



Alumni graduate career pathways as a learning tool to assist career planning

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While university students usually anticipate that their degree will lead to a rewarding career, a challenge for students in most generalist degrees is that their degree program is not actually focused on qualifying them for a specific profession. Lack of certainty about career paths can have a detrimental effect on student engagement and performance, and there is ample evidence to suggest that if students can develop a sense of certainty about their career path, they will be more engaged in their studies and achieve better outcomes (Bridgstock, 2009; Graunke & Woosley, 2005). The diverse range of career paths available to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) graduates introduces additional complexity for students, and for academic and professional staff providing career support to students. To help students to better navigate their career pathway, our school introduced the subject SHE2001 Career Options and Professional Identity.

The subject is core for all students enrolled in Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Biological Science and Bachelor of Biomedicine degrees and runs in the 1st semester of the 2nd year as career intervention activities are more effective if introduced early in the degree (Brown et al., 2019). It has been designed to help students identify gaps in their enterprise skills, help build those skills over the semester and to identify extra-curricular opportunities that can help them with their career planning. One activity that students consistently rate as the most helpful part of the subject involves studying the career pathways of La Trobe Alumni who graduated from similar courses, obtained from LinkedIn. As a team of two or three, students are asked to trace the career pathways of two deidentified alumni in a field of their choosing, through their various jobs and voluntary experience leading up to their current positions. Students are required to report and reflect on the enterprise skills that they believe the graduates gained from each workplace/volunteer experience, and how they would have assisted with gaining and succeeding at the next position the graduate held. At the end of the activity the team must present their investigation to the class, along with lessons that they have learned from completing this activity which they can use in their own career progression. Finally, students are asked to complete and submit a detailed reflection on the activity.

A number of themes emerge from an analysis of student presentations and reflections about what students gain from this activity, including an increased appreciation that many graduates don't have linear careers, and that enterprise skills gained from jobs and/or volunteering opportunities that are not directly related to science can provide significant advantages in the employment market.

Bridgstock, R. (2009). The graduate attributes we've overlooked: Enhancing graduate employability through career management skills. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 28(1), 31-44.

Brown, J. L., Healy, M., Lexis, L., & Julien, B. L. (2019). Connectedness Learning in the Life Sciences: LinkedIn as an assessment task for employability and career exploration. In R. Bridgstock & N. Tippet (Eds.), *Higher Education and the Future of Graduate Employability. A Connectedness Learning Approach* (pp. 100-119). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Graunke, S. S., & Woosley, S. (2005). An exploration of the factors that affect the academic success of college sophomores. *College Student Journal*, 39, 367-376.