

New River Valley Career Services Panel

Quina Weber-Shirk: Well, welcome everyone. My name is Quina Weber-Shirk. I am the project coordinator for the Regional Internship Collaborative. And we are hosting today an online career services panel for higher education institutions in the New River Valley. This is part of our work on connecting employers and talking about recruiting local students for high-quality internships. So this is something that's put on and organized by the Regional Internship Collaborative and specifically by some of our collaborative members, representatives from the Virginia Department of Education, Radford University Center for Career and Talent Development, and Virginia Tech's Career and Professional Development Center. Today, Kim Radford will be moderating our panel and I'll turn it over to her in just a second to introduce herself. But we have three panelists: Teresa Dickens, a career counselor at Radford University, Jim Henderson, employer relations at Virginia Tech, and Gwen Houston, career services advisor at New River Community College. Thank you all for your time here today. And Kim, I will turn it over to you.

Kim Radford: Okay. Great. Thank you so much. So again, my name is Kim Radford. I am the work-based learning specialist for superintendent Region 6 for the Virginia Department of Education. And so, we have a very high interest in what is going on in career services these days. So I want to go ahead and get started with our panelists. So Gwen, if you want to tell us a little bit about your program, and then we'll get started with building some questions.

Gwen Houston: Thank you. It's such a pleasure to be here. Again, my name is Gwen Houston and I am the student resources and career services advisor at New River Community College. I am a one-person show. So you're looking at the Career Services Department at New River, and we are working on expanding our services. We're actually hiring a community career coach that's going to work more with adult students, if you will. And I work more with the in-house students -- traditional students. And so I typically work with students directly one-on-one, as we're starting to grow our services. And that's career assessments, career exploration. If students come in as general studies students and they're unsure of which direction they want to take, I work with them on career exploration. I'm excited to announce that we just purchased a new career center platform called Emsi Career Coach (sp). I work on resume writing and review with students and then also connecting with industry partners as well to get them connected to students. Our departments that fall within our business and technology areas, they typically, the chairs, will typically work with industry partners to identify internship opportunities and co-op opportunities for their students and work directly through their departments.

Kim Radford: Great. Okay. And then Teresa, would you like to share a little bit about your program to get us started?

Teresa Dickens: Absolutely. Thank you for having Radford University on this panel. So happy to be here. As mentioned, my name is Teresa Lopez Dickens. I am a career coach here at the

Center for Career and Talent Development at Radford University. So our tagline is "Discover, experience, thrive." It is a little bit of that. Helping our students is a developmental model. Helping our students discover their talents, their strengths, and experiencing through internships, shadowing experiences, and on-campus jobs to better define which is the career path that they may want to follow and eventually thrive, professionally and personally as a citizen of the world. So we are -- we have a model of college liaisons. We have three career coaches, and we each have different colleges that we work with. But we also do a little bit of general, when a person is not here, we can certainly cover. We have a team that includes employee development, which is Carolyn Sutphin and our director Jason Clayton, as well as a communications specialist, to help us put our events and opportunities out there for the campus community as well as the New River Valley and beyond.

Kim Radford: Excellent. Okay, and Jim?

Jim Henderson: Hi, my name is Jim Henderson. I lead the Employer Relations team at Virginia Tech Career and Professional Development. So my team, we work with companies near and far with recruiters looking to hire our students. We have 27 interview rooms. And we really are trying to get employers to come back to campus. It's a whole new world, hopefully we're at post pandemic. So just really trying to work with employers. There's a lot of questions on how to -- the new best practices in recruiting. But just really working with employers to connect with our students for internships, co-ops, full-time hires, whatever their needs are, trying to provide great opportunities for our students.

Kim Radford: Really, that kind of leads me right into the first question, to ask you guys about, from a student's perspective, as well as from an employer's perspective, during this whole process, what do you all feel that recruiters or that students might really want other people to know about during the process, in terms of hiring or supervising interns? Gwen, you wanna go ahead and start. You're muted. There you go.

Gwen Houston: Thank you.

Kim Radford: Yeah, you're welcome.

Gwen Houston: I think our students would want employers to know that they're eager to learn, but they're not necessarily the expert. And so they may need some direction, rather than just being thrown out there to sink or swim. I think they also want employers to know that they're there to gain real-life experience. They're not there to just be a go-fer. And while they're willing to do whatever it is that they are asked to do, their primary purpose for being there is to learn some experience -- gain experience that they can take into the workforce. I think it's also important that students want employers to know that it's important to have a position description to help them quantify their experiences when they're beefing up their resume, or as they're entering into the workforce, if that particular experience does not translate into a full-time position for them.

