How to Increase Student Employability Guide

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Advisory Services

When picking their institution, many students are more concerned with the professional results than with the academic concentration. Students in today's fast-paced and always-evolving world want to know that the degree they get will provide them with the opportunity to get a solid career after graduation.

To increase their appeal to potential students, colleges and universities are starting to place a greater emphasis on the development of student employability programs that are on par with the academic rigor of their degree programs. However there are a lot of schools of higher education that are having trouble launching student employability programs that are both quantifiable and successful and a significant number of students have the impression that they are not adequately equipped for the workforce.

It is the responsibility of the heads of educational institutions to see to it that their students have the greatest possible life outcomes as a result of their education. Naturally, academic development and the formation of abilities in critical thinking are going to play a significant role in achieving these aims. Employment skills are a necessary complement: they are the collection of qualities that are required to attract professional roles and to thrive in such roles. They include "soft skills" such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and networking skills. This aspect of students' education has so far been relegated to a secondary status relative to the core curriculum, and has frequently been outsourced to career advisory services.

The following are some strategies that universities can follow to make their offerings better suited to today's working environment.

Offer Opportunities For Teamwork

In today's work environment, crowdsourcing, collaboration and teamwork have become the standard for getting goals accomplished faster and more productively. In fact, there are few instances in the working world where an employee is forced to accomplish their job completely independently, without the help of others.

Yet, in a university environment, students are responsible for their own work in a wholly independent fashion. Indeed, they are expected to be able to be entirely responsible for their study outcomes. Only if the student happens to choose to join a study group, or to be involved in a class where they are matched with a lab partner, does teamwork ever come into play. Thus, most of the graduating students are woefully inexperienced with working in a serious manner toward a common goal in a team environment.

If an education institution wants to increase student employability, it should give students opportunities to list experience working on teams. Not only would this help the student's C.V. look more attractive; it will also give the students the chance to build the soft skills they need to retain their employment position long-term.

There is a great deal of latitude in most curriculums for teachers to offer opportunities for students to work in teams. Assignments can be reconstructed so that they are completed in teams instead of individually. Light competitive projects can be created, where two teams compete to accomplish a certain goal, with the winning team being the one that accomplishes it first. Or, two teams can work on accomplishing something, but using different methodologies. This could be a way to contrast and compare methods after the fact, where each team learns something from the other. Finally, consider encouraging students to participate in team athletics either in school or outside of school. Any chance for students to work or play in a team environment will boost their overall employability.
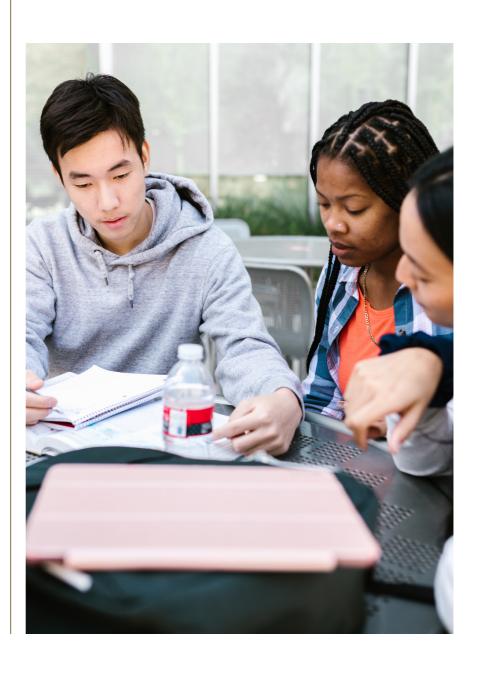
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Learn What Skills Employers Are Looking For

In order to provide students with the ability to become more employable upon graduation, your educators need to learn what skills employers are looking for today. There is often a gap between the academic world and the working world.

Most employers these days are desperate to find qualified job candidates. They will be more than happy to spend time on the phone or in person, sharing exactly what skills are most needed in their industry. You could call this an outreach program, but the important aspect is that all educators are involved. It shouldn't just be the top administrative staff or heads of faculty who meets with local employers. Each individual teacher needs to have access to this information so that they can apply it to their daily teaching.

Implement an Employment Skills Coaching Program

Many students are fearful that they will not be able to get a job after they graduate. Current curriculums do little to eradicate those fears. Students are sent out into the working world with little knowledge of what employability is, what their candidacy will be judged on, or what skills employers in their chosen field are looking for in new hires.

One of the best ways that institutions can resolve this gap is to implement an employment skills coaching program. This program could be split into individual career paths, so that the information imparted is distinctly relevant to the professional field. Information about necessary skills can be gleaned from employers themselves, with answers copied and distributed to students. Other resources could be online job boards themselves, where employers specially list the skills necessary to be considered for specific jobs. Finally, individual employment skills coaching could be provided either one-on-one or in small groups, with a qualified educator answering questions and steering students in the right direction with insight into how to acquire certain skills.

