Professional Development capstone course:
Bridging success in the classroom to success in the workplace

KATHLEEN YU, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
ST. LOUIS FED PROFESSIONALS CONFERENCE
NOVEMBER 4, 2016
Google: Are college grads ready for the workforce?

- **Time.com (Money)** “2015 college grads may not be as ready for the workplace as they think they are” (May 2015)
- **Forbes** “Students think they’re ready for the real world; employers, not so much” (Sept 2015)
- **Gallup** “Many college graduates not equipped for workplace success” (Sept 2015)
- **CBSmoneywatch** “Employers: new college grads aren’t ready for the workplace” / **CNBC** “Hiring managers say many grads not job ready” (May 2016)
- **LinkedIn** “Colleges aren’t preparing students for the workforce: what this means for recruiters” (July 15)
17 Measures of learning outcomes

- Working with others in teams
- Staying current on technologies
- Ethical judgement and decision-making
- Locating, organizing, evaluating info
- Oral communication
- Working with numbers/statistics
- Written communication
- Critical/analytical thinking
- Being innovative/creative
- Analyzing/solving complex problems
- Applying knowledge/skills to the real world
- Awareness/experience of diverse cultures in US
- Staying current on developments in science
- Working with people from different backgrounds
- Staying current on global developments
- Proficient in other language
- Awareness/experience of diverse cultures outside US
In 11 of the 17 dimensions, a majority of students felt well-prepared (rating 8, 9, or 10 in a ten-point scale).

But employers give low grades to students in all learning outcomes.

In 15 dimensions, the percentage of students who feel they are prepared is at least double the percentage of employers who feel the same way.
Why the discrepancy?

- College Graduate Employment Survey: polls soon-to-be 2015 graduates and older 2013, 2014 graduates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations of the Working World Class of 2015</th>
<th>Realities of the Working World 2013 and 2014 Grads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80% (\text{believe their education prepared them well})</td>
<td>64% (\text{felt their education prepared them well})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77% (\text{expect their first employer to provide formal training})</td>
<td>53% (\text{received training from their first employer})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whose responsibility is it to provide training?

Moral question: is it the college’s or university’s job to prepare students for both the technical and non-technical aspects required for success in the employers’ eyes?

Perhaps there is room for a hybrid course

- Develop professional skills in a non-academic setting
- Practice applying technical skills learned in the classroom in a non-academic setting
- Develop new technical skills that cannot be taught in the classroom
- Gain professional work experience and networking opportunities
Professional development course

- Capstones represent the final step before graduation: blends technical skills with professional skills necessary in the workplace
- Offered to students entering their final year of study
- Earn 1 course credit that can be used towards graduation requirement
- Small classes:
  - 2012/13: 6 students
  - 2013/14: 11 students
  - 2014/15: 14 students
  - 2015/16: 10 students
  - 2016/17: 17 students
Students' responsibility

- Application, statement about intended career goals, interview with instructor
- Provide 200 hours of unpaid work over 1-2 semesters
- Attend, participate in all professional development class sessions
- Complete 5 writing assignments (paired with class sessions) and a final report
- Poster session at the end of the year
- Maintain a work log, documenting tasks, responsibilities
- Meet with instructor for monthly one-on-one meeting
Instructor’s responsibility

- Find suitable placements for students
- Set the learning objectives: general areas for improvement
  - Professional writing
  - Professional soft skills
  - Identify, highlight their skills, educ, experience
- Develop course content to achieve learning objectives
  - Assignments (5 short papers): 20%
  - Participation/attendance in class sessions; work logs; individual meetings: 10%
  - Final written report: 30%
  - Poster: 15%
  - Employer assessment: 25%
Internship placements

- City of Mississauga
  - Strategic Planning
  - Planning and Building
  - Human Resources
  - Economic Development
- Impact Infrastructure
- Gowlings, Lafleur & Henderson LLP
- Toronto Stock Exchange
- National Bank, Wealth Management
- Ministry of Social Services
- NATO Atlantic Council of Canada
- Edward Jones
- Nigel Capital
- Bank of Canada, Economic Analysis Dept
- Bell Canada, Intelligence Team
- Environment Canada
- City of Brampton, Economic Dev
- Ontario Chamber of Commerce
- Agawa Fund Management Inc

- Town of Oakville
  - Development Financing and Investments
  - Econ Development
- Cosmos Sports
- Ontario Financing Authority
- Social Planning Council of Peel Region
- Industry Canada
  - Strategic Policy Sector
  - Innovation, Science & Economic Development
- Canadian Urban Institute
- Yellow Bear Studios
- Canadian International Council
- Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis
- Progress Capital
- SEED Sustainable Investments
- Wellesley Institute
- Mississauga Board of Trade
- Integral Wealth
- Research, Innovation, Commercialization (RIC) Centre
Learning objectives

- Partners: academic skills centre, Career centre
- Create practical, professional skills sessions that meets objectives
  - Professional writing
    - Basics of professional writing
    - Non-academic writing rubric
    - Peer review of assignments
  - Professional soft skills
    - Stand out and succeed workshop
    - Networking workshop and networking event
    - Project management
    - Presentation skills: oral presentation, poster session
  - Highlighting their skills, educ, exp
    - Career planning: setting internship goals, identifying skills needed for career goal
    - Resume critique: incorporating new internship skills, projects, experience onto resume
    - Cover letter workshop
Written assignment, final report

- Classes serve as the Basis for reflective writing assignments
  - Assignment 1: Background and context
  - Assignment 2: setting internship goals
  - Assignment 3: application of Project management towards internship project
  - Assignment 4: Poster planning
  - Assignment 5: updated resume, cover letter

- Each of the 5 writing assignments represents components of their final reflective written report
Challenges, rewards

- Working with difficult supervisors/colleagues
- Managing multiple deadlines, obligations
- Working with little/no guidance
- Learning new technical skills on the job
- “This isn’t what I thought the job would be like”
- Realizing the difference between theory and application
What if teaching a capstone course isn’t for me?

- Review your syllabus, ask what relevant skills are being taught here
- Work with your career centre
  - Help identify employer-valued skills
  - Offer a resume session
  - Inform students of services
- Encourage problem-based learning environments