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CITI® UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS IN INNOVATION & DISCOVERY (CUPID) PROGRAM

FACULTY/ADVISOR PROFILE
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How did this project come to be/how did you get involved?

I was contacted by Tiffany Miller (West Los Angeles College's Dean of Apprenticeships), who asked if I was interested on learning more about a California pilot program in partnership with NexusEdge, which fills the gap between academia and market readiness. As someone who is always trying new things in academia, and creating solutions for companies, I jumped at the opportunity to add value to our students.

NexusEdge functions as a portal for companies interested on helping students develop the skills and knowledge required to fulfill their needs. Using the industry certification badges format, companies break down the skills and knowledge in learning opportunities, and when students complete those, they are ready to take exams that will certify their mastery of those skills.

How did you get started?

As a first step, West Los Angeles College (WLAC) asked me to analyze the contents of each of the badges offered by Citibank in the CUPID program against the contents of all the courses offered in our Business programs.

The result was a detailed report with recommendations for different levels of integration according to the match between each of the badges and course contents.

Then, it took only a couple of weeks to decide how to best integrate those contents in one of my Introduction to Business courses and run, what I was told to be the first pilot in the US at a community college.

Proven a success, those students are now moving on to the next phase, where they will progress by interacting directly with Citibank on real current challenges, while continuing to be under my coaching.

At the same time, we moved on, and integrated all the badges as an applied learning module in our Introduction to Business course for the Winter session. We now have over 40 students going through the first phase of the program, while I am working on getting two new cohorts ready to start again this coming Spring.

Describe the need for this project.

One of the greatest concerns in academia is making sure students are ready to take on real world challenges upon graduation. Having companies actively engaged in the process is priceless.

For starters, students feel extra-motivated for learning what companies value, need, and are looking for, when hiring. The possibility of being selected for an internship and possibly securing a job offer, gives students another reason to be serious about their education.

The program is basically a long interview process of sorts without the stress that usually accompany those. Companies have the opportunity to watch students performing, while at the same time getting them ready for taking on positions.

To maximize the results, however, instructors need to work integrating the modules in ways that all the work done prior to that will help with preparing the students to be successful. For instance, I adopt a project-based methodology, so aligning the right projects before students get there, maximize their chances with the companies. And, since we measure our success based on students' accomplishments, this type of project requires instructors that are committed to that. In short, it helps students experiment with real world applications that are valued today, provided by the same companies that are hiring, filling the gap between academia and the job market.

How are you implementing this in your classes?

I added all the contents of the badges to a new module labeled Applied Learning. I found it important to present those in a progressive level of difficulty, since there are different subjects covered.

Another detail that proved important was to edit a few of the assignments' names to make them more friendly. Adding those assignments after the comparable contents are covered in the course, has been instrumental to improve students' confidence levels.

Success rates will also improve, when taking the time to explain each assignment. I found using templates and rubrics, and recording videos has helped a lot. We are now starting a new cycle to integrate opportunities at Shopify.

Why is this an important initiative for your students?

- It gives students additional motivation to learn.

- Students learn skills needed to work on current challenges at real companies.

- It is an opportunity to prove their potential, talents, and skills at companies hiring now.

- It helps to empower students with practical applications that build on the project-based learning they are exposed to prior to reaching those applied learning modules.

- It offers a competitive edge, when applying for other opportunities, as those badges are recognized by the industry.

- Finally, this type of project is also important from a diversity-equity-inclusion perspective since it provides unique opportunities for students from underprivileged communities.

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