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People, Partnerships and Pedagogies

Embracing partnerships – human and AI – in digital course on career readiness

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Research on PhD graduates from universities in New Zealand and the United States has revealed a lack of career preparedness during doctoral study (Spronken-Smith, et al. 2023). The research found that PhD graduates had very limited knowledge of their skills sets and attributes, as well as a lack of awareness of career pathways beyond academia. This is a major concern as only 40-50% of PhD graduates typically can enter academia following graduation, with the remainder entering a range of careers, especially in the western world. Consequently, the first author set about generating a digital course on career readiness and career preparedness for doctoral candidates as well as postdoctoral fellows (those in either teaching or research roles). The development of the course is a team effort involving academic developers, careers advisers, a digital developer, graduate research candidates and artificial intelligence (AI). We hope to launch the course in 2024.

The course comprises elements of social constructivism and reflective practice and weaves in cultural aspects throughout. Two main platforms are used to deliver the self-paced online course: Microsoft Teams Classroom and an EdX platform. Central to the course is a koru diagram which maps out a pathway for career readiness, starting with self-discovery, followed by discovery of career options, then considering practical strategies for career readiness, and finally developing an action plan. The learners enter the course through the Microsoft Teams environment, where we encourage introductions and connections with classmates. Learners can then progress at their own pace through 12 main modules, with touchpoints occurring on a few occasions where they are asked to share ideas with the class. Reflective practice is embedded throughout, with learners keeping a journal and creating items for their digital portfolio – the assessment item for the course. In two places we have built in AI, using ChatGPT as a tutor to give feedback on learner's articulation of their skills sets, and again towards the end of the course, where learners can input their skills, values and job preferences and ChatGPT suggests some possible career options.

Developing the course is a great example of the benefit of taking a partnership approach in course design and implementation. It was the research of Rachel Spronken-Smith, an academic developer, who inspired the course, but to make it happen she needed support. Most importantly, she needed the expert input from Yvonne Gaut, a careers adviser, and Russell Butson, an educational technology academic. Between them they were able to design the course and draw on appropriate technology. However, they also needed a digital developer (Matt Fernandes) who could infuse appropriate design elements throughout the course, as well as videographers to capture media clips (Alba Suarez Garcia and Jodie Evans). They also enlisted two graduate research candidates (Patrick Mazzocco and Jodie Evans, the former of whom was also a past careers adviser), to test the course design and provide feedback on each module – an essential aspect to ensure relevance and engagement. By the time of this Pecha Kucha presentation we hope the course is ready to launch!

Keywords: digital course, doctoral education, career readiness, partnership, AI

References

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