the topics very interesting and wish I could have done them all. The weekly assessments geared towards resume writing were especially helpful as was having to think about how our how our respective subjects can apply to non-traditional areas. Being able to connect our achievements to our LinkedIn accounts was especially beneficial. And the price of the course ($0), wow, you couldn’t beat that!”

“Thank you so much for organizing this program; this structure was much needed during such unprecedented times.”
IN A WORLD OF CHANGE,
WE CHANGE FIRST

In June of 2020, the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others spurred the Toppel Career Center into action and transparency to further our pledge to all marginalized communities, specifically Black lives. With a longstanding appreciation and commitment towards diversity, equity, and inclusion, our team remains dedicated to embracing our Toppel values by:

- denouncing and standing against racism
- educating ourselves, each other, and employer partners on the barriers our students from underrepresented backgrounds face preparing for their careers and navigating the world of work
- increasing access to resources that will help meet the ever-evolving career readiness needs of our diverse student body

How exactly have we done this?

First, to keep the promises we shared above, we have cultivated a culture at Toppel that allows us to listen, learn, and challenge ourselves through daily endeavors, ongoing dialogue, and meaningful collaborations. Throughout this past year, many of our Toppel staff members were consistent participants of MSA’s Brave Spaces, which provides spaces for student support, dialogue, and community building. In collaboration with MSA, we also co-facilitated one of their Braves Spaces, “Navigating Authenticity & Identity in the Job Search,” where three of our staff members served as guest panelists.

In the fall, we introduced a series of frequent, candid conversations allowing our Toppel staff and leadership team to address a variety of difficult and significant topics by engaging with students, campus partners, and other guest speakers of varying backgrounds. Some of our guests included Student Government, United Black Students, the Black Student Leadership Caucus, LGBTQ+ Center, MSA, Maximus, and Gender & Sexuality Studies faculty member, Dr. Claire Oueslati-Porter. In the spring, we continued our Diversity & Inclusion Professional Development Academy.

Next, we have embraced the Toppel values of bold moves, fearlessness, and adaptability to advocate deliberately and unapologetically for our BIPOC and other marginalized students. We have accomplished this through various initiatives, including BreakThru Hour and Sebastian’s Closet Fund.

We created BreakThru Hour, which takes place in the fall and the spring during the first hour of our Job & Internship Expo, offering a space for our BIPOC and first-generation student population at the U to connect with employers who value and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Also, since our Sebastian’s Closet closed during the pandemic, in the spring, we launched the Sebastian’s Closet Fund CaneFunder Campaign to collect donations from the community to provide students with funding for business-professional clothing. Thanks to those generous donations, we were able to offer funds of $150 to 40 students representing a diversity of identities and backgrounds, totaling $6,000.

Finally, we recognize that we are just getting started and still have a lot of work ahead of us. In order to be part of change, we need to change first. We will continue to engage in intentional efforts that will ensure our students are heard, respected, and valued.

“We with the help of Break Thru Hour, I was able to connect with Citi Bank and Bank of America. Currently, I am part of the BofA Diversity and Inclusion forum where I am hearing from their executive team of all backgrounds. I was even invited to apply for their Summer 2022 programs early!”

-BreakThru Hour Participant

“I absolutely loved the panel session. I felt that I could relate to so many aspects of each panelists’ journey and it was incredibly inspiring. The conference, overall, gave me a new sense of motivation to be involved in my education to a higher degree, without the pressure of having my career totally figured out this early on. I am willing to embrace my social identities with confidence, rather than shying away from who I am or suppressing myself to fit a construct. Thank you to everyone who made today happen!”

-DIPDA Conference Participant

“I would just like to thank the Toppel Center for providing students like me with the opportunity to purchase professional wear. Sometimes it is hard to be confident when going in for an interview without the proper attire. I do feel more comfortable going in for interviews now with the help of the Toppel Center. The process was easy; the team was also amazing in assisting me with completing my order.”

-Sebastian’s Closet Fund Recipient
LEADING THE WAY

Each year, we lead the way in the field of career services by learning new things and engaging in events outside of the field and/or the U.

EVENTS WE ATTENDED

This year, staff members attended conferences and networking events across the globe (virtually), including:

• SoACE Employer Relations Summit
• Cooperative Education & Internship Association (CEIA) Conference
• Annual Career Competency Symposium
• UM’s Business of Healthcare Conference
• National Labor Relations Board Meet and Greet
• NACE Leadership Virtual Roundtable: Examining Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
• For(bes) The Culture – Culturally Accountable Summit
• Tableau Conference
• Higher Ed Summit
• Career Everywhere – uConnect Conference

AUDIENCES WE ENGAGED

• Multiple staff served as Empower Me First Mentors
• Ismaris presented to the Aqua Foundation about Career Readiness Resources for LGBTQ+ Women
• Christian served on a LinkedIn panel about Future Forecasting: Student Career, Job & Internships Trends
• Ali served as a UD:Dialogue facilitator.
• Ali also presented at InternBridge on Employer Engagement: The New Imperative for Career Center Success

THINGS WE LEARNED

• Several staff learned about disability inclusion during UM’s Disabilities in the Workplace Awareness Month.
• Ali learned about the Black experience in academic and corporate culture at a NACE webinar.
• Carly learned about the future of work at a Berkeley webinar.
• Multiple staff learned about the new recruitment reality from Ivy Research Council

STRATEGIC PLAN PROGRESS

This past year marked the end of Phase 1 of our 10-year, Toppel 2025 Strategic Plan. The first phase of the Plan really set us up for success so that we could smoothly embrace change, and we expect no less from the second phase.

