

Student Career Planning and Facilitating Student Transition to the Job Market

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For a variety of reasons, students are increasingly focused on the importance of finding employment following college graduation. Helping students to identify their major and career and be better prepared in the job search is extremely important. The graduating seniors are not the only to benefit. These efforts also reflect positively on the college in the eyes of current students, future students, and the community as a whole. This paper provides a case study providing an overview of how WSU Lake assists its students with their career selection and then provides a more in-depth look at preparing students to enter the job market on upon graduation through their participation in the Lake Campus Spring Job Fair. It is hoped that this case study can aid other campuses in developing or improving upon their own student career services.

College degrees were often viewed as a guarantee for a job, but students today find employment to be more difficult. In 2015, The National Center for Education Statistics reported that young students with Bachelor's Degrees in 2014 had employment rates of 69.4%, compared to 77.4% employment for graduates in 2000 (USDOE, NCES 2015). Although the enrollment rates into higher education have increased slightly from 35% to 41% over the years 2000 to 2016 (USDOE, NCES, 2018), the stress of finding a job and the concerns over paying back student loans are foremost in student's minds. WSU Lake has addressed this important issue by providing students with meaningful experiences and hosting an annual spring Job Fair. The Job Fair provides an opportunity for students to network with local businesses, and potentially to obtain employment.

To assist students in their career pathway, WSU Lake has various programs to reach out and support students as they enter college in selecting a major area of study, along with internships and job placements

for those students in their later years of study. This paper will give a brief overview of how WSU Lake assists its students with beginning career selection and a more in-depth look at job preparation upon graduation, focusing on our success with a Job Fair in the Spring.

Literature Review

The literature dealing with helping college students find meaningful employment can be divided into college career services that focus on students obtaining job opportunities and developing skills to make them more successful landing positions, and career planning that helps to guide students in entering careers that are best for them. There is significant overlap in these two areas, but the literature divides into these two themes.

College Job Preparation Services

An important aspect of most college career centers is identifying jobs, internships, and available jobs for current and graduating students. A main source of college employment at most universities is the part-time employment working for the university itself in a work study job. The focus of this paper is on helping students obtain external employment. Placement and networking opportunities for students are two of the most important aspects of obtaining external employment and are often the focus of college career centers. The NACE's 2017-18 Career Services Benchmark Survey Report for Colleges and Universities reports that 73% of all higher education institutions have centralized career services offices. The five most sited services include counseling, internship assistance, career fairs, career assessment tools, and career workshops. Specifically, 91.7% offered workshops and 92% offered job fairs. Cassella (1990) find that career centers are important for developing network opportunities with employers and Dey and Real (2010) finds that the career center use of technology, like online social networking platforms, has helped students to more easily connect with prospective employers.

Career Planning Services

A number of authors have conducted research that demonstrates the effectiveness of interventions to help students choose majors and careers. Specifically, authors have found that the use of cognitive restructuring is effective at helping students resolve career indecisiveness. This approach is based on the belief that career indecisiveness and the

anxiety associated with this is due to irrational beliefs of the students. By forcing students to question the validity of these mistaken assumptions the students were able to adapt their views and arrive at satisfying decisions. Keller, Biggs and Gysbers (1982), Hartman, Funqua, and Blum (1985), Beck (1976) and Mitchel and Krumboltz (1987) find evidence supporting the effectiveness of this approach. Studies have also been conducted that compare intervention and non-intervention comparison groups to statistically evaluate the effectiveness of intervention. Hartman, Fuqua and Hartman (1983) find undecided students are more likely to drop out without intervention, Lam and Santos (2018) use a longitudinal study of 244 students half of whom participated in a 4 week class on Effective Career Decision Making. The results of this study suggested that interventions could inspire female students to consider nontraditional careers and the level of indecision can be reduced.

Lake Campus Case Study

The remainder of this manuscript outlines the efforts taken at the Lake Campus to help students in their incoming, current students and graduating students in career planning and in obtaining employment.

Incoming and Current Students

For those students entering WSU Lake who are unsure of their major, TypeFocus is recommended as an online personality type and career assessment questionnaire to help them discover occupations- which would suit them. It accesses their various strengths, assists in exploring occupations, setting goals, and developing one's strengths.

WSU Lake also offers all students during their academic career the experience of mock interviews, resume-building workshops, job shadowing and career exploration opportunities. For incoming freshmen unsure of where to begin, the TypeFocus is recommended; it may not tell the student what to major in, but will show them what *does not* interest them, helping them to narrow their focus. The students are then advised to do a couple of hours of job shadowing in a potential area of interest. For current students, WSU Lake Campus student jobs are also regularly posted on Facebook and emailed to them, informing them of employment in local businesses and at campus. Jobs which require a degree are also posted, along with Co-ops and internships. For current students, the Lake Campus holds a Campus Community Connection Fair in the spring. This event invites local businesses

to meet with students focusing on part-time employment, internships and Co-op opportunities.

