

Roanoke-Alleghany Career Services Panel

Quina Weber-Shirk: Well, welcome everyone. It is wonderful to be with you today. I am Quina Weber-Shirk. I am the project coordinator for the Regional Internship Collaborative. And today we are hosting a panel with career services representatives in the Roanoke Valley and Alleghany Highlands. This is part of our work to connect employers and career services around recruiting local students for high-quality internships. And our goal with our panel today is intended to provide a space to discuss student career readiness, some promising practices for recruiting and any specific programs that are available. [INAUDIBLE] Specifically some of our members and steering committee members with the Virginia Career Works Blue Ridge Region, Virginia Department of Education and the Roanoke Regional Chamber of Commerce. And today we have the pleasure of hearing from Leslie Holden, from Ferrum College, Jeffrey White from Hollins University, and Amy Foster from Roanoke College. So with that, I will turn it over to Toni. Thank you.

Toni McLawhorn: Thank you Quina. I'm Toni McLawhorn. I am the one-stop manager for Virginia Career Works Blue Ridge based out of the Roanoke Center. And we also have centers in Covington and Rocky Mount at the Franklin Center. But I have the pleasure today of talking with three of my good friends and colleagues in career services. And we're going to get their impressions about students and employers and internships. So as I get started here, if you have any comments to add to what the person answering says, please feel free to jump in. Leslie, we'll start with you on this first one. What do you think students wish recruiters and employers knew when hiring or supervising interns?

Leslie Holden: I think one of the first -- I wrote down a few notes. It's nice if they would know that when these students come in, a lot of them come in nervous. We actually have a lot of first-generation students, so sometimes their confidence is not where it needs to be. And of course usually we see that increasing as they go through internship. I think there's a need for structure and clear expectations. So they'd like to have some direction, goals that they need to meet, some steps. Sort of an on-boarding training period so they can fit into the culture of the organization as well. And then again, just sort of a understanding of what the culture is at the organization that they're entering in. So those are some of the things that came to my mind.

Toni McLawhorn: Okay. Amy, do you have any additional thoughts?

Amy Foster: I echo of course what Leslie said. Excuse me. I also think that students are eager to learn and they're eager to experience some hands-on opportunities. So I think specific projects designed in a timetable that will allow students to have that hands-on experience more than just making copies and observing in shadowing. While that is a key component of learning the overall business structure, I think that students also would love to have some ownership over projects that they could highlight as something that they did, whether it be with a set of interns or independently. I think sometimes feedback that we have gotten from students is that they enter an internship that maybe isn't super organized and that can be frustrating for them. And

so something that our students could really have some structure like Leslie said, but also some ownership over projects.

Toni McLawhorn: What about you, Jeffrey?

Jeffrey White: Again, I would agree with what Leslie and Amy are saying and perhaps adding to the need for project orientation, structured on-boarding, understanding where they're coming from. And I think also just being open, the employee being open to what's called reverse mentoring. So Gen Z has thoughts about how the world works and they're valid and I think they want to be heard. So I would add that.

Toni McLawhorn: That's true. Employers can learn a lot from students today. Okay, let's go to the next question. How could students feel more supported and connected during the hiring and supervising process with internships? Jeffrey, let's start with you on that one.

Jeffrey White: Well, I think again, since students are looking for, I think structured opportunities, checking in with students about their desired outcomes is important, and maybe helping them to structure those if they haven't done that already. I think also, likewise, after an experience or set of experiences checking in with students about their takeaways. Again, they want to be able to talk about what they're doing. And so in addition, again, I guess to add structure to checking in with them about what they think they need, to reach their desired outcomes. So I think those things are very important.

Toni McLawhorn: Okay. Leslie?

Leslie Holden: I just echo what Jeffrey said, but also in terms of checking in, but also giving them some constructive feedback, especially on skill development. So they know when they go into an interview or on the resume, what they need to put on that resume, what they did in that internship. Also mentoring, which would be the checking in. A few things I've put -- again, this comes with our location, is sometimes for our students, because we're about an hour south of Roanoke, sometimes if they can structure the internship where they only come in two to three days a week instead of every day. It makes it much less of a burden on our students. And we do have students who have chunks or days that they don't have courses. And then maybe some possible remote work, if it's possible, like maybe one day remote, two or three days in-person. Those are some of the things I think.

