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Welcome to Northampton Business School

Maggie Anderson

Evaluating pedagogy for employability: illuminating students' perspectives on an intensive undergraduate employability module

- To elicit the student voice in evaluating the design and delivery of a four-day intensive employability module at the University of Northampton in May 2013.

- As this was a pilot program, it was important for the team to evaluate the module based on 1) what were students' perceptions of the condensed mode of delivery? and 2) to what extent did students' believe the training enhanced their employability?

Background Employability

As opposed to being viewed as an "add on" or external provision, career development and employability intervention is progressively embedded into academic programs (Wilkins et al., 2013). The notion of embedded employability is commonplace in 21st century business education.

Background Student Voice

The diverse needs of the student population is often measured in terms of the perceived student experience. This chimes with the prevalent discourse around the "student voice", which considers the student perspective as critical for improving teaching and learning provision (Flint & O'Hara, 2013).

Models such as the "partnership model", where staff and students consult on curriculum and delivery, and the "consumerist model" of higher education highlights the expected impact of student feedback which feeds statistical data recognizes the student as a key stakeholder (Ibid).

 Stoncel and Shelton-Mayes (2012, p. 5) stated that we are now in a time where "the student voice is increasingly important in informing university planning in the short, medium and longer term".

Background Condensed Delivery

Condensed delivery is often termed "intensive" or "accelerated" delivery for the purposes of providing education or training over a shorter than usual period of time.

Davies (2006) stated that "intensive courses" refer to various alternatives to semesterized delivery of courses; wherein material is delivered over a shorter timeframe than a semester or a term.

Davies proposed that the term 'intensive' is used synonymously with those he identified as 'block' courses – where delivery takes place in longer blocks of at least a full day at a time and, often, for multiple full days in a row. Similarly, a definition of condensed delivery or intensive courses may also be termed "accelerated", "time- shortened", "block format", "compressed courses", "flexible" and "alternative" delivery (Scott & Conrad, 1992; Wodkowski, 2003).

Background Condensed Delivery

There are conflicting findings and criticisms of intensive programs, particularly in relation to student fatigue and poor absorption of information.

Some studies show that students experienced more stress due to workload and content during an intensive course,(Henbery 1997) .
Some students perceive intensive courses to require less time to complete, to encourage less reading and result in less learning, Welsh (2012) .

Despite such critical views, it has been reported that students' motivation, commitment and engagement improve during intensive delivery formats and that students perceive intensive programs to be more stimulating, more exciting, more efficient, more integrated, more challenging and even more enjoyable , (Daniel, 2000; Burton & Nesbit, 2002).

The Study

This training was delivered to 212 students enrolled on business related undergraduate degree programs during the summer after their penultimate year of undergraduate study. At the end of the fourth day, students were asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire about their experiences and perceptions of the module. Groups of students (approximately six to a group) were given the opportunity to participate in a video interview.

The questionnaire was designed as a series of open-ended question so as to capture a richer corpus of data than what would be achieved through a quantitative instrument. Completed questionnaires were received by 85 students, which represents a response rate of 40%.

The video interviews added a fun, innovative approach to data collection with which the students engaged well. Approximately 60% of students participated in the video interviews. Some students participated in both forms of data collection.

Findings - Perceptions of the condensed 4 day format

What students liked	What students disliked
Students preferred the segments that were delivered by employability experts, employment recruiters, employers, etc.	There wasn't enough detailed communication prior to the program for students to know what to expect over the four days.
The module team was enthusiastic, which the students reported they liked.	Despite the condensed format, there was too much down time while teachers changed between activities.
Student liked when the sections of the days were well-organized and interactive.	The days felt too long and students became bored.
Students appreciated the format of the module on the basis that they received a lot of information.	The group sizes (n=25) were too big to be meaningful to individuals in a short amount of time.
Students liked the four-day format because it meant they could complete it faster.	Students felt they did not have enough time to dedicate to their assignment.
	Students wants more time to interact with each other rather than listening to lectures or speakers.
	Students wanted more practical tasks incorporated into the module.

Findings – Student Perceptions of Impact

Positive	Negative
Students felt the module was beneficial because it highlighted many of the services available to support academic and professional excellence.	Some students felt the module was too basic for their needs.
The module was useful because it helped with future choices and ideas and to identify opportunities.	A few students thought this module was too similar to other work based learning modules.
The module was impactful because it provided practical CV training and worked to develop skills for applying to jobs.	Mature students thought the module was too patronizing.
Some students felt they had a better understanding of what employers expected from graduate employees.	Some students wished the module had covered self-employment.
Students felt they had a better understanding of the recruitment cycle.	
Students realized they needed to act soon to start preparing for employment. This included online networking and personal branding.	
Some students felt confident about getting a job after taking the module.	
Students felt more informed about their chosen career.	

Filmed Feedback

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CK6_c5gWzy4

(8.45 mins)

Conclusion

The results of this study highlighted some interesting student perceptions regarding condensed module delivery. First, students strongly requested high levels of interaction and did not discuss tiredness or fatigue. Second, students called for a more bespoke, tailored approach which suits their specific needs.

The majority of students did report that they felt that the module enhanced their employability skills in relation to understanding employer expectations and graduate recruitment and selection processes and requirements. However some students found the module too basic for their needs, in particular mature students who have previous, extensive work experience.

Overall this study highlights the importance of the credibility of the delivery team in relation to employability programs and the need to personalise the delivery of material for bespoke career choices and individual circumstances.

The need to make intensive module delivery highly interactive and practical in nature also emerges as a key theme.

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Questions ????

Thank you
for listening

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