Kim Radford: Great. And Teresa?

Teresa Dickens: Yes, I totally agree with everything Gwen just mentioned. Our students are very much eager to find opportunities that will give them the skills and knowledge and competencies that they can apply, you know, according to their disciplines. They really do like to have a pretty good idea, when they read the descriptions, of what the projects that they are going to be working on and what's the culture, what's expected of them. They are flexible and they are willing to learn a lot, but they like to have an idea when they're applying. As I see with students looking for internships and experience, as they really do want to know that -- they really like to have paid experience says because many times, our students are working at the same time while they go to school. So if they cannot get paid for an internship, sometimes they have to have a day job and an internship, and sometimes school as well. So that's a huge, a huge load for them. They like to have a kind of a sense of belonging. They want to be part of the team and they like to have their own space when they come in, like an area that they know that they can come in and they have the tools that are needed to do the job. Some of the few things that I can think of.

Kim Radford: Yeah, those are great. And then Jim, I guess you're going to look at it more from the employer perspective. And so we're gonna get both sides on this one, so you can take it away.

Jim Henderson: Yeah, what I would like employers to know when hiring interns is it's a whole new world. The days of just posting a position and hoping all your top candidates apply to that position are long gone. At Virginia Tech, through the Handshake system, we posted 132,000 jobs last year. So if an employer is only posting -- the number one question that we get from employers is: "I posted this job, but I didn't get any student applications." So your company brand, either virtually or in-person, is increasingly important. And the way to kinda get in front of students; student engagement is very challenging right now. And we don't even know really what the student behavior is going to be coming out of the pandemic. Are students going to return to a large ballroom full of people? Are they going to opt to do more virtual events or both? So I think the fall recruiting cycle, it's gonna be a lot of experimentation, people doing different things, and we're going to see what works. But if you're really looking to recruit, posting is critical. As I said earlier, the job posting is critical, to really be as specific as possible, to make your posting kind of stand out. Because the job posting to a student is similar to a resume to a recruiter. And a resume, you may only get a few seconds. The same thing is true for job postings. So I think all of those things are gonna be very, very important going forward.

Kim Radford: Yeah, I agree with that as well. And that kind of leads us into knowing what some of these things are that people wish they had known going through the process. What do each of you do in your career services role to help support either the students and/or the employers through the entire process?

Gwen Houston: Sure. So at New River, we provide a packet or a handbook, if you will, that includes tips for success. Students know they have a list of tasks or requirements for the program, so they know what the expectations are of them. It also includes forms that the employer and the student, as well as the dean, are required to sign so that they enter into a contract with each other so everyone knows what their expectations are. There are also some guides and recommendations on creating a position description and also some goals for the student, three to five goals that they would work towards for the semester. In addition, there's ongoing support from the faculty advisor, and then also the dean and then Student Services advisors as well. So we want the students to be successful, and so there's ongoing support throughout.

Kim Radford: That's awesome. And then Teresa.

Teresa Dickens: Yes. So at Radford University, we have for-credit internships. But students can also do non credit internships to gain experience. For the credit internships, just like Gwen mentioned, we do have agreements where students, faculty, and the agency, the organization, have particular things that they have to cover. The student has to create an objective and some student learning outcomes to make sure that this experience is related to the discipline and that they're actually going to have some related competencies gain. I think it's really important for the companies to give the students particular projects from beginning to end, so the students can really put a stamp on it. And the students can say, This was my protect. And I can put it on my resume and feel real comfortable about that, as well as use it during the interview process. To support our employers, of course, we have Handshake, which is our career management platform. And Carolyn Sutphin does a wonderful job, really helping every employer on how to use and how to maximize and optimize Handshake so students know what opportunities are there. But just like Jim mentioned before, posting a job is not quite enough. So the career coaches send the deans and the faculty particular jobs that are coming through in newsletters so they can share with students. We all know that faculty members are the biggest influencers for our students. So when they hear it from a faculty member, the students really pay attention. Employers are always welcome to come to campus, to do on-campus interviews, to participate in classroom presentations, to come to our career fairs and other networking events. We have a Jumpstart career development conference where it's not just a recruiting event, but more a connecting event so students can meet employers and recruiters in a more informal, safer environment, which is really helpful for our students and for our recruiters.

Kim Radford: Wow, That's awesome. How about you guys, Jim?