Toni McLawhorn: Amy?

Amy Foster: Again, I agree. Just open lines of communication. I think that, like Jeffrey said, our students like to be heard. However, they also need to listen. And so I think those open lines of communication where they can have those opportunities to sit with their supervisor or to even have their supervisor communicate with their campus resource personnel too, because we do have sessions where we gather all of our interns together and so they're talking to each other and they're talking to us. And so it's good to know that those on-site supervisors can communicate back with our campus resources to make sure that everyone is on the same page.

And that there aren't any disconnects; I think that would also help to improve some confidence in our students as they move forward.

Jeffrey White: Now one more thing I think that employers can do to support students is actually offer concrete career advice, especially if the student is interested in that domain or that field. The recent National Alumni Career Mobility survey -- the newest report's coming out on the 12th of August -- for a couple of years running, it's really showing that one item that correlates with career mobility for alumni 5 and 10 years out is employers giving concrete career advice. There are six factors that they identified, but that's one of them.

Toni McLawhorn: Okay. Great. And I'm going to ask one of the questions further down the list now because it kind of goes back to a couple of the comments you all have made. So how do you support student development of career readiness skills? And likewise, how can employers support that development as well? Leslie, you alluded to that a little bit talking about the employers helping the students to develop skills.

Leslie Holden: So some of the ways we support it at Ferrum is -- actually our new mission is: "Enter with promise; lead with purpose," and it's tied directly to career paths. All the academic programs have been charged with having some kind of prep in their curriculum somewhere. And I've been very, very lucky to be able to get into courses and to talk about career prep. And a lot of times I talked about the NACE competencies. Probably every class I go into, I talk about the competencies and how they can articulate these out to employers. So that's part of the prep. Part of the prep is doing resume reviews and sort of making sure that they're putting those buzzwords in there as well as doing practice interviewing. And so a lot of it that I've been able to do is through, again, the curriculum. We do some stand alone programs. But I think the most effective way is for me to partner with our faculty.

Toni McLawhorn: Very true, very true. Amy, how about you?

Amy Foster: Well, we have actually shifted from a career services office to, we call ourselves PLACE, which stands for Purpose, Life And Career Exploration. So there is a real push right now on our campus to work with our freshmen through our office. Of course our focus your senior year is with that -- obtaining a job, going to graduate school. But the idea is that if you come in as a freshman and take advantage of everything that the campus has to offer, not just our office, but you'll be more prepared finding your passion and your purpose. What I have found, one of our most exciting programs that we've begun to offer, aside from partnering with faculty, the resume reviews, the mock interviewing, is we have begun to offer what we call a Launch Lab, where we invite our seniors. We've done it now -- we had hoped to do it this past January, but COVID kept us from that because we were looking at another delay in start. But we offer a Launch Lab, where we have a multi-day workshop where we have employers who enter and talk to our students about what they're looking for. And so they've spent four years at this point hearing it from us. Now they're hearing it -- ideally, we're trying to get on a timeline where we offer that to our senior class in January or earlier and possibly during fall break. But

then we invite our upcoming seniors, so our junior class at the end of May, to the Launch Lab in the May semester, or right after the May semester. So they are hearing about that and thinking about that in the summer. Hopefully, what this will do then is have them secure a position prior to graduation. So that's what we're trying to do. It's exciting. It's hard to get on that timeline where we feel like we're not working from behind because we've had to deal with, clearly COVID and weather and you know, so, but we are excited about it. And I think that it is getting more employers on campus. And they are hearing it from a lot of different people. And we're super proud too of how involved our alumni are with our current students, in helping them get career ready. So those are some of the focus areas that we have really, as we shift from career services, which, it's hard to talk to people about PLACE because we're still doing resumes, we are still doing mock interviews. We're still doing all career readiness. But now our office is more of a gathering place where we don't claim to know everything. So we're a resource gathering spot where we are connecting students with alumni, with faculty members, with people in the community who do have the knowledge that maybe we don't have. We still know a lot, but we don't claim to know it all, but we claim to know where to get it. So that's kind of some programming that we've really instituted.

