Case Study 1: Online careers planning for Business students

Introduction and Context:

In January 2021, 276 2nd year School of Business students completed an online credit bearing "Career Management Skills" module. This was almost double the 144 students that had taken the module the previous year. Students were surveyed at the start of the module to understand their level of career readiness and allow the module to be tailored accordingly.

- 6% said they knew what they wanted *and* how to get it.

- 20% said they knew that they wanted *but* were not sure how to get it.

- 46% said they had a vague idea of what they might like

- 28% said they had no idea what they wanted

17% of students said they already had work experience related to their area of interest; while 83% had work, experience gained from within the leisure or hospitality sector.

Of note to the Careers and Employability services in NCI, 70% said they had no network to assist them in securing employment.

Given the number of students who had given very little thought to career planning and the number who did not have a professional network available to them the challenge was to ensure that students had at least the same opportunities to interact with industry as they normally would in the non-Covid study environment. Using digital technology and leveraging employer networks, we successfully scaled the module for online delivery, whilst retaining the networking building opportunities that are such an important part of the offering to students.

Summary of the Initiative:

Traditionally, this experiential module had been delivered to students through lecture halls and using large open areas within NCI that facilitated large-group interaction with employer representatives. In 2020-21, their experience would be through the small screens of their laptops.

We single out four digital technology-driven innovations as particularly relevant to the success of the online module sessions:

1. We used Kahoot to survey students at the beginning and end of the module to measure their career readiness and learning gain.

2. We had previously held on-campus mock interviews for students. However, we were at absolute capacity with 144 students. In January 2021, using MS Teams, 276 students undertook individual mock interviews with experienced industry recruiters. HAYS recruitment volunteered 76 hours of mock interviews using over 20 consultants.

3. We had previously used the NCI College Atrium and Kelly Theatre for structured round table networking events. In terms of physical college space, the January 2020 event (pre-Covid) was at capacity with 144 students. However, in 2021, using a virtual conference platform, we held a round table networking event for 276 students and 30 employers over two hours. This would not have been possible in person. Each group of nine students met 15 employers over the course of two hours. Participating employers included Adare HRM, AIB, Arup, Comfort Keepers, CRH, Crowe, Crowleys, Deloitte, Dell, ESB, Hays, Jameson, Kaseya, Peninsula, Personio, SAP and Trane Technologies.

4. Video interviews (via Zoom) became the norm over the last 2 years. To ensure that students could perform effectively, we provided them with free access to the *Sparkhire* [1] video interviewing tool. All students undertaking this module completed a one-way video interview.

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[1] https://go.sparkhire.com/

Key Findings and Impact:

Feedback on the module was strongly positive, from both students and participating employers.

Selected Student Module feedback:

- *Big thanks for making this module fun, interesting and worthwhile. You went out of your way to make events happen even in a level 5 lockdown! My favourite module by far.*

- *It pushed me out of my comfort zone (in a good way) by making us do the networking event and the interview and I'm very grateful for this.*

- *Everything was clear and straight forward. She made networking so enjoyable, and I feel this will help me along my networking journey in the future!*

- *The opportunity to network with other college students at NCI and employers from various organisations across different industries was hugely insightful and beneficial. I really enjoyed this module over the second semester - Thank you for all your support!*

- *The talks were a great insight into the minds of what employers today are looking for and what makes an applicant stand out from the rest. The knowledge the employers delivered was impeccable and to a very high standard.*

Employer Feedback on LinkedIn

Natasha Whitney, Crowe: That was great, great students: you organised a really good event. It has been the only positive engagement I have had this year in any college, so thanks so much for that. I enjoyed it so much, a nice change of pace for a morning!

Maria Walsh, BDO - Great to speak with students at the National College of Ireland yesterday! It is also great to see the creative technology we are still finding to deal with current restrictions.

Ross O Brien, AIB: Massive thanks Caroline Kennedy & National College of Ireland for the invite to this morning's event. I was delighted to represent AIB and meet some of the second-year students on what was a great virtual platform...Well done to all involved!

Conclusion:

The Careers Service aims to support and enhance the graduate outcomes of NCI students. Encouraging and facilitating the development of students' networking skills is a vital component of our work. Leveraging digital technology, we were able to provide 2021 students with even more networking opportunities than would have been possible on campus. Using Kahoot at the start and again at the end of the 2021 Career Management Skills module, it was possible to understand where each student and the overall class was in terms of career readiness and the extent to which they had already engaged in activities that could enhance their employability. This supported effective module design.

In the longer-term, the Careers Services plans to use digital technology to tailor and personalise supports for students. We are considering the introduction a short online Career Readiness Survey as part of the registration and process for full time students every year in NCI. This would facilitate the careers service to:

- Better understand students' positions at the beginning of each year.
- Assess how far students need to travel to articulate and then reach their goals.

- Identify the class cohorts most in need of careers support and then deliver more targeted, streamlined and personalised services

- Introduce 'real-time' monitoring of students' career readiness and their engagement with valuable experiences while they are students in NCI.

Making best use of digital technology supports us to better identify current student needs in "real-time". It mitigates the drawbacks of reliance on graduate outcome information which is necessarily retrospective, meaning that enhancements to services can often come too late for some current students whose more immediate needs are not known.