



PeopleGrove

University of Miami's Toppel Career Center joins forces with alumni to provide career guidance to students



INSTITUTION TYPE

Private Research University



ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

132 bachelor's, 148 master's, and 67 doctoral programs



LOCATION

Coral Gables, Florida



TOTAL ENROLLMENT

17,000



ALUMNI

193,000

Introduction

The University of Miami, located just outside the city of Miami, Florida, was first chartered in 1925. This was the same year a [historic "land boom"](#) was taking place, as people flocked to the state in search of a new life (and lots of sunshine). By the fall of 1926, the real estate bubble had popped, and a [record-breaking hurricane](#) brought devastation to the once-thriving city. The University of Miami held on, surviving the subsequent Great Depression and the Second World War. Despite such a challenging beginning, the university today is a shining beacon in higher education. Its students and student athletes aptly call themselves the "Hurricanes"—perhaps as much of a testament to the tenacity of the university as its history.



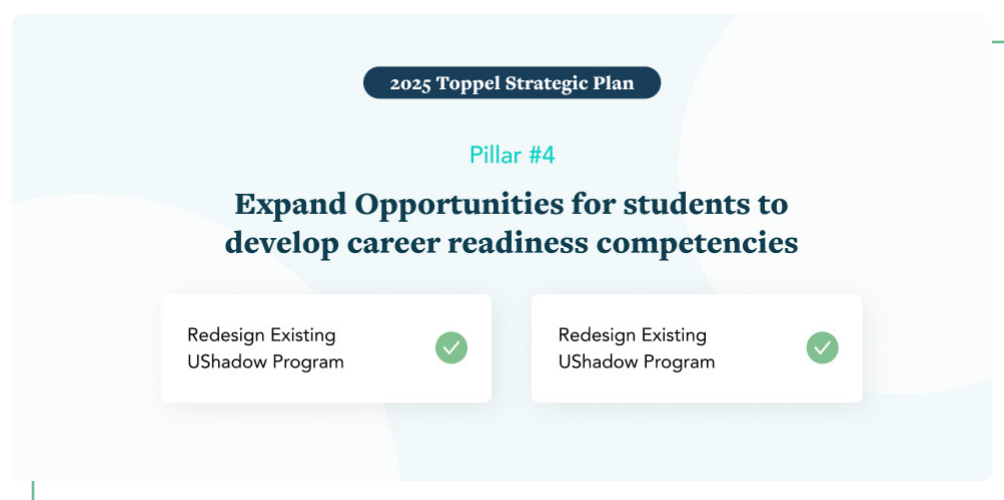
The University of Miami campus. Photo credit: University of Miami

At the university, students and young alumni alike rely on the Toppel Career Center for career resources and support. Their “Explore, Prepare, Connect” model is intended to “meet students where they are” with a myriad of programs.

“The Toppel Career Center is the centralized career center for the institution,” said Christian Garcia, Associate Dean and Executive Director, Toppel Career Center, University of Miami. “Our mission as a career center is to help provide students a foundation. It’s not about preparing them for one particular job, instead it’s about preparing them with the skills, tools, and knowledge to be able to do this over and over throughout their life.”

University of Miami has a racially and ethnically diverse student population: 25% of undergraduate students and 29% of graduate students identify as Hispanic or Latino, 12% of undergrads and 15% of graduate students identify as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 9% of undergraduates and 8% of graduate students identify as Black. “At Toppel, we always examine things through a diversity, equity and inclusion lens,” said Keashla Marengo, Associate Director, Career Readiness at Toppel. Keashla and the Toppel staff work closely with alumni relations, the [LGBTQ student center](#), the [multicultural students affairs center](#), and student government to structure a feedback loop and ensure student needs are being met.

Toppel’s [2025 Strategic Plan](#) outlines five pillars for success, not the least of which is expanding opportunities for students to develop career readiness competencies. This focus area aligns closely with the [initiative](#) set forth by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).



A better alternative for connecting students with alumni

As with any university career center, certain difficulties persisted. “One of our biggest challenges was helping students connect with alumni, and alumni to come back [to the university] and connect with students,” Christian recalled. “Before PeopleGrove, there was this rudimentary platform that existed through the Alumni Association office, where—in theory— students could search and find alumni that met the criteria that they were interested in.” The reality, however, was much different: The system failed to stay updated, and no one person or department was assigned ownership, creating a poor user experience for alumni and students alike.

