

How Will This Help Me Get a Job?

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With the cost of education skyrocketing, and more pressure than ever being placed on securing a high-paying job after graduation, students often become frustrated by courses or activities they feel are a waste of time and money. This frustration is especially prevalent in first year or general education courses. Students may question the purpose of assignments or shrug them off as the idiosyncrasies of a persnickety professor. Discussing a course's value to students' personal, professional, academic, and civic lives is one way to help them see the big picture. For instance, after introducing rhetorical appeals in a composition class, the professor might inquire about how the topic helps students resolve a conflict with their roommate, ask for an extension on an assignment, or consider who to vote for during an election season.

Many students may still struggle to apply course concepts to their professional lives. Traditional students often have limited work experience and are unfamiliar with professional environments, behaviors, and expectations. They sometimes think of achieving career goals in terms of educational requirements, without realizing that many employers actively seek various types of hard and soft skills. These students are often unable to recognize the numerous transferable professional skills they learn in class on a daily basis.

To help students see this bigger picture, I created an end-of-semester activity that achieves multiple purposes: (1) familiarizes students with the concept of soft skills; (2) allows students to reflect on the marketable skills learned in class; and (3) prepares students for a competitive job market and high-stress job interviews.

Job Interview Response Activity

First, students research hard and soft skills and define the characteristics of these skills. Then, they choose one or two jobs they might apply for after graduation on which to focus. Students often have some idea of what they want to do when they graduate, but if they do not, this is an opportune time for them to discover what career paths they can access with their degree. Many departmental and career services websites offer comprehensive lists, but in the event that your institution does not, students can add this to their initial research phase.

Once they have chosen a job or two, students perform another internet search for job listings either on Google or on job recruiting sites like LinkedIn, Glassdoor, or Indeed. They are frequently surprised that employers advertise for skills such as critical thinking, problem

solving, teamwork, and collaboration. This is an excellent time to tell students that, in addition to their degree, they will need to demonstrate in a resume, cover letter, interview, or other application processes that they are adept at these skills.

Students then consider projects or activities they have completed in class that developed these soft skills. It is important to encourage them to think broadly as opposed to directly. For example, most students will never have to format documents in MLA style for their employers; however, the formatting requirements teach them to follow lengthy instructions, self-manage, pay attention to details, format communications that require distinct specifications, trouble-shoot, and practice patience— all of which may be important to a potential employer. Students understand the immediate benefits of peer review, but do not always consider how peer review teaches them to provide constructive criticism, incorporate feedback in the revision process, and hone written skills. When they start to look at other projects, activities, and exercises they have completed in and out of class, they begin to see the numerous professional skills they have practiced over the semester.

Finally, students compose a short "Job Interview Response." In this response, they must select a potential employer and explain how the skills they learned in class would transfer to the position and the working environment of the organization. In other words, they must articulate how the professional training gained in the course makes them the perfect candidate for the position.

Conclusion

Not only does this activity encourage students to reflect on their semester of learning, it also allows them to see the practical benefits of a course and prepare a professional explanation of these skills that they could use in a cover letter or in a real job interview. In my class specifically, it prepares students to explain the importance of an English course in a public sphere where English classes are often undervalued. When students see the personal, academic, and professional value of a course, they are able to see the big picture of how a course can help them succeed.

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