Faculty Learn How to Develop the 'T Professional'

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In line with the UA's commitment under the Never Settle strategic plan to expand student engagement and better prepare students for the workforce, Career Services [1], the Office of Student Engagement [2] and the UA Career Council, a campuswide collaborative team around student career success, recently sponsored a presentation designed to help UA faculty prepare students for life after graduation.

Philip Gardner, director of the Collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State University, spoke last week to UA faculty, instructional leaders and staff about how to develop a "T Professional."

The idea, he said, is to model the worker after the structural elements of the letter "T." The "T-shaped" worker will have a deep knowledge in one subject, represented by the vertical stem of the "T," and a good knowledge and ability to communicate about a lot of different areas, represented by the horizontal part of the "T."

Gardner said more and more higher education institutions are using this model in preparing their students. He talked about not giving students assignments they will see as a checklist of things to do in order to complete the class, but that engage them in practices that will be useful when they graduate to be able to get a job.

"We may have lost our way as we became research universities but we are really land grant schools and basically we should be producing 'T's and we have always been producing 'T's,'" Gardner said. "We just lost our way somewhere in the last couple decades and we need to get back on track."

The concept aligns with the "engagement" pillar of the UA's Never Settle strategic plan, which guarantees every student hands-on learning opportunities to prepare them for the workforce.

"I see 100% Engagement as trying to help provide students with transformative experiences that will help connect them to their futures," said Eileen McGarry, executive director for Career Services and Student Engagement. "This (presentation) was all about doing that, because it's talking about what the workplace looks like today and how to meet those demands."

Gardner also talked about changing the way universities may approach students with regard to choosing a major. He says that from the time a student applies and all throughout their time at the university, they should be thinking instead about "purpose."

He suggested that the depth of the "T" then becomes known as a student's purpose and said the "T Professional" should be driven by three things ? purpose, confidence and awareness ? that will lead to student success.
Mary Frances Kuper, assistant director for Career Services, who attended the presentation, said she learned that the conversation between the University and students may need to change.

"As someone who does early career readiness, that conversation around purpose and how they're integrating those other key concepts into it was really interesting," Kuper says. "We're really looking into engagement across the University, how to have that conversation with students and get them on the right path because the idea that they've lost time for exploration is very true. It's something that we have to be very aware of."

Gardner offered some tips on how to engage students who will be entering the workforce in the next few years. Because one of millennials' strong suits is technology, Gardner mentioned a service called knack.it, which uses mobile games as a way to connect people to potential employers by testing a person's aptitude.

"I kind of heard it before that technology is changing jobs in the future, but I think this was the first time I heard that it's changing the way we help students get jobs," said Peter Corrigan, assistant director of employer relations for Eller undergraduate programs.

Gardner ended the presentation by telling the audience that universities' way of thinking has to change for the best results.

"We have to work the system differently," he said, "And we've all been wondering how are we going to change, how are we going to rework ourselves in this system? In today's world, we are going to be accountable for way down the road and so we have to look at this a little bit differently."

McGarry says she hopes there will be an opportunity to present information about the “T Professional” to students, as the University continues to make great strides in engaging students.

"We need to define a model for how we prepare students and build their competency for the future," McGarry said. "I see there being an opportunity to present this to students and bring in academic leaders who are providing the ultimate experience, but we've seen close to 100 percent faculty starting to engage more visibly in this process of working with students to provide an engagement experience."

To find out more about what Career Services offers and upcoming events, visit the office's website.

Source URL: https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/faculty-learn-how-develop-t-professional

Links:
[1] https://www.career.arizona.edu
[3] https://www.eller.arizona.edu/
[4] https://www.career.arizona.edu/student