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Align Curriculums With Graduate Destinations

Historically, the primary emphasis of universities has been on providing students with instruction in a certain academic discipline and the awarding of corresponding qualifications. The emphasis has moved in recent years to include getting students ready for their future jobs. As a result, students need to be evaluated and instructed in a manner that is reflective of how they will function in a professional environment. For instance, the conventional method of evaluation for disciplines within the liberal arts is the composition of extended essays. However, a significant number of the fields in which graduates of liberal arts programs find employment after college seldom need essay writing as a competence. It may take some time to instigate this kind of change at the level of the curriculum; nevertheless, you can get the process started by thinking about ways to enhance procedures so that they are more relevant to the activities that graduates will undertake on the job.

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Offer Courses That are Workforce Relevant and Globally In-demand

Just a small fraction of students believe they are getting high value from the digital skills their university offers them, despite the fact that the majority of educational institutions are reportedly increasing the number of course offerings on digital skill sets. Because technological advances occur on a regular basis, it is necessary that educational institutions at the higher education level provide students with marketable skills that put them in high demand in the workforce and instills in them the self-assurance that their talents are on par with those in their age group.

The idea of "soft skills" and "hard skills" is important, but institutions also have a responsibility to educate "durable skills." This includes, but is not limited to, skills such as those pertaining to global citizenship and interpersonal communication. Students in today's schools see themselves as citizens of the world. A significant number of people are concerned about the effects of climate change and have profound feelings about the societal problems that our planet is now confronting. Higher education degrees will have a greater impact on society if they are aligned with the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). These SDGs were developed to address the most pressing problems facing the global community.

The OECD Skills for Job interactive table is another useful tool for determining the kinds of knowledge, talents, and skills that are in high demand in your nation. The teachers and staff at your institution might use this information to better advise students who are seeking employment possibilities that are relevant to the students' degrees.

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Promote a Sense of Self-Awareness in Students

Self-awareness, in the context of employability, refers to an individual's capacity to be aware of and convey both their strengths and flaws, to demonstrate self-control, to be responsible, and to manage their emotions when confronted with challenging circumstances. These are qualities that will be of great assistance to a graduate both throughout their job hunt and throughout their professional lives. Self-awareness may be developed by activities such as meditation, writing down objectives, seeking feedback, and taking psychometric tests. Social and emotional learning can also achieve this. The growth of your students' self-awareness may be considerably aided by your encouragement of them to participate in activities like these.

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Teach About Personal Branding From Potential Employers' Perspectives

Job seekers now have an easier time researching their potential career pathways and areas of interest, connecting with potential employers, and finding employment, thanks to social media. On the other hand, as a result of this, it is very necessary for them to keep up a powerful and credible online personal brand. Employers do background checks on possible employees using social media platforms in the same way that students might use these platforms to gather information about future employers. As a result, students need to begin cultivating a powerful personal brand a significant amount of time before they begin the process of applying for jobs. Through one-on-one sessions or group workshops, provide students with the feedback and assistance they require to create their online brand in the way they want it to appear to potential employers.

Assist Students in Getting Relevant Work Experience

For a graduate who is looking for a job, having past work experience is perhaps one of the most useful negotiating chips they can have. A graduate has very little chance of finding a permanent position if they can't demonstrate previous work experience in the real world. If an employer is deciding between two equally educated candidates, they will choose the one who has the relevant work experience, in most cases.

Work experience or placements within a relevant industry, whether paid or unpaid, apprenticeships, internships, volunteer or part-time work, need to be found and secured by students with the support of faculty and staff. This will improve the employability of students. When trying to discover the proper placement for your students, your educational facility can make use of personal connections, alumni networks, and industry alliances.

Encourage Extracurricular Activities

Participating in activities outside of the classroom is critical to a student's overall growth and development. First, they provide a release valve for the stress that comes with studying, and second, they demonstrate to potential employers that an applicant is well-rounded. In addition, participation in extracurricular activities may continue the development of skills that were started by earlier employability tactics. Participation in sports, for instance, helps cultivate skills in cooperation and collaboration; debate helps cultivate abilities in communication and analysis; and art class helps create self-awareness. Make sure that each and every one of your students spends some of their time participating in pursuits that not only provide them with joy but also give them the chance to develop.

