DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS' CAREER IDENTITIES

BY TRINA JORRE DE ST JORRE

Social and professional platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn have changed the way in which people connect and share. Through these platforms, people can expand their social and professional networks and share information using diverse multimedia. However, most universities have done very little to capitalise on the connectivity offered by digital technologies and still evidence and communicate student achievement in the same way as they have for centuries – through marks, grades and academic transcripts.

Deakin University has developed two strategies that provide students with opportunities to showcase their achievements through professional platforms. Both strategies encourage students to create unique digital artefacts that integrate their academic achievements with other aspects of their lives and, in doing so, engage students in reflection that helps to build their confidence and career identity.

Why is Career Identity Important?

Graduate opportunities and career pathways are no longer as straightforward as they once were. The graduate employment market is highly competitive and, where a degree was once a differentiator, it is now a prerequisite for many jobs, so graduates need to highlight additional achievement and experiences to differentiate themselves from other graduates.

The concept of a career has also changed. Individuals now move more frequently between organisations and roles to accommodate new interests, gain better opportunities or out of necessity. The jobs that students aim towards at the outset of their degree may not be available when they graduate or may not even exist in the future, meaning that adaptability is critical to the opportunities they gain at graduation and further into the future.

What can Universities Do?

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that is relevant to employment through:

1. Focusing on skills, not just knowledge

It is clearly no longer sufficient to focus solely on the development of discipline-specific knowledge and contexts. Universities must ensure that graduates also develop a broad transferable skill set that can be applied to whatever opportunities they seek or find in the future. For example, communication, teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking are important to gaining opportunities in any work or life context.

2. Encouraging autonomy beyond the assessment task

Embedding transferable skills into the curriculum is important, but students also need to be made aware of the capabilities that they have

and will need so that they can take responsibility for their own personal and professional development. Students need to be more than passive recipients of skills, because as graduates they will need to articulate and provide evidence of their capabilities to gain opportunities, and to find personalised evidence of achievement that differentiates them from their peers.

3. Allowing students to demonstrate distinct and personalised achievement

It is unique experience and achievement that will differentiate graduates from their peers, so rather than requiring all students to produce homogenised artefacts of their capabilities, students should be encouraged to draw on their unique experience and perspectives and provide personalised evidence of what they have, know and can do. Learners should be encouraged to integrate and draw on learning and achievement from all aspects of their lives and to evaluate their interests and capabilities against those needed for different career opportunities.

What Might this Look Like in Practice?

There are many ways in which the above principles might be embedded into curriculum or assessment. However, here are two strategies developed at Deakin University that give students the opportunity to create unique digital artefacts that can be easily shared through professional and social networks as evidence of their employability.

Example 1: A simple video strategy

Me in a Minute is a very simple video strategy developed to emphasise graduate employability to students and employers. Students are supported in the production of a one-minute video pitching their knowledge, capabilities and experience to prospective employers. Students select

three of eight of Deakin's graduate learning outcomes to focus on and evidence in their video: discipline-specific knowledge and capabilities, communication, digital literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, self-management, teamwork or global citizenship.

While the strategy was first implemented as an extra-curricular opportunity, it is now being incorporated and assessed in courses. To support adoption at scale, resources have been developed to assist students to produce their own videos. Students are encouraged to disseminate their video through digital networks, such as LinkedIn, and to embed in digital resumes to market themselves to prospective employers. To facilitate this, videos are uploaded to the Me in a Minute YouTube channel and each video closes with 'Connect with [Student name] on LinkedIn'.

Student perceptions of the video strategy have been overwhelmingly positive. In addition to valuing the short videos as a medium for promoting their employability, students have reported that the process of pitching was even more valuable because it encouraged them to reflect on their experiences, skills and capabilities, and through making the videos, they learned how to articulate these clearly and succinctly.

Example 2: Employability credentials

Deakin Hallmarks are university awards that recognise students' outstanding achievement in capabilities that are important in the workplace. They were developed as an extra-curricular opportunity for students to differentiate themselves to employers through evidencing achievement of one of Deakin's graduate learning outcomes. Although they are non-credit bearing, each award is contextualised to a specific degree program and focuses on a single graduate learning outcome considered particularly important to the employment of graduates in that course.

To ensure Hallmarks signify outstanding achievement as valued and judged in professional life, they are developed by teaching teams in collaboration with industry partners and professional bodies, who also help to assess student achievement. Students are invited to provide evidence of outstanding achievement that fulfils the standards and criteria associated with the award and must draw on understanding and experience from their course, as well as from other aspects of their lives.

Students who achieve the award are provided with a digital credential that can be easily shared through social and professional platforms as evidence of their employability. The credentials utilise digital badging technologies and consist of an icon bearing the insignia of Deakin University, linked to information verifying the recipient of the award, the achievement required (including the standards and criteria), the industry partners involved in developing and assessing the award and an artefact evidencing the students' work.

Feedback from students suggests that they value the opportunity to have their skills endorsed, but equally if not more so, value the confidence and understanding gained through reflecting on their capabilities and graduate identity.

The strategies described above are just two ways in which digital technologies can be used to share student achievement. The world is changing and to prepare graduates for an unknown future, teachers and universities need to think creatively about how they can innovate to provide students with opportunities to develop and showcase their career identities. ∎

Dr Trina Jorre de St Jorre is a Lecturer in Graduate Employability at Deakin University. She is interested in pedagogies that engage and empower students and her research focus is on assuring graduate capabilities, improving employment outcomes and incorporating the student voice into curriculum development.