CACEE Awards

Name of Nominee: Career Services

Nominee Institution/Organization: Queen's University

Award: Excellence in Innovation - Student Engagement

Team Size: Small

Project Budget Category: Medium

Nomination Overview:

There is a lot of talk about a 'skills gap,' but 'skills awareness gap' is more appropriate. Students and recent graduates have lots of skills gained through curricular and co-curricular activities but often struggle to identify and articulate their skills. Counsellors and program facilitators need engaging, low cost, and easy-to-implement ways to help students better assess their skills. The Queen's Skills Cards bridge this skills awareness gap by helping students name and describe their skills in an interactive, fun way, and are a creative tool that could be replicated at other institutions.

The Queen's Skills Cards are a card sort tool, with content customized to the Queen's student experience; the skills chosen for the cards align with the Queen's Learning Outcomes Framework and employer feedback on desired skills, and the examples on the cards are based on Queen's student activities. While there are some skills assessment tools available in the marketplace, students respond best to resources that are targeted and customized to their experiences and identities. We believe this is the first school-specific skills cards tool.

Each card in the 35-card deck defines a skill, breaks that skill down into components, and provides an example of a student using that skill. In addition, each pack contains eight 'activity' cards which can be used depending on context and goals for the particular intervention. Career Services worked with the Queen's University International Centre to develop the Intercultural Competence card, and with Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre to develop the Indigenous Cultural Awareness and the Indigenous Knowledge and Ways of Knowing cards.

We have evaluated reach, outcomes, and operational objectives. In just three months, we have already reached over 300 students and approximately 100 faculty and staff. Initial impact data indicates that approximately 80% of students experience increases in self-reported self-awareness, their ability to explain their own skills, and their confidence as a result of using the Skills Cards or participating in a workshop including the Skills Cards. The following student quotes are typical of the feedback we are getting: 'Gave me a way to describe skills I already knew I had, but didn't know how to explain to employers, particularly those outside of academia' and 'Seeing these cards helped me to verbalize the skills I've gained from different kinds of experiences both in and outside of my degree.' Aside from these outcomes, the program has also elevated the conversation about skills from a dialogue driven by the 'skills gap' deficit model to one grounded in a 'skills articulation' strength-based approach. Several academic and student service units want to embed Skills Cards activities into their programming in 2020-2021, and we expect to reach over 2,000 students next year. Operationally, we met our objectives of creating a cost-effective, versatile tool. We were able to print 100 sets, including the boxes, for less

than $2,000 - approximately half the cost of a commercially available card sort (not for skills, but for career interests) in Canada.

Already, we have had peer institutions ask us about creating their own versions of the Skills Cards. We are committed to sharing our materials, as this resource could be easily replicated and customized for other schools or other settings should others be interested. Institutions could use their own skills catalogues ? whether tied to learning outcomes like here at Queen's, or to career-readiness competencies or other institution-specific skills listings. We can provide templates and planning documents, including strategies for student user testing, partnerships with other campus units, printing and production considerations, and our facilitator guide. Our facilitator guide orients new users (counsellors, advisors, faculty, and program coordinators) to a strength-based skills approach, describes how to use a card sort, and explains a set of eight targeted exercises. These exercises include 'Skills Snapshot,' 'Taking Stock of Successes,' and 'Showcasing Your Value.' Some of these are most suitable for 1-1 conversations, while others are more effective in group settings.

The Queen's Skills Cards are helping students build awareness and confidence in their skills. Their increased ability to articulate these skills will, in turn, clarify and deepen their recruitment conversations with employers. As a profession, we have an opportunity to help reframe the 'skills gap' conversation from the current harmful deficit narrative to a 'skills awareness' and strength-based conversation. We hope that the Queen's Skills Cards can be a powerful tool to contribute to this shift. For more information about the Queen's Skills Cards, including a photo of the front of a card, please visit https://careers.queensu.ca/skillscards.