

Class offers job hunting skills

By Julie Swensen
Emerald Contributor

In a time of a bleak job market where many college graduates can't find employment, some University students are preparing themselves with the skills necessary to beat out the competition.

Twenty University students spent two days last week in a seminar called "Success Skills: Bridge to your Future," a pilot project that teaches effective resume writing, interview skills and ways to convey abilities to prospective employers.

A class of the same name will be offered next term.

All students should register for this class, said Dennis Boehm, a senior in psychology and a participant in the seminar.

"I think this class should be a requirement," Boehm said. "This is at least as important as your education. No matter how educated you are, if you can't present your skills and abilities, you're not going to get the job you've been working for. You could be the best there is, but if you don't let your employer know, you're not going to get hired."

The program is important because even well-qualified graduates won't get jobs if they don't present their skills in interview situations, said Larry Smith, director of Career Planning and Placement Services.

"Students have a wealth of knowledge and abilities that is sometimes difficult for them to express," he said. "What we're trying to do with this program is to provide a vocabulary that translates those skills and abilities into words. We're focusing on the vocabulary of success."

The participants began the seminar by rating themselves in what skills they were highly effective as compared to their peers.

They then watched a video depicting situations that will come up in the workplace, such as working as a team, handling conflicts, goal setting and interpersonal relationships.

The program directors then stopped the video and asked the students what they would do in each situation. After they chose from four responses, the answers were entered into a computer, and participants received a ranking of their skills to compare to their self-ratings.

The video gives students a chance to improve on their weaknesses before entering the job market, said Beth Swank, a counselor for Career Planning and Placement Services.

"We're using this video to show this is what you need to be successful in the workplace," Swank said. "You need to know what your strong skills are, because those are the things you want to be selling to employers."

Michael Omogrosso, a pre-journalism major who attended the seminar, said identifying his weak skills would help him in the future.

"This gives you the opportunity to select classes to fill out those areas that you aren't so strong in," he said. "It's better to address those than to ignore them."

After the students realized their strengths, they practiced those abilities in writing resumes and interviews in front of the class, while others offered constructive criticism.

The program started after Smith spent years asking employers what they look for in job applicants,

Swank said.

"The same things came up over and over," she said. "Problem-solving. Critical thinking. Leadership, self-esteem and initiative. It didn't matter if you talked to someone in the insurance industry, or you talked to someone in graphic arts. All of the responses seemed to be the same."

At the same time Smith discovered a video that measured these exact kinds of skills, two students from the ASUO, Robb Gilbert and Christen Drue, approached him about starting a program to get students aware of the expectations of them in the workplace.

Gilbert said he saw a need for the program to compensate for skills students weren't receiving in the classroom.

"The student body needs something like this to give them more exposure and confidence," Gilbert said. "It will expose them to the things that industries need them to know, and to be effective in the future jobs they're going to have."

It wasn't just seniors who are graduating who attended the program. Dennis Bolt, a freshman in architecture, attended as well.

"I've always been interested in leadership, self-improvement, or anything I can do to help my prospects of getting a job in the future," Bolt said. "With this seminar, I've gained insight into my abilities. I've learned how to look at myself and figure out what the interviewers might want."

Students would be better off if they followed Bolt's lead and came into Career Planning and Placement Services during their freshman or sophomore year. However, many don't because they either haven't heard of the services, or fear the reality of graduation, Swank said.

"Our challenge is getting them in here early enough," she said. "The students that use our services say, 'I wish I'd known about you two years ago, so I could have gotten some internships or more information on careers.' Some people come in three months before graduation, and we could have done more for them if they would have started earlier."

Students would be more prepared if they utilized the program's services sooner, Gilbert said.

"If you get them in here, it really reduces the fear of going into the job market," he said. "If you've been exposed to and you can identify the skills that we're zoning in on, I think soon-to-be graduates would be more comfortable with themselves."

Many of the students left the program feeling self-assured.

"I feel much more confident in creating my resume and in going into interviews," Boehm said. "Not only can I say, 'This is what one of my best skills are,' but I can quantitatively say, 'This is what I have done.' Before, I didn't quite make the connection. Now, I've got the connection, and it's going to make a lot of difference."

The "Success Skills" class is not listed in the spring term course guide. However, students may register for the one-credit class (CPSY 408/508) by using the CRN 6447/6448.

The class, which is limited to 100 students, consists of four short seminars in April, three in the evening beginning at 6 p.m., and one on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Extra credits may mean higher cost

By Meg Dedolph
Emerald Reporter

Students exceeding a certain number of credits in pursuit of a bachelor's degree will be charged out-of-state tuition in a plan being considered by the Oregon State Board of Higher Education.

The specific details of the plan are still under review, among them the number of credits at which the threshold will be set and whether an opportunity for an appeal will be given.

Despite the lack of final details for the policy, Dave Quenzer, associate vice chancellor for budget and fiscal policy, said he believes there will be a threshold policy.

Quenzer said the board initially planned to charge out-of-state tuition to those people who took 32 credits more than the minimum needed for a degree, and offer an opportunity for a petition of appeal, but is reviewing that plan to ensure its feasibility.

Another suggestion before the board is that the number of credits be raised to 48 hours before out-of-state tuition is assessed, and no chance for appeal be offered.

Quenzer said the final policy would take effect during the 1993-94 school year. He said the final decision on the policy's specifics will not be made until late spring.

George Pernsteiner, the associate vice chancellor for the Oregon State System of Higher Education, said the idea of a credit threshold began in the fall of 1991, when the governor asked each state agency to determine its major budgeting issues.

OSSHE was concerned with the amount of time some students took to get a college degree and the perception that some students were taking more classes than necessary, without any real progress toward a degree.

Pernsteiner said the credit threshold is designed to "encourage students to complete a degree in a timely fashion."

"It's part of sending a signal to the university community that we do want to have progress toward a degree," he said.

Both Pernsteiner and Quenzer said the issue is not primarily a money issue, but more an issue of the wise use of resources, such as class space.

Joe Wade, director of Academic Advising and Student Services, said he believes the number of students who are actually abusing the system is small.

Wade said many students with high numbers of credits are pursuing two majors, are transfer students, have changed majors, or are returning to school after a long absence and taking core classes to meet new prerequisites.

Students with circumstances like these should have an opportunity to appeal any credit threshold that may be applied to them, Wade said.

"I do think it's only fair to determine some number, but then allow exceptions to occur," Wade said. "I think it's a laudable idea, and I think there are a few people who abuse the system. We need to deal with the people that abuse the system."

'It's part of sending a signal to the university community that we do want to have progress toward a degree.'

— George Pernsteiner,
OSSHE Associate
Vice Chancellor

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