Toni McLawhorn: Okay, how about you Jeffrey at Hollins?

Jeffrey White: At Hollins, we are also shifting a little bit away from the typical career services model, from sort of testing and telling where they should go, what to do. We do advising and workshops; we still do resume, cover letter, interview type advising and workshops. But we're also getting more into the students really telling their stories about their experiences, whether it be classroom-based volunteering work and helping them to articulate those in ways that connect to core career competencies. And in addition, we also work a lot with our alumni here at Hollins. We're known for our alumni network. So currently we have the Career Connection Conference, which is every September or October -- this year, it's in late September -- where alumni come to Hollins and do panels and do networking events with the students. In addition, we've started what's called Grads Plus, which is, actually, it's a private LinkedIn group. But it's for seniors and alums who want to mentor the seniors. And currently we have -- I think this go around -- about 160 members on that.

A big part of what we're trying to do too, is to integrate the core career competencies into the curriculum. So we're launching a first group of faculty who are working to integrate these competencies. And if I can just quickly share my screen, I don't know if I'm able to do that, but I can show you what this looks like. So this wheel here, really, this is the wheel of the competencies. You'll see it's a lot like the NACE 8. This is from the University of Minnesota and we're in a consortium with them. We're working on this career readiness initiative with our faculty to really integrate it into the classes because we only see students so much, but faculty see them every day. And that's where we can really start getting the traction on career readiness if we can get it through faculty. So that's a big project that we're working on right now to support students.

Toni McLawhorn: Okay. And I think all of you had a common theme, common thread, going through your conversations as integrating into the curriculum across the board as much as you can and getting the faculty involved. We all know that students are with faculty a whole lot more than they're with the staff members in various departments. So the more you can get staff and faculty working together, the better. Jeffrey, did you want to add something else?

Jeffrey White: I wanted to add too, another thing we do, what we're known for it at Hollins, is 70-75 percent of every graduating class will have done an internship, at least one. We start offering internships actually in the first year. These are January term internships, they're local, for the first year. But we have interns all over the country. We have some that are supported with stipends. We're seeking out more and more paid internships for our students. So that's another way we support the career readiness development.

Toni McLawhorn: Okay. And along with that, you've kinda touched on this as well. What resources does your institution have that supports business offering high-quality internships to students? Jeff, you want to continue with that?

Jeffrey White: Sure, sure. So, you know, with COVID, we're not really -- we stopped having career fairs. And also there were some issues with attendance at career fairs. Students -- there's a lot of competition for student attention. So right now what we're doing is, I think more of a curating model. We're really connecting one-on-one relationships with employers and really wanting to curate them with the students and the students to the employers as well to try to make the connection, whether it be for internships or potentially talent pathways to career. So that's one of our strategic strands that we have in the center in terms of employer relations, is this sort of curation model. We may go to having more fairs as things change. But currently we're working more on a relationship-based model.

Toni McLawhorn: Okay. Leslie, how about you?

Leslie Holden: Well, one of the things in our new strategic plan, that each academic program was tasked with, was coming up with an advisory board, from alumni and local business and industry that are related to those majors. So as a way to talk about what they're looking for, what we could be integrating into our curriculum. So that's one of the things that is in the process right now. We also are very much supported by our deans. And one of the charges, again, they want back, is finding places in the curriculum to have experiential opportunities, with I think the idea of moving to every major requiring an internship. We have a few holdout majors that we sort of have to work along and tease along. That's his goal, and I like the goal.

Then we have very strong program coordinators. So anytime an employer contacts my office, I connect them with the program coordinator directly so they can talk about it because we're a de-centralized internship; every program has their own requirements. Although that's what

we're working towards, changing that as well. And so those are some of the main resources that we have on our campus as well.

Toni McLawhorn: Amy, what about at Roanoke?

