PPLS: Career Planning for Philosophy students

To encourage students to start thinking about their future early during their time at University and to encourage them to make the most of opportunities which may make them more employable.

**School/Subject Area:** Philosophy

**Target Audience:**Year 2 students

**Staff Involved:** Careers Adviser; Employability Consultant; tutors on Philosophy 2; PPLS Director of Undergraduate Studies; administrative staff in PPLS

**Dates/timings:** Annually in semester 2, piloted in AY 2008/09

Key features

Head of PPLS in AY 2007/08 was keen to engage with the employability agenda and initiated a discussion with staff from the Careers Service and Employability Consultancy. As a result, the Philosophy subject area was keen to have some careers provision within the normal Philosophy curriculum, possibly to help with student engagement. This was to be part of a larger programme of offerings across PPLS.

Due to high competition for graduate jobs and further study, the aim was to encourage students to start thinking about their future early during their time at University and to encourage them to make the most of opportunities which may make them more employable. It was felt critical, however, to approach this topic from the perspective of the academic discipline itself rather than as an entirely distinct and ‘bolted-on’ input.

Second year was chosen as an appropriate time, giving students time to settle in to the University experience but not leaving it too late to start thinking about their future. The Philosophy 2 course was selected as it is a core course for all Philosophy students.

Planning

Careers Adviser, Employability Consultant, Director of Undergraduate Studies and Course Organiser for Philosophy 2 had an initial meeting to discuss practicalities including dates, tutor input, and administrative support. Further to this the Careers Adviser and Employability Consultant had several meetings to prepare content of tutorials and lecture. Prior to tutorials there was a short briefing attended by all Philosophy 2 tutors plus those at the initial planning meeting.

Inputs

Students were given a statement to discuss in one of their timetabled tutorials for the Philosophy 2 course: ’Our futures beyond university are entirely an expression of free choice. Discuss.’ Tutors were asked to facilitate discussion around:

* What factors can affect peoples’ futures?
* How do these different factors work together or pull in different directions?
* Can we mediate for different factors? If so, in what ways?
* What are the positive and negative implications of trying to influence control over the future?

All tutorial groups were asked to feedback a consensus viewpoint from their discussion of the statement with key arguments that supported their standpoint.

The tutorials were followed up with a lecture in curriculum time which developed some of the themes emerging in the tutorials. The lecture content included discussion of a number of approaches to career decision making and possible consequences of choosing a particular approach (with the aim of making students aware of the implications of the approach they are personally favouring at present) and an overview of some of the Careers Service resources available to support students in their career decision making.

Resources

Philosophy academic staff time was limited to the initial planning meeting and briefing meeting with tutors. Philosophy tutors were given a tutorial plan and some materials to support them; the amount of preparation was left to the individual tutor. Careers Adviser time was needed to prepare the lecture and tutorial initially, with input from the Employability Consultant, but annual updates require less time. Subject area freed up one lecture and one tutorial slot from their normal course delivery.

Evaluation

Feedback from students and tutors on the tutorial piloted in AY08/09 suggested that the tutorial was maybe too structured and as a result it was changed, to that mentioned above. This allowed something that reflected more closely the style of discussion favoured in Philosophy tutorials.

The majority of feedback from tutors indicated that the students did engage positively in the tutorial discussion and as a result brought out some of the issues they saw as impacting on their career decisions for the future. Turnout at the lecture was equivalent to that of subject lectures and students engaged in positive discussion with the Careers Adviser.

Some feedback does suggest that students have concerns about time being taken away from teaching and discussion of their subject but both the subject area and Careers Service staff felt this was the best way to engage most of the year group. It should also be noted that students have requested more ‘Philosophy-specific’ input in the lecture so some case studies of career pathways of Philosophy students have been added.

Advice

Success is very dependent on the buy in of the tutors. Good tutor briefing is essential. If possible, using tutors who self-select for this specific tutorial would be more successful.

The timing of the tutorial and lecture should be chosen very carefully to ensure they are not breaking up a course artificially but are still embedded in the curriculum.

Although the career opportunities available to Philosophy students can be very similar to graduates in other humanities disciplines, making very subject-specific references can help student engagement.

Key contacts

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<http://www.ed.ac.uk/employability/staff-information/how-employability-addressed/good-practice/hss/career-planning>