We accomplished a lot in Phase 1, but something we’re especially proud of: our career education model that focuses more on relationships than events, on drop-in advising over appointments, and on making resources more accessible and relatable to students (enter highly-trained peer advisors!). We launched a mentoring platform called Cane2Cane to help students connect with alumni and friends of the U in their desired fields. We created the Diversity and Inclusion edition of the Professional Development Academy to help students navigate their identities in the workplace and then reimagined that program as a conference in order to reach more students. We started Toppel Taco Tuesdays (T3), where we pop-up at different locations on campus to raise Handshake awareness. And we implemented Salesforce for tracking employer engagement and informing strategy.

As always, we’ve got our ears on the ground and eyes on the future (2025 we’re looking at you!), staying at the forefront of career education and job market trends. We’re excited to add new objectives to the plan over the next five years as part of Phase 2. Stay tuned!
Toppel would not be able to serve our students without the support of amazing campus partners. Below are just some of our partners who we’d like to highlight for their dedication to students’ career development. They are winners of Toppel Awards, and this is what their nominators had to say about them:

**Chris Hartnett**  
Senior Manager of Professional Development

Chris is dedicated to the professional development of students. This dedication has included serving as Toppel’s liaison to the First Year Directions Course and leading the effort to incorporate career education and development into this crucial class for our first year ‘Canes. He created a template for career assignments within the First Year Directions syllabus that focused on Handshake. Using this as a model, many of the FYD instructors incorporated these tasks into their respective syllabi. In addition, Chris hosted a Toppel staff member during one of his classes to provide an overview of career education and encouraged other professors to do the same. As a result, Toppel team members presented to hundreds of first-year students in more than 15 classes.

Additionally, Chris took part in the Career Champions Network. He also had an impact on our employers by serving as a co-facilitator at HireACane Academy, Toppel’s recruiter conference and retreat.

**Dr. Renée Dickens Callan**  
Assistant VP of Student Life

In her previous role as Director of Multicultural Student Affairs, Renée has been an outstanding partner to Toppel. She is an advocate for students of color at UM, and she is committed to their success. With this mindset, we have worked collaboratively with her and MSA to plan a variety of initiatives to help students with career readiness over the years. These initiatives include interactive programming for students of color to help them prepare for career expos, fairs, and events. Renée consistently brings creative ideas to the table as we developed programs, and she is very knowledgeable about the needs of our students. She has also demonstrated a willingness to talk to employers who are interested in diversifying their applicant pools and works with our team to educate employers. When planning the first ever Student of Color Symposium, she reached out to us to sponsor this important conference. As a result, Toppel continues to be an active sponsor and participant of the symposium.
Danielle Houck
Senior Lecturer, College of Arts & Sciences

Danielle has consistently developed an immense amount of career opportunities for all of her students. I took the professor’s ENG 230: Advanced Professional Communication course in which we had five core assignments that consisted of submitting a resume, cover letter, digital portfolio, presentation, professional event responses, and a proposal. During the proposal, we learned essential writing skills in professional communication through email drafting over the course of the semester.

At the beginning of semester, she shared how to use Handshake for job searching and mentioned Toppel’s events like the Virtual Career Expo and the Virtual Career Crawl for professional event ideas. Also, she would open each class by announcing new networking and career opportunities.

Whether it was Toppel’s Career Fair, professional events like educational medical panels, or connecting UM alumni with her current students, she always found ways to guide us on our career paths. She truly made it her primary goal to base her curriculum on preparing us for our careers.

Theatre Action Group

In support of Toppel’s mission, this organization has worked virtually to provide programming and post-graduation support for our current members and recently graduated members. The goal of this organization is to provide professional development that we may not have received in class, such as alumni networking, exposure to specialized career tracks, and generalized theatrical engagement. This organization developed an alumni network from within our field, hosted networking events, panels, and created an active Facebook page for members.

The Group’s Facebook page provides its members with a professional setting to network, celebrate each other’s successes and new projects! On this Facebook page, they explore general business skills such as personal branding, website/logo creation, and share ideas regarding finances for the working actors and actresses, relevant and current success tips, podcasting, career shifts, double majoring, and post-secondary education.

This organization also works in part towards Toppel’s diversity and inclusion values with their newly instated Monthly Action Initiatives as they aim to raise member education and fundraising for the Florida Bail Fund and FEMPOWER Miami during June’s BLM protests, voter registration, mental health for the actor, Breast Cancer Awareness, Transgender Awareness Month, AIDS Awareness, and more.

