

PLAY: [PULSE] The Post-Graduation Intelligence System

Do you have a tool that can assess whether your curriculum met the needs of your graduates and their employers one, three, five, or ten years after graduation?

V1.0 — Published August 5, 2026

By Rodney G. Alsup, D.B.A., CPA, CITP
Professor Emeritus
Part of the Graduate Program Intake Playbook — Appendices: Resources

You built the Bridge Matrix. You plotted where your learners entered, where your curriculum aimed, and where employers expected them to land. You ran it twice — once to plan the cycle, once to prove it — and you had something most programs never get: actual evidence the gap closed.

Then graduation happened, and the matrix stopped.

That's not a failure of the tool. It's a failure of the timeline. The employer expectations you captured at intake were a snapshot of one moment. Your graduate's actual capability, one and three years into a career, is a different number entirely — sometimes higher than anyone predicted, sometimes lower, and you have no way of knowing which without asking. Play 0.4 called this Post-Graduation Abandonment: a program that treats graduation as a finish line instead of a transition point. This play is the fix for the intelligence side of that problem — what happens to the data, not just the relationship.

ISSUE

Most programs that do maintain post-graduation contact are maintaining a relationship, not a research instrument. A call, a newsletter, an invitation to a reunion, a donation ask. That's necessary and it is not nothing — but it collects almost no usable intelligence about whether the program actually worked. The one tool your program already has that could answer that question — the Bridge Matrix — gets built once, used twice by graduation — once to plan, once to prove — and then retired at exactly the moment its data would start to compound in value.

WHY THIS MATTERS

- A curriculum committee revising next year's syllabus is working from intake-year employer data that may already be three years stale. Employer expectations drift. Your matrix doesn't know that unless you ask again.
- Some KSCs your curriculum treats as core turn out to matter less on the job than you assumed — and some capabilities your graduates needed on day one were never on the original matrix at all. You can't fix a gap you never measured.

- A graduate in year ten has a decade of career trajectory intelligence, mentoring capacity, and professional network value that a graduate at year one doesn't have yet. Play 0.4 named that asset. This play is how you collect it.
- Faculty development dollars get spent on instinct instead of evidence, because nobody's bringing them a report that says, in plain terms, what changed.

THE CORE IDEA: RUN THE MATRIX AGAIN — ON A CADENCE, NOT JUST TWICE

I built the Bridge Matrix, which is to be run twice: plan, then prove. PULSE is the same instrument, run again, on a standing schedule, for as long as a graduate will answer.

Same three-column logic, one relabeling. Instead of comparing entry-level, curriculum targets, and employer expectations for a single intake cycle, you're now comparing three things across time:

1. Curriculum target (C) — what you were aiming for when they graduated. This number doesn't change; it's your historical record.
2. Re-surveyed employer expectations (E2) — what the market expects now for someone at this graduate's career stage. Ask this the same way you asked it the first time: job postings, advisory board input, and — where you can get it — direct conversation.
3. Alum's actual level (A) — where this graduate's real, on-the-job capability has landed. This is the number you're missing entirely without PULSE.

The distance between C and A tells you whether your curriculum delivered. The distance between A and E2 tells you whether what you delivered still matters. Together, both numbers are the finding.

A quick scale reminder before you read the table below: Bloom's six levels run low to high — 1 Remember, 2 Understand, 3 Apply, 4 Analyze, 5 Evaluate, 6 Create. Two of those words sitting a few inches apart on a page can look like a minor difference when they're actually two or three steps apart in complexity. If you're not fluent in Bloom's yet, read every level in this play with its number attached, not just its name — "Evaluate" is a full two steps above "Apply," not one.

Here's a simplified example, revisiting the same cohort three years after the original Bridge Matrix — including one capability that never made the original matrix at all:

Knowledge / Skill / Capability	Curriculum Target (C)	Employer Expectation, Re-Surveyed (E2)	Alum's Actual Level (A)	Verdict
Financial Statement Literacy	4 – Analyze	5 – Evaluate	4 – Analyze	Gap persisted
Cross-Functional Communication	4 – Analyze	5 – Evaluate	5 – Evaluate	Gap closed
Data-Driven Decision Making	5 – Evaluate	6 – Create	5 – Evaluate	Gap persisted
Ethical Reasoning Under Ambiguity	3 – Apply	6 – Create	5 – Evaluate	Gap narrowed
Stakeholder Negotiation	— (not on original matrix)	4 – Analyze	2 – Understand	Missing entirely

A NOTE ON WHAT "GAP" MEANS HERE

Not every gap is bad, and this play only works if you resist treating every mismatch as a failure. Three things can be true of the same KSC:

- Under-achieved: your graduate's actual level (A) sits below both the curriculum target (C) and current employer expectation (E2). This is the clearest signal — the curriculum didn't deliver or didn't stick.
- Over-achieved: A is above C. Something outside the curriculum — the job itself, a mentor, a certification — did more work than your program did. That's not a curriculum failure to fix; it's a data point about where real capability comes from, and it belongs in the report anyway.
- Missing entirely: the KSC shows up in E2 but was never a row on the original matrix. This is the gap that should worry you most — not a level mismatch, but a blind spot. Something the market needed on day one that your program never claimed responsibility for teaching.