Jim Henderson: Yeah, we have a number of ways that we help support students and employers. Our students, we have lots of resources that our advisors use to help with their resume or interviewing skills or assessments -- mock interviews. Then on the employer side, we we've put together a pretty robust employer recruiting guide that really walks an employer through all the various options to connect with our students. And then also an internship guide that we developed to help organizations develop internship programs. But really every student and

every employer is unique and they need different things. So one of the things we really try to do on the employer side, is really learn what that employer is recognizing as their challenge. So instead of just trying to get them all the resources -- because what we find is at a large university, you can have an employer who's well branded and does great recruiting in one segment of the school. But they may have real challenges in another. So for example, you might have someone who hires mechanical and electrical engineering, and they may do really, really well with mechanical but really poorly with electrical. So again, learning what their challenges are. We have a lot of resources and ways to help each individual recruiter to be successful on campus.

Kim Radford: Well, that's awesome because several of you, as you answered some of the questions, you talked about some of the resources that you have. Are there any other resources or guidance that you can offer to students or employers that you haven't already mentioned as part of your program?

Jim Henderson: Well, I can just add a couple more. So again, we have 27 interview rooms. So pre pandemic, they were largely full. During the pandemic they were completely empty. And now going into the fall, they'll probably be halfway full. So we're looking for some creative ways to fill our interview rooms. So we're going to have an employer in-residency program where we're inviting employers to come and spend a day or two with us and we'll give them a home base where we can help them connect with faculty and students, but have them use our space even though they're not doing actual interviews. But just trying to find ways to get employers to come on campus. And then all of our academic departments, they have their own unique resources and tools that they can help with the employers as well.

Kim Radford: Right. And so Gwen and Teresa, do you all have any other programs, kind of like what Jim was talking about, that you would like to highlight or offer, either to employers or to students as a resource?

Teresa Dickens: Absolutely. We do mock interviews and we also have an online platform where students can do a virtual interview and record themselves, share that recording with a faculty advisor or a career coach for them to get feedback on how they're doing on those interviewing skills. We all know how nerve-wracking interviewing can be for our students and how now, most companies are doing a pre-video interview, rather than a screening interview over the telephone like we used to do before. So those are really important skills to practice. We have a series of workshops that we have for our students throughout the year to help them develop those skills. Resume writing, interview skills, how to search for a job, how to manage their social media. We know that is a huge challenge. And how to create a strong social media presence through LinkedIn, through Instagram, through Handshake, definitely; for a lot of creative students' disciplines, we're using Instagram as part of their portfolio, right? So if you are a photographer or an artist, or a social media marketer, use your Instagram as a portfolio to show employers.

Kim Radford: Wow, that's all really, really great information. And then Gwen, did you have anything else you wanted to add for New River?

Gwen Houston: Sure. I just wanted to add also that we provide spaces for employers if they want to come on campus and meet with students as well, or if they want to come and showcase their organizations and what they have to offer, we provide space for that as well. We also provide an opportunity for -- if employers have shadowing experiences, we try to make that connection so that students can go and shadow folks at their organizations, just getting that knowledge and to determine if that's something that they would want to do long-term. Let's see. Some other things that we have to offer are that--I don't know if you're gonna go into this, Kim, but I was going to talk about a couple of the state of the art programs that we provide. Our instrumentation program is one of the only programs in the Virginia Community College System, so we have students that travel here from all across the state to come participate in the instrumentation program that we have. And then our automotive programs and many of the other hands-on experience learning that we have to offer, state of the art equipment that students can come and get that experience here on campus. We're in Dublin. And so we're very, very proud of those programs as well as nursing and many others.

Kim Radford: And then what about at Radford and Tech? Do you all have some specific programs that may offer opportunities outside of internships, like apprenticeships, or other work-based learning opportunities for students?

Jim Henderson: A lot of those are held outside of the Career Center. So a lot of our academic departments would have different types of internship programs as part of the curriculum. I mean, certainly through here, I mean, we have an internship and co-op program. So many of our students will do a co-op; that's largely engineering students. But one other thing that I would want to mention for services to students is during the pandemic, knowing that virtual interviewing will be one of the things that will continue to take place, we equipped all of our interview rooms with wired monitors, so if a student needs a quiet space to do a virtual interview, instead of the employer using the space, we allow students to reserve space to do virtual interviews.

Kim Radford: And Teresa? Those all sound like great benefits. Yeah.

Teresa Dickens: Yeah, so some of the educational programs that Radford offers, we have Radford University Vinod Chachra IMPACT Lab, that offers competency-based education, that are in high demand for the workplace, for cybersecurity, geo-spatial intelligence, data science, and K-12 education. We also have an SAS graduate certificate in business analytics that is online. We also have a design thinking certificate that is online. So these are all shorter programs that students can take, or even non-traditional students, right? People that can just come to enhance their skills and competencies. So those are some of the educational programs that we're offering.