Amy Foster: Well, we have gone back to in-person fairs. So our internship fair is now September 26th and our spring internship fair probably -- we had had the best attendance. So we're hopeful; however, we have to work really hard to get students there and we had moved it quite some time ago into the Colket Center, which employer-wise, we would love to have it elsewhere on campus, but it's right in front of our commons. And so students have to walk past employers to get to dinner. So that may be part of the reason we are increasing our attendance. We also have a Maroon Mentor program where our goal is for all sophomores to have to have an individual mentorship with an alumni or employer in the area, in their area of interest. That has been a little more difficult, of course, I hate to keep saying COVID, but that slowed the process a little bit; however, it opened some doors, we were able to be a little bit more creative because of Zoom; no one Zoomed before then. So now we have the opportunity to have those virtual relationships.

We have switched to having, instead of in-person career nights, we now have what we call Power Hours, where we invite our, most recently alumni, to visit with our students in specific fields. We do that during a lunch hour, so our students on Tuesdays and Thursdays, they have a set -- and we are, like everyone else, fighting for attention. However, we've been able to, because those are virtual, we can expand those. And we've opened Power Hours up in Colorado, and students can really choose: "Hey, I'm going to move here," or "I'm going to move there," or "I'm interested -- " We've been able to expand where we don't normally travel to obviously, as our office, and so that's been really helpful and maybe broadened our world for some of our students, which I think has been really important.

Leslie Holden: I did want to add; so we've done a targeted fair for years, a human services fair, which is criminal justice and social services, which we actually brought back again. And that's always been very successful. So I'm working now with our business office to do the same for business, accounting and finance. And I told them if the faculty support getting the students there, I said, I'll do everything else. But if you can get the students there and the faculty in those majors, you'll get students there. So it's a small fair, about 20 to 25. But it serves its purpose and we don't charge at this point because we need people to come to our campus and we're off the beaten path.

Amy Foster: We don't charge either.

Leslie Holden: Yeah.

Jeffrey White: Another thing to support employers, internships are very hard to plan. So that's another area where we work with employers to plan outcomes and to help them see the internship as perhaps more project-based. And so that's another service we offer employers.

Toni McLawhorn: So are there any programs specific to your institution that you'd like employers to know about? So for example, Jeffrey, you've already mentioned that you have J-Term, which focuses highly on internships. Are there any, perhaps any academic programs that are offered that might be unique to your institution, that a lot of colleges and universities -- especially, the three of you are at smaller institutions -- that other liberal arts schools might not offer? Jeffrey, anything more unique to Hollins beyond J-Term? And you also mentioned the Career Connections.

Jeffrey White: Well, I think that, in terms of our academic programs, we have a new public health program, which I think is timely, given all that's been going on. As well, we have creative writing and we have a tradition of illustration as well, I mean, with the children's literature program. And sometimes employers are looking for writers and illustrators. I mean, I was just talking with somebody at the Blue Ridge Partnership about this. It's not all direct medical service. And in addition, we have more common majors like communications; a lot of students do internships with that. Our students are very interested in also social justice issues. And we have lots of people go off to work in various think tanks and non-profits to support social justice causes as well. And lastly, even as a liberal arts institution, we have a business program very strong in data science. So that would be another area for internship development.

Toni McLawhorn: Okay. Leslie, what about at Ferrum?

Leslie Holden: We have several, I would say unique programs. One of them is we're one of the few colleges that have an ecotourism major, and in that major there is an internship requirement. We also have a lot of health science students, but we also have a one health emphasis area, which is combining the environment with social justice and everything together. We also have agriculture, which we're 1 of 3 schools in the state of Virginia that has agriculture. Us, Virginia Tech, and Virginia State. Environmental science is another one, that we have that I don't think all colleges have that as well. And we have a new public history minor that's focused on museum studies. So that's coming out of our history department. And again, we have the same business and communications majors as well. But the ones I've mentioned, all those majors require an internship as part of that.

Toni McLawhorn: Okay. And what about at Roanoke, Amy?

