



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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IMPLEMENTING CAREER STRATEGIES

Whether students are seeking a promotion at their current place of employment, a new position within a different organization, or looking forward to a new career in a completely new field, all who successfully complete their program of study have the promise of furthering their careers. While coursework prepares students with a vast array of book knowledge, practical hands-on experience can be acquired through co-ops, internships, and service learning opportunities. But are these blossoming learners truly prepared for the job search process which will lead them to gainful employment? Once in the workforce are employees knowledgeable about the peripheral aspects of the job? Are they attentive to general business etiquette guidelines; do they have a solid ethical foundation; are they aware of the value of networking; are they capable of appropriate verbal and written communication within the business environment? All of these are skills necessary to get ahead in business.

A career strategies course provides students with these skills, adequately preparing them for the multiple dimensions of seeking and maintaining any job. This course culminates in the achievement of the ultimate educational goal: obtaining gainful employment.

Initial Course Design

The course format is designed to use a combination of lecture, group interaction, guest speakers, and discussion groups.

Peer Mentors

The implementation of peer mentors served as a multi-functional springboard for increasing student interaction, active participation, and successful course completion. The role of the peer mentor helped to achieve several objectives: 1) build a quasi-liaison relationship between the faculty member and students, allowing students to feel comfortable with questions or

concerns that could be addressed by the peer mentor; 2) emphasize the significance of each element of the course by relating personal anecdotes; 3) bridge the divide between the faculty and the unique characteristics of the class; and 4) assist in the mock interview process by conducting actual interviews with students.

Criteria for hiring peer mentors include successful completion of the course and a genuine interest in helping other students succeed. Mentors are paid a minimum hourly rate and expected to attend all in-class activities. Each mentor is assigned a group of 10 students. Responsibilities include: meeting with the group at the end of every class session; discussing content covered in the course and weekly homework assignment; sharing personal examples of resumés, cover letters, and correspondence; and encouraging group interaction through the exchange of contact information and the development of friendly relationships.

Resumé and Cover Letter

Students evaluate and discuss resumé samples, discuss legal and ethical issues, and review guidelines for employers' expectations. Emphasis is placed on the need for individual expression in the creation of a personal resumé, with the caveat that creativity has a place in specific industries and should not be considered acceptable across the board.

Homework: Students construct a personal resumé, using a specified format.

Internship Process: Students with little work experience or those who are interested in re-careering are encouraged to consider an internship or co-op to expose them to their new field of interest. These often result in permanent jobs. Students are introduced to the available resources through the campus career center, the library, and the Internet, and taught appropriate ways to investigate opportunities.

Homework: Students research internship and co-op openings of interest and write a paper clarifying their field of interest and outlining their research process and search results.



Business Correspondence

While many individuals are happy to see the era of formality go by the wayside, others long for some semblance of decorum. With the advent of electronic technology, however, communication has become casual and instantaneous.

The course explains the downside of casual business communication through the use of e-mail, letters, and faxes, and focuses on the most appropriate methods of communication. For example, while e-mail is an easy method for receiving instantaneous feedback, it is also a hotbed for some of the most horrific uses of grammar, poor sentence structure, and unruly usage of slang.

Developing a Two-Minute Speech

Articulating personal career goals and interests is critical. A "two-minute speech" (that outlines future goals and aspirations) is designed to help students discover their strengths and develop the ability to express these desires adequately.

Homework: Students write a paper about five-year career aspirations, and develop and write a comprehensive "elevator speech."

Company Research

The most successful interviewing strategy includes having an intimate knowledge of the organization with which one is interviewing. Often, students do not know where to begin collecting vital company information or what type of information they should be collecting. Students are taught basic company information and about where that information is located.

Homework: Students research job postings at three companies that they believe might be interested in hiring someone within their major, research company background for each, write a synopsis of the information gleaned from each resource, and provide a copy of the job posting.

Dress for Success

First impressions are made within 30 seconds of entering a room, and students often are unaware of the subliminal messages that their clothing sends. Dressing appropriately is critical in the work environment and even more critical when interviewing. The course delineates the differences between casual, business casual, business professional, and interviewing attire so students will be knowledgeable about the most proper attire for any professional occasion. Mini-fashion shows with student models are used to demonstrate various types of dress.

Networking/Informational Interviewing

Many individuals often underestimate the beneficial nature of networking and often do not understand the power of informational interviewing. This segment of the course focuses on appropriate ways to network and the importance of follow-up when new contacts are made. Students learn about effective ways to conduct informational interviews and establish networking relationships.

Homework: Students think of people with whom they could create networking opportunities and create a spreadsheet with a minimum of 10 networking sources. Students then contact three sources and write about those interactions.

Interviewing Techniques

A common misconception is that the most critical part of the job search process is writing a good resumé. Instead, interview performance determines who gets the job offer. In the course, students learn: 1) appropriate ways to prepare for an interview; 2) methods for answering questions accurately and honestly; 3) inappropriate and unlawful questions; 4) individual strengths, key accomplishments, and weaknesses; and 5) keys to creating a lasting impression.

Homework: Students complete a half-hour mock interview, conducted by peer mentors and faculty. They are graded on resumé accuracy, choice of dress, ability to answer questions thoughtfully, and depth of knowledge about a specific company. The mock interview is an opportunity to demonstrate skills developed and information gleaned over the term.

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