Kim Radford: Those are all just really impressive. And so getting students ready for all of these experiences, what types of services or programs do you offer at your particular institution that would help students with career readiness skills? So Gwen, I'll start with you.

Gwen Houston: Sure. So, many of our programs have a career component or a stand-alone course that is required for degree completion. And if there is not a standalone course that is required for the programs, then those workplace readiness or career readiness skills are incorporated into the curriculum.

Kim Radford: Teresa?

Teresa Dickens: Yeah. Just just like Gwen mentioned, a lot of our programs, academic programs, have internship programs, not internship programs, but internship courses that students take before they take their internship, to prepare them before they take the internship. Also, using the NACE career readiness competencies to help the students be able to tell the employers how they are earning these competencies and so on. We have a new platform called PathwayU that are career assessments, that helps the student find out their interests, their skills, their values, their workplace preferences, and kind of matches to a particular career path that they can take that are in congruence to these values and preferences. So some of the things that we have in place to help our students.

Jim Henderson: And so we have a formalized internship program through the career and professional development office. So if a student enrolls in our program, they get a lot of professional development before they go out onto the internship. And then we're working with the supervisor and the students creating learning objectives. And there's check-ins throughout the internship. And then there are certain expectations of the supervisor as well. So it's really a lot of collaboration between this office, the employer, and the student. And that process really works well to kind of tether the student to the university. And if the employer is having any kind of issue with the student, we're able to be involved to kinda help resolve those.

Kim Radford: Right. And that kind of leads us to talking about students who are really interested in these types of opportunities but maybe they're not quite ready, right, to enter into the workforce. What types of services or programs do you offer to kind of help guide them or get them ready?

Gwen Houston: The beauty of some of the programs at New River, especially our two-year applied sciences degrees focus -- you don't have those general ed requirements in those programs. So they're specifically focusing on those career readiness skills. And so once the students complete those programs than they are workplace ready to enter into the workforce and hit the ground running. If they are lacking in any skills, if the instructor determines that they're lacking in any skills, then they will work directly with that student to help fill in those gaps. But most importantly, those students are ready to enter into the workforce because that's what they have focused on in their program.

Teresa Dickens: Yeah, at Radford University, the Career Center works very closely with alumni relationships to have connections between our students and alumni, for shadowing experience and mentorship experiences. I think that's one of the beauty in what Radford is known for, just those personal connections, because we're a smaller university, and so we definitely take advantage of that. Yes.

Jim Henderson: Yeah, I'm not sure I have anything to add more than what I spoke about earlier.

Kim Radford: Okay. Well, that's great. Well, thank you so much. And I think Quina is going to come back on and wrap it up for us. So thank you all for being here. I really enjoyed moderating this today.

Quina Weber-Shirk: Oh, the same. I really appreciate you all taking your time and sharing your experiences of the many different ways that you provide structure and support both to the students at your institutions and to the employers in our region, who want to engage with you and your students. So before we turn the recording off, I just wanted to provide an opportunity if any of you have last comments or questions for each other.

Gwen Houston: I wanted to add, just as far as supporting, making or helping interns to feel supported, or co-op students to feel supported, once they are in their position, I think it's important if -- I don't remember if I said this or if it was said and I apologize if I'm repeating -- but I think it's important for an intern or co-op student to feel as they are part of the team. And so making formal introductions so that the employees, the full-time employees or part-time and regular employees, are familiar with who this intern is and what their primary role is. I think it's important to provide, if there's an opportunity for a brief orientation, provide them with the handbook, include them. I can remember when I was an intern, that it made me feel valuable to be included in actual meetings, staff meetings, so that I truly felt like I was a part of the team and to ask for my input in various conversations. So I just wanted to add that those are additional ways to help interns to feel they are part of the team as well. Then also just to put in a little plug again, I had mentioned earlier in my introduction that we have recently purchased Emsi career coach (sp), which is very similar to Handshake at some of the four-year schools. And so I invite employers to connect with us, create a profile so that our students can see what opportunities these organizations in the region are offering.

Quina Weber-Shirk: Thank you, Gwen.

Teresa Dickens: I want to thank you for the opportunity to be part of this panel and it was great sharing with Gwen and Jim. I also learned from both of you. And I'm always available and welcoming.

Quina Weber-Shirk: Thanks, Teresa. Alright, I'll end the recording.