Track all three. A curriculum committee that only sees under-achievement gets a partial, defensive picture. Give them all three and the conversation changes from "what did we get wrong" to "what should we actually be teaching?"

WHAT TO DO: A CADENCE THAT DOESN'T DEMAND A FULL RESEARCH OFFICE

You don't need an annual instrument to make this work, and starting with one is the fastest way to abandon it by year two. Anchor the cadence to the moments Play 0.4 already established, then extend past where that play stopped:

- Year 1 — light touch. This overlaps the touchpoints Play 0.4 already has you running in the first two years. Don't build a second instrument; fold one or two PULSE questions into a check-in you're already having.
- Year 3 — first real pulse. Enough time has passed for a graduate's actual on-the-job level to diverge meaningfully from the curriculum target. This is your first full matrix re-run.
- Year 5 — consolidation pulse. One data point can be a blip; two tells you whether the Year 3 signal was a trend or noise. This is also where career pivots that a single early snapshot would miss start to show up.
- Year 10 — mid-career pulse. Employer expectations at this stage look different from entry-level expectations; re-survey E2 specifically for this stage, not just re-ask the original question.
- Year 15 — and roughly every five years after. Fewer alumni will respond at this distance, and that's fine. The ones who do are your highest-value respondents: deep career trajectory data, real mentoring capacity, and often your strongest advocates.

Start with one cohort and one cadence point. Don't build all five intervals before you've proven the first one works. Treat these five points as a starting proposal, not a fixed standard — every program can set its own timeline once it has a cycle or two of real response data telling it what actually works for its alumni.

GATHERING IT: DON'T SURVEY WHEN A CONVERSATION WILL DO

The same caution from the Bridge Matrix play applies here, more so: a survey will get you a level (A), but it won't tell you which KSCs were missing entirely, and it rarely surfaces the over-achieved capabilities a graduate picked up from the job itself rather than from you. That distinction only shows up in an actual conversation. Where you can get fifteen minutes with a graduate at a pulse point, take the conversation over the checkbox. Where you can't — this population thins out fast after year ten — a well-built survey against a broader alumni panel is a legitimate substitute, the same way it is for the employer-expectation column in the original Bridge Matrix.

One format worth considering alongside individual conversations: a small focus group, three to five graduates from the same cohort, especially once you're past Phase 1 and working at the cohort level. A group setting surfaces things a one-on-one conversation won't — one graduate's answer prompts another's, and you hear where their experiences agree or diverge in real time. The tradeoff is honesty under peer pressure: someone who fell short on a KSC may not say so in front of former classmates. Use focus groups to gather the discussion and the "why" behind a pattern you've already spotted individually, not as the first source of any one graduate's actual A-level score — that number should still come from a private conversation.

Both learner and employer engagement need to continue for this to work. A PULSE cycle that only talks to alumni and never re-surveys employers will drift — you'll know how your graduates feel about their own capability without knowing whether the market's definition of that capability moved. Build both conversations into every pulse point, not just the alumni half. Treat each employer re-survey conversation as more than a data-collection task, too — it's a live opportunity to deepen the kind of employer partnership Play 0.2 is built around. An employer who's asked for real input every few years, and shown what changed because of it, is a very different relationship than one who only hears from your program during a fundraising cycle.

TURN IT INTO SOMETHING FACULTY CAN ACT ON

Raw matrix data is not a report. Before it goes to your curriculum committee, translate every finding into one of four plain recommendations:

1. Keep as-is — the KSC's curriculum target still matches what the market needs and what alumni are delivering.
2. Raise the target — alumni and employers are both landing above where the curriculum aimed. The curriculum is underselling what this program can produce.
3. Add a KSC — something showed up in re-surveyed employer expectations (E2) that was never on the original matrix. This is new curriculum territory, not a tuning adjustment.
4. Retire or reduce a KSC — the curriculum still weights this heavily, but neither alumni outcomes nor current employer expectations justify the investment anymore.

A report built around those four verbs is something a curriculum committee can vote on in one meeting. A spreadsheet of raw Bloom's levels is something they'll table until next semester.

