Case Study

Career Integrated Learning Project

- provided by Robert Shea -

What does this project do to tackle youth unemployment?

The Career Integrated Learning project was developed to help students make the transition between school and work. One of the issues associated with the "skills mismatch" is that employers seek competencies or skills developed through experience, and students define themselves by their degree name, not by the skills, abilities and talents that they possess – often as a result of completing a degree program. The career integrated learning project addresses this issue by helping students to identify and articulate the broader skills and attributes acquired through completion of a degree – making a clear connection for employers to see the potential in a prospective employee.

The concept of identifying career competencies or graduating student competencies (GSC) is not new, especially for students who participate in experiential learning activities. What is innovative about this project is translating the process to classroom-based courses, especially in Arts and Science faculties. The fact that the project began at a grassroots level, working with interested faculty and put responsibility for career development in the hands of students, is also innovative.

Working individually with faculty at Memorial University of Newfoundland, project staff and course instructors collaborate to identify GSC associated with course evaluation activities. Each activity required by a professor involves the practice of skills that are transferable to life after university. For example, in a Folklore course, when students complete a group assignment they are developing teamwork skills, communication skills, responsibility and ethics as well as learning about their own work preferences. The key is to challenge students to reflect on those skills and to consider the competencies they may have or are developing in other courses and other aspects of their lives.

The Career Integrated Learning project has also expanded to include employers and other universities across the country. In order to truly address the issue of a skills mismatch employers and all post-secondary institutions must be engaged in the conversation. This project encourages students, professors, career centre staff and employers to think more broadly about the skills that are developed during the completion of a post-secondary degree.

The KPIs

The project was piloted in 2012 with a small group of students in one course and then expanded during the 2013/2014 school year to include arts and science faculties. Participants included undergraduate and graduate students who ranged in age from 18-65. Of those involved in the project, 437 responded to a survey and 72% of those respondents said that becoming aware of the graduating student competencies that they were practicing in the classroom was helpful to them. Many students gave examples of how they could now articulate these competencies to improve a resume or apply for graduate school, or simply recognize opportunities in their current studies. Here are a few quotes:

- *"I had never thought about competencies before this class. Before this class, all I thought about was completing courses and marks"*

- *"Though I am not graduating this year, it has opened my eyes to things to think about and things to pay attention to in class that will develop my skills for employment"*

- *"Until this course, I had not considered what GSC I was developing as a student. I knew I was learning how to do different things in my courses but did not recognize that some of these competencies set me apart from other individuals who will be applying for similar jobs"*

Learnings and Recommendations

In order to launch a similar project it is important to get buy-in from your organization and colleagues. Start with people who are like-minded – those whom we call champions - but also focus on how you might align your project with organizational goals. For example, we adopted the language of our university's teaching and learning framework. The use of this common language provided the framework that enabled us to connect with colleagues and achieve common goals.

Invite input from students, and faculty – and be willing to try different approaches as you go along. Working directly with students and instructors in the classroom allowed us to see first-hand the results of our efforts. We adjusted or changed content and direction when we received feedback and this helped the project grow and progress.