Toppel got a second chance to strengthen their relationship with the department of alumni relations, and capture the interest of alumni by providing an opportunity for them to give back to their alma mater with their time and talent on a consistent basis. “A lot of what we got from alumni were these one-off contributions, such as participating in a panel discussion [at an event],” Keashla remarked. “A lot of people love to share their stories and lessons they’ve learned, and we didn’t have a way for alumni to do that with students.”

“We needed to connect our students with industry professionals who could provide both industry insight and career advice that’s specific to the student’s areas of interest.”



Keashla Marengo

Associate Director, Career Services
Toppel Career Center, University of Miami

Not only did the University of Miami need to be serving its alumni in more robust ways, there was a significant need for students to forge connections with alumni and other friends of the university. “We needed to connect our students with industry professionals who could provide both industry insight and career advice that’s specific to the student’s areas of interest,” Keashla said. “When you look at university career centers and how they’re staffed, there’s no way you’re going to have an expert in every industry. So who can we turn to, to provide our students with industry knowledge?” Toppel doesn’t limit itself to having just alumni on their platform—they also enlist others affiliated with the university, including employers, parents, faculty and staff. “Any of them could provide that industry insight [that students are looking for].”

Tools for driving mentorship and career preparation

“Not every student has the luxury of having lots of social capital. PeopleGrove provides an instant network to students that they didn’t have before.”



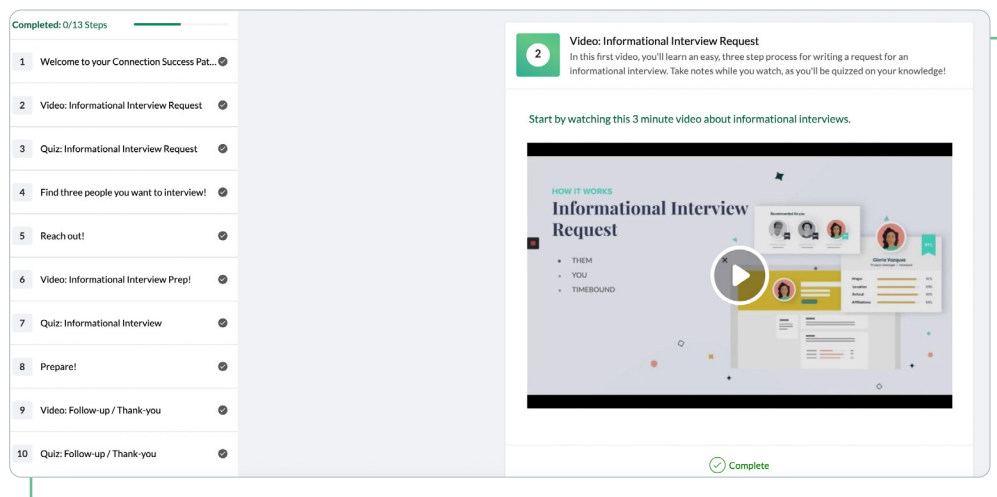
Christian Garcia

Associate Dean and Executive Director
Toppel Career Center, University of Miami

The university launched their platform with PeopleGrove in August 2019.

USER TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Cane2Cane uses PeopleGrove’s pre-built training, called the Connection Success [Pathway](#), to prepare students for an informational interview with a mentor. Participants went through a series of on-demand, self-guided, and interactive content, including video and quizzes. Each person was able to read the material at their own pace, including segments on how to source the right people to ask for an interview, and how to prepare for the interview.



The University of Miami uses PeopleGrove Pathways to prepare students for mentorship.

USHADOW PROGRAM

University of Miami’s UShadow program gives sophomores and juniors across all majors the chance to participate in job shadowing with UM alumni and other employers. Happening during each fall and spring semester, the program is designed to give students an idea of what a typical workday in their career field or industry of interest might look like.

Students have to be a member of Cane2Cane to apply and participate. Participants were matched based on factors such as career role and industry preferences.