Amy Foster: You know, I think that business is going to be our largest major here. We have our capstone class; our students create and partner with businesses in the area to enhance their business plan, to create a business plan, and that has been long in the works. We are getting ready to start and launch an MBA program shortly, which is going to be super exciting for us. That is going to add another level of students seeking positions after graduation. We have our public health major. One of the things, that I'm sure that my colleagues could stay the same, is

our professors and our faculty members are really partnering with folks in the community to bring programs to our students as well. So it's truly a collaborative effort on everyone's part. We all play a part in the success of our students. And I know that while we all have similar departments, there are things unique to each department that our faculty are doing to make sure that our students find success. So through -- one of our public health professors is partnering right now, most recently that I have heard of, with the Blue Ridge Partnership for Health Science Careers. So she's bringing some -- and in fact, I'm getting ready to email my colleagues to share that partnership with them. So Leslie and Jeffrey, you all are on my e-mail list. Watch for that email. And so there are lots of things that, program wise, we're doing across the board to get our students ready.

Toni McLawhorn: Okay.

Leslie Holden: I also want to add, the three of us are in the Career Premiere Consortium as well. And I know that we have the Federal Career Expo that we do as a consortium and I know we've talked about expanding it as well. So we already work together.

Toni McLawhorn: That's true. That's the nice thing about this entire state, is that everybody works together well. And Jeffrey, I know you need to get to another obligation, but we have one more question, which I think employers would be very interested to hear because they're gonna be our audience for this recording mostly. How do you respond to students who are seeking an internship but who are not prepared for the workplace? Jeffrey, I'm gonna let you go first and then if you need to slip off, you can.

Jeffrey White: Well, I would say early and often. But advising for sure, workshops, we offer that. But when we're doing advising and workshops and we notice students seem to need more upskilling in some of the career management skills, we will invite them to come to more advising, getting them really to articulate their experiences as well, in terms of those core competencies and just seeing those competencies. A lot of students feel like they don't have anything to offer when they're young. And I think getting them to get confidence in that can help to initiate that internal motivation to really be thinking in terms of career and career readiness for the workplace. Internships is by the way, another way, and if we can get them into an internship that will help, and to prepare for internships, orientation as well. And with that, I'm going to say goodbye.

Toni McLawhorn: Thanks, Jeffrey. Thanks for helping us today.

Jeffrey White: All right. Bye bye.

Toni McLawhorn: Leslie, what about you?

Leslie Holden: I want to echo what Jeffrey said. I think a lot of it is being able to work with the student one-on-one. And so a lot of the students who go out for interns, they have to take a prep class before they can actually do it for credit. And part of that is they have to do mock interviews and resume reviews through our office. So that's a great opportunity for me to give

them some feedback, talk to them about their skills or the skills that they aren't talking about. They might have them on their resume, but they're not talking about them in the interview. And then talking about where they feel like they need to bump up their skills as well.

Toni McLawhorn: Okay, and Amy, at Roanoke?

Amy Foster: Just starting from ground zero. Making sure that they understand that professional dress are not dressy jeans, does not incorporate a denim shirt. So starting from ground zero. And then using their experiences with a nicely written resume. Because like Jeffrey said, so many of our students take for granted their good choices. And so to be able, just to point out, Hey, listen, I get it. You have been a hostess at a restaurant. But how does that relate back to customer service, which is on this job description, which is what they're asking you to do? So drawing the lines for them to see that every experience has helped develop them professionally. Those babysitting jobs that students don't think are so important; they were important to someone, right? So to be able to draw those similarities to those entry-level jobs that they've had to have more professional opportunities, I think helps them too.

Toni McLawhorn: You're both right. You know, so many students just don't think that things they did when they were in high school or side jobs they had, like babysitting or serving at a restaurant, that they're just not important, but every job helps build that person. So you all have had really great advice and we really appreciate you cooperating today. So at this point, I'm going to turn the program back over to Quina.

Quina Weber-Shirk: All I have left to say is thank you so much for your time and your experience, and I open the opportunity to Leslie or Amy, if you have any last things you want to say before we turn off the recording.

Amy Foster: I just appreciate the opportunity to serve on the panel and to share a little bit about what we're doing with Roanoke. So that we can then help prepare our students a little bit better too, to be stronger interns for area businesses. So I appreciate the opportunity.

Leslie Holden: Yeah, I want to thank you for the opportunity as well. We're a little farther out of the Roanoke Valley, but we're still part of it. And we'd like to see our students stay and live in this area as well. So we want to connect them with employers in this area.

Quina Weber-Shirk: Thank you so much.