Provide Faculty With Skills Development Program Training

Only the students themselves can effectively cultivate the skill set necessary to flourish in the working world. However, it is the duty of the teaching staff to instill in the students the drive and determination that would urge them to take command of their own professional lives. The teaching staff of an educational institution has to have a sufficient level of familiarity with the transferable skills that are demanded of potential employers in order to effectively encourage and direct students in the process of preparing for life after graduation. Since the goal of teaching students employability skills is a relatively recent one for educational institutions of higher learning, it is quite doubtful that any of the members of your workforce will have received any kind of "training" in employability during their time in tertiary school. Because of this, it is very necessary for the teaching staff at an educational institution to be informed about the soft skills that students require in order to become employable candidates. This capacity building for staff, which might be done by staff members themselves completing a program for the development of their own talents, will allow staff members to assist students in the development of their soft skills.

Improve Student Employability to Create a Win For All Stakeholders

The primary motivating factor for improving students' employability should be for the students themselves. It should remain every educational facility's goal to provide students with, not only education, but the ability to attract quality employers. However, it cannot be dismissed that another huge benefit of improving student employability is that it will significantly bolster the institution's reputation with parents, students and even professional educators.

Parents or sponsors want to ensure that their money is not going to waste. While many good parents leave the choice of higher education institution entirely up to the students, others have at least a 50% say in what school their child attends. Rest assured, parents and sponsors will do their research to see how well previous students have fared at your institution.

In a similar manner, serious students will choose to go to an educational institution that has a solid reputation, and one that has shown itself to support the student's employment endeavors.

Finally, an educational facility can greatly increase its odds of attracting the top echelon of educators when its reputation is one of the best.

Improving student employability is a win for all stakeholders, and the educational facility that embraces this concept will continue to reap the benefits for years to come.

Improve Alumni Employability With Lifelong Learning Initiatives

As a result of the ongoing transformation of our whole economy brought on by the fourth industrial revolution, the useful lifespan of skills is substantially diminishing. In today's world, the average lifespan of a talent acquired by an individual is five years. The revolution in lifelong learning is putting pressure on educational institutions to adopt new forms of doing business, such as the provision of micro-credentials and online course delivery.

Your former students all over the globe have one thing in common: regardless of the degree they earned from your institution, they want to have successful professions for the rest of their lives. The vast majority of students who graduate from high school or college nowadays want to continue their education and achieve other certificates in addition to their first degree. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that institutions of higher education work to cultivate lifetime ties with their graduates.

It definitely takes a whole lot to improve graduate employability, but by investing in this area strategically, universities can support their students to make the most of their careers not only right after graduation, but throughout their lives. One of the keys to implementing such an initiative might be to partner with local lifelong learning programs in your area, where they help to share the administrative burden and the cost of marketing, course prep and faculty pay.

Make Experiential Learning a Top Priority

In the real world, employees don't sit down for lectures and instructions on how to do things. They are given the tools to get the job done. Whether a person is employed as an architect, apartment manager, sales person or plumber, they need to do, in order to work, not sit and watch and listen.

Make experiential learning a major focus in each and every classroom so that students may become more at ease in a setting that more closely resembles a real workplace. Make adjustments to the curriculum so that students spend less time listening to lectures and more time working on hands-on projects. Doing things on their own is by far the most effective method of education for the vast majority of students. Provide every student with the opportunity to address issues that occur in the real world and to work through case studies, either alone or in groups.

Give them real-world experience in business whenever you can and whenever it is useful. This may be accomplished via the use of cooperative education programs, in which students spend one semester working for a company under the direction of academic advisors from their educational institution as well as job supervisors from the firm. Before students even begin their placements, their educational facilities must provide them with the fundamental knowledge and abilities they will need to successfully fulfill their responsibilities.

One idea is to collaborate with a local company and establish a "take a student to work" day, where one of your students goes to work and shadows one of their existing employees. In this way, the student sees exactly what it's like to work in an office, at a car mechanic's shop, in a furniture manufacturing facility, and so on.

This is one of the most effective strategies for preparing students to participate in the business world and for establishing solid ties between students and future potential employers.

How to Begin a Student Employability Plan

The first thing an organization has to do is evaluate the breadth and depth of its present activities, as well as their level of efficacy, in order to determine where, if any, possible holes may exist in the activities that make up its current portfolio. Every school is probably already doing something, but the suite of offerings may not be well connected to promote optimum use, and it is highly probable that much more might be done in this area.

If you want to establish a student employability program that is more solid, you should consider the following questions: What more might we do to assist students in seeing the connection between their professional aspirations and the degree they choose to pursue when they are attending orientation? How well do we integrate this activity with our program for first-year experiences, our student advisors, and/or our career services?

The next phase is to carry out primary research with a range of different stakeholders, namely students, recent graduates, former graduates, and employers. After that, do an analysis to determine the strengths and limitations, from the point of view of employability, that these various stakeholders attribute to your institution.

These two processes should give the core inputs to guide the creation of an employability plan and assist the institution in defining clear objectives and criteria for success. These inputs should also better guide the development of a plan to help students find employment.

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