START SIMPLE: AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR PROGRAM DIRECTORS

This is a new practice for almost every graduate program reading this, yours included. Build it in three phases, and don't skip ahead.

Phase 1 — Prove the method on a few graduates, not just one. A single conversation risks describing one person's unusual path rather than something the curriculum actually produced or

missed. Pick two or three people from a cohort you already ran a Bridge Matrix on, now roughly one year out. Have a real conversation with each. Score the same KSCs for each of them, and see whether a pattern holds across more than one person before you treat anything as a finding. This still costs you an afternoon or two, not a system.

Phase 2 — Extend to one full cohort at one pulse point. Once the method holds up across those first few graduates, run it for an entire cohort at whichever interval is closest and most feasible — usually Year 1 or Year 3. This is where you generate cohort-level, not just individual-level, findings.

Phase 3 — Build the standing cadence and the report. Only once Phase 2 has produced something a curriculum committee acted on should you formalize the full cadence and put a report on the calendar. A framework nobody asked for doesn't get funded. A framework that has already changed one curriculum decision does.

Phase 4 — Aggregate across intakes, once you have more than one cohort's data. Most programs don't run one cohort at a time. An 18- or 24-month program starting a new intake every year can easily have two cohorts mid-program, one graduating, and one still being recruited, at the same moment — sometimes on different curriculum versions if you've made changes in between. Once PULSE has run for more than one cohort, roll the findings up across intakes before you take anything to the curriculum committee. A gap that shows up in one cohort's pulse might be that cohort's story: a hard year, an instructor who left, a curriculum version you've already revised. A gap that shows up the same way across two or three intakes is a pattern, not a story, and the pattern belongs in a report. Tag each cohort's PULSE data with its intake term and curriculum version before aggregating, so a fix you've already made doesn't get blamed on a version that's no longer in use. Once you're aggregating across intakes, this stops being just an internal management tool and starts looking like real research. State a hypothesis before each pulse, not just an open question — "we expect the Year 3 gap in Ethical Reasoning to persist because we haven't touched that course since the original matrix," for example — then test it against what the pulse actually finds. That discipline is what turns PULSE into something a faculty researcher or doctoral student could take on directly, the same way Play A.8 flagged KSC validation as a legitimate thesis project. A multi-year, multi-cohort PULSE dataset is exactly the kind of longitudinal evidence that's hard to come by in this field and straightforward to build once the cadence is running.

This play deliberately doesn't hand you a finished instrument, a data platform, or a formal research protocol. Those come later, once you've proven the method matters to the people who must fund it. Start with a conversation, not a system.

WHAT TO DO WITH THIS TODAY

Pull the names of a few graduates from a cohort you have already run a Bridge Matrix on. If it's been at least a year, call them. Ask what they're doing day to day, and hold your original matrix up against it — not to grade them, but to grade your program. See if the gap surprises you. In my experience, it will.

WHERE THIS GOES NEXT

Turning a single pulse conversation into a repeatable interview protocol — and eventually, an alumni report employers will actually read — is real work of its own, worth its own play down the road, likely in the System III: Fan Creation or Cycle Review and Reset sections once this practice has enough runs behind it to standardize.

The Curricular Agility research entering the Playbook's Evidence to Action section backs the instinct behind this play directly: the study found that Feedback Systems — the capability to translate real-world signal back into curriculum decisions — was among the weakest and most commonly missing dimension across the schools studied. PULSE is one concrete way to build that dimension instead of just naming it. See [From Evidence to Action, Research Entry 001](#), for the full findings.

This Playbook only gets built by hearing what's missing from it. If this play left a gap for your situation — or if you already know the play you wish existed but haven't seen written anywhere — send it my way. That's exactly how the next one gets written.

Need support? Three Ways to Engage – All Free

I built the Playbook to be useful, not to be sold. That means no paywalls, no retainers, and nothing to register for just to read the work.

Read the Plays. Every Play is free at <https://rgalsup.com/grad-program-intake-playbook/>. Start wherever your program needs the most help — each one stands on its own.

Join a free webinar. I host free monthly webinars on specific Playbook topics, built around real conversations with people working on the same problems you are. One-time registration is required. The meetings occur monthly, on the third Wednesday at 11:00 AM EST. [Click here to register](#).

Talk to me directly. If something here is hitting close to home for your program — faculty enablement, hidden data in your platforms, evidence that nobody is using — I would genuinely like to hear about it. Free one-on-one conversations are available via Calendly. Click here to schedule a [One-on-one with Rodney](#). Please book any available slot that works for you, as my schedule fills up fast.

The offer is open. Let's make a difference one play at a time.

© Rodney G. Alsup 2026. Licensed under CC BY 4.0. Free to share and adapt with attribution.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>