Thank you to all of our partners! If you would like to partner with us, don’t hesitate to reach out!
WHO ENGAGED WITH OUR STUDENTS THIS YEAR?

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

124,157
Jobs/Internships Posted on Handshake

135
Networking/Recruiting Events Held

11,084
Organizations Posted Jobs/Internships on Handshake

267
Organizations Attended Career Fairs

AND MANY MORE!
The Toppel Awards recognize the many outstanding individuals and organizations who have made career education & career development a priority – even during a pandemic, social unrest, and the myriad other curveballs that 2020 threw at us. This year’s awards ceremony took place on February 23, 2021, and was held virtually via Zoom for the first time in its history.

Twelve awards were presented this year, including a new award titled “#BreakThru.” This award was presented to an individual, student organization, or faculty/administrator who demonstrated through a program, initiative, or event, a commitment to overcoming obstacles for themselves and others.

We also had two sets of two-way ties for The Student of the Year Undergraduate Award and the Distinguished Faculty Member of the Year Award. Each Toppel Award was uniquely designed by Gapingvoid, Toppel’s Hurricane Platinum Partner. The ceremony was hosted by Toppel’s very own Christian Garcia, Associate Dean and Executive Director, and Ali Rodriguez, Executive Director.

The Toppel Career Center is grateful to everyone who helped make this a great event for the 6th consecutive year! Congratulations again to all of our nominees and winners; we appreciate your dedication to career development and want you to know that Toppel and UM would not be the same without you!

“Today’s Toppel Awards virtual event was fantastic and well attended! Congratulations to you, your staff, and all the winners! Well-deserved and inspiring nominations!”

-Gabrielle Chudnoff
University of Miami, Senior Manager, Human Resources

“We were all impressed with how smoothly and professionally the 6th Annual Toppel Awards Virtual Event ran. Congratulations to everyone involved!”

-Devika Milner
University of Miami, Assistant Dean and Director, Office of Study Abroad

2021 AWARD WINNERS

STUDENT OF THE YEAR
Graduate Student Recipient: Melanie Plastini
Undergraduate Student Recipient: Esther Animalu
Undergraduate Student Recipient: Michel Pinard

ALUMNI OF THE YEAR
Eugene Sulzberger

STUDENT GROUP OF THE YEAR
Theatre Action Group

PROGRAM OF THE YEAR
Frost Preparatory Program

DISTINGUISHED ADMINISTRATOR
Chris Hartnett

DISTINGUISHED FACULTY MEMBER
Danielle Houck
Susan Leary

EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR
Maximus

RECRUITER OF THE YEAR
Rachel Johnson, Bank of America

BREAKTHRU AWARD
Landon C. Coles

PATRICIA TOPPEL AWARD
Employer Recipient: Ken Taylor, Citrix
Administrator Recipient: Dr. Renée Dickens Callan
A native South Floridian, much of Naomi’s professional life has been dedicated to working as a change agent in communities. From 2009 to 2019, she strengthened her leadership skills while actively volunteering with a multitude of community-based organizations.

She served three terms as an AmeriCorps member with local nonprofits addressing neighborhood revitalization, food equity, and academic service-learning. In her past roles, she has also focused on capacity building in organizations through curating diverse events, supporting nonprofit leaders in professional education and their operations, and through promoting changemaker efforts via on-line and off-line channels.

Now, as an AmeriCorps Recruiter at University of Miami, Naomi has been able to tap into those experiences. Through a variety of campus outreach efforts, attending virtual job fairs, and coordinating collaborative events, she’s creating ways to educate UM students and beyond on the positive impact that being part of national service programs can have for a lifetime!

Some words from Naomi about her role: “I am so excited for this fantastic opportunity to inspire a new generation of young leaders to explore their career options in service.”
Thousands of open jobs and internships are posted for students on Handshake each year by thousands of employers (including all Fortune 500 companies). In an effort to increase visibility of these postings and promote more career-mindedness amongst our students, Toppel has been working with each school/college to create live job and internship feeds on their webpages, where each feed corresponds to a possible career path relevant to the school/college’s majors. Keep your eyes peeled for announcements as we publish these webpages throughout the year!

With over 5,000 UM students working on campus, we know that many are engaging in robust and skills-rich tasks and projects. By transforming these on-campus jobs into internships, it encourages students to make the most of their on-campus experience, helps their work feel more meaningful and valued as an integral part of the U, and allows them to gain transferable skills and learn how to communicate their professional growth more readily to future employers. Toppel has been working with departments across campus to help them elevate their current student employment opportunities into meaningful internships, and we invite your department to join us. If you’re interested, please contact us at toppel-internships@miami.edu

Our theme for next year is #BounceBack. We’ll use this theme to encourage students to overcome obstacles in their paths to success and emerge stronger and more determined on the other side. We’re excited to see what they accomplish when they embrace hope and take steps to shape their future in meaningful ways.