For Graduating Students: The Job Fair

The Lake Campus Job Fair is a faculty-led effort to facilitate employment for graduating Lake Campus students. The job fair has resulted in employment for a number of Lake Campus students, but more importantly the event provides students with the ability to effectively seek employment beyond the day of the fair. The benefits to the Lake Campus have also included developing a closer connection to community employers, promoting the Lake Campus positively to the community, and aiding in student recruitment and retention. The following is an overview of the setup and operation of the Lake Campus Job Fair. Hopefully sharing our experience will aid other regional campuses should they consider offering their own Job Fair.

Overview

The Lake Campus Job Fair has been run the past two springs and the planning for the third Fair is underway for the Spring of 2019. Although the basic operation of the Fair has remained similar we continue to make changes each year to make it a better experience for students and employers. The day of the event the employers arrive in the morning to set up their booths and the Fair runs for about four hours that afternoon. Light refreshments are provided, and the committee is on hand to provide the booklets listing the businesses and their table location to the students, and direct employers to their respective locale.

Although the event is open to the public, Lake Campus students are required to pre-register and provide a resume.

Prior to the Event

About six months prior to the event date planning begins with a committee that is made up of 10 people including faculty, staff, and students. The first year of the event, the employers were contacted by phone to take part, but now the employer and student participants register online. Advertisement is decided upon and local employers are asked to participate. Employers provide summaries of their business and descriptions of the jobs for which they have openings. A booklet is constructed that contains this information and contact information for every employer. This

booklet and a map of where each table is located is provided to each student attending the Fair. There are also workshops available for students to help construct and review their resumes and to practice interviewing skills, including how to dress and basic etiquette skills.

The first year a number of employers recruited for positions not requiring a degree. Many were really just looking for part-time help. Since this Job Fair was aimed at graduating students the registration process the second year made it clear to employers this Job Fair was for full time employment for positions requiring a completion of a college degree. We directed employers with part-time, internship or coop positions to attend a Campus Community Connection Fair that is also held each Spring.

Cost and Participation

The following are some specifics concerning the fair including the costs and participation the first two years: The cost each year was around \$200.00 for table and linen rental and \$300.00 for catering of cookies, pretzels, lemonade and water. The first year 25 employers participated and the second year the event reached the room capacity with 39 employers. Each employer was provided a six-foot table, in a room 70x54 sq. ft. in size. The second year, a grant through Mercer County Job Services provided funds for a bag to each participant and radio advertisements. The radio station also provided a live feed the day of the event where our Dean and numerous committee members were interviewed on air. For the first year's event 65 Lake Campus students participated. The second year, the Job Fair also invited the public. 90 Lake Campus students participated and an additional 53 non-Lake Campus students participated.

The Campus Community Connection Fair, held for the first time this past spring, was also very successful. This event had 25 employers participating and 5 on campus organizations. Over 200 students attended this event which aimed at students seeking, and employers in search of filling, part-time, internships and Co-op positions.

Employment and Job Fair Benefits:

We not have hard numbers that demonstrate successful job placement, but the committee received feedback from many of their students who found positions and appreciated the opportunity to attend. Every engineering student that participated was offered a position from this past year's Fair and all are employed. A large number of the students

participating were Juniors who participated in order to make connections with future potential employers.

Another benefit of the Job Fair is the experience students gain in resume writing, and how to speak to employers in an interview-like situation. Lake Campus students are required to register ahead of the event. This registration requires that they submit a resume that is reviewed and returned. The Lake Campus students are coached in what to wear, how to interview, and generally present themselves in a professional manner. For example, the students were expected to introduce themselves and be prepared to talk about themselves and their qualifications.

Spring 2019 Fair

This next year it is likely we will make a few changes to improve the event. One problem identified was that some participants were not appropriately dressed for the event. This reflected poorly on them as potential job candidates and on the Lake Campus as their appearance suggested the students were not taking the opportunity and the event seriously. For the most part, the Lake Campus students were dressed appropriately and were prepared and professional when speaking to potential employers. However, many of the public (nonstudent) participants were not. This year we will make the expectations clear to all participants. The second change that we intent to make is charging employers to participate. It will be unlikely that the Jobs Services Grant will be available to help pay for this event going forward and the feedback from the employers indicated that they would be happy to pay something to attend. Many of them regularly participate in Job Fairs in larger cities and are asked to pay hundreds of dollars.

The Lake Campus Job Fair has been an extremely worthwhile event that has benefitted the Lake Campus as a whole and its graduating students in particular. It facilitates connections with local employers and the public. The event demonstrates to the community and our students that we care about our students, are proud of their accomplishments, and are confident in their success. It is likely other campuses would similarly benefit from offering this type of event.

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Personal Biography

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