Ula Martinez-Caballero

Mentor



Review of [Redacted] (mentee) • May 25, 2020

"I was delighted to give [Redacted] an insight into the Silicon Valley startup life, even though Coronavirus shut down was just beginning. I was so impressed by [Redacted] preparedness, quality of his questions and drive. I can't wait to see where [Redacted] ends up and expect he'll be a formidable contributor wherever that might be."

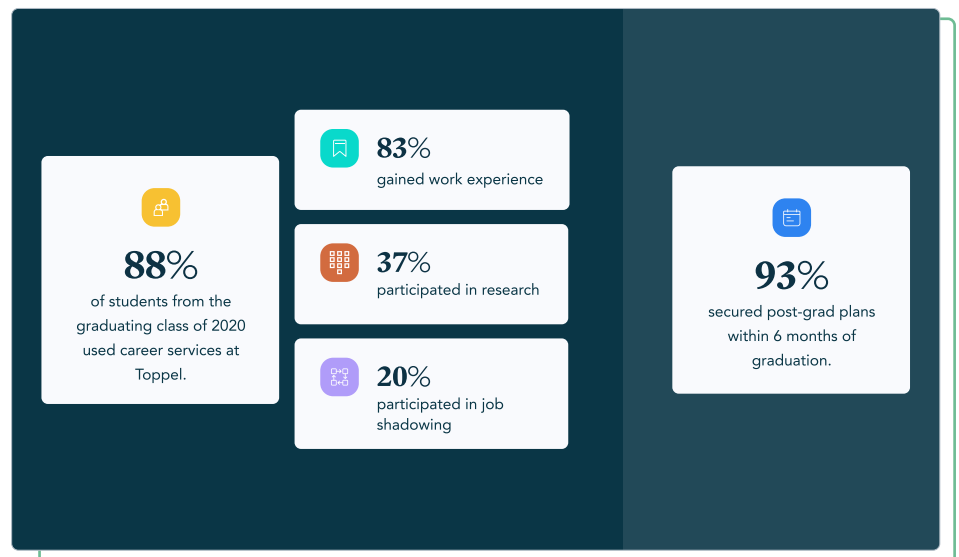
Cane2Cane admin view of a mentor's review of their meeting with a student mentee.

GROUPS

Keashla said that after Cane2Cane launched, she was contacted by various campus affinity groups asking how they could get involved in helping certain affiliated individuals connect with one another. Toppel uses PeopleGrove Groups to provide additional support to Miami Herbert Business School students and alumni, as well as undergraduate and graduate students in the public health programs.

Since Toppel Career Center launched Cane2Cane with PeopleGrove, more than 2,000 students and nearly 2,000 alumni & friends of the university have joined. "I think part of why we've been successful and seen our numbers increase...it's because of how supportive the PeopleGrove team has been," said Keashla.

Results and Evolution



"C2C has contributed tremendously to my personal and professional goals in that I knew that I wanted to help other fellow Canes at the beginning of my career. The C2C allows me to fulfill my goals of helping others obtain their career goals and purpose outside of the Richmond, VA area."

Jelena Hill
UM Alum '09

"I'm a big believer in mentors because I have had a lot of mentors in my career. UM helped my trajectory, so that's why I wanted to give back."

Priyanka Surio
UM Alum '12

"I joined Cane2Cane to connect with UM alumni, so they could guide me through their stories and experience. Cane2Cane is the best platform to network. I have made more successful connections on C2C than I have on LinkedIn."

Saad Ahmad
Economics Major, May 2021

"I really enjoyed being able to connect with an alum who has more experience than I do. Marian [my mentor] helped me to recognize that I could be flexible with my career and realize that there are many opportunities that will come up through time."

Emmanuel Soto
International Studies

As Toppel's team looks to the future, they remain dedicated to continuing their work to expand access to career resources through mentoring—especially for underrepresented groups. Keashla identified gaps in mentor-mentee pairings that she's working to address; for example, they have more students that identify as Black or AAPI than mentors on their platform.

"Not every student has the luxury of having lots of social capital," Christian said. "PeopleGrove provides an instant network to students that they didn't have before."

Enable meaningful connections throughout every learner's journey.

Visit peoplegrove.com to learn more.



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