



PREPARING STUDENTS TO ADAPT IN THE WORLD OF WORK

BY KELLY MATTHEWS

In an era when we often hear that careers of the future will be unimaginably different from those that exist today, it is no easy task to teach, guide, and advise students toward developing skills that will equip them for a lifetime of work.

While we certainly must continue to teach career-specific skills, it behooves us as educators to prepare our students for a lifetime of career flexibility, as well. Whenever I hear a student confess that they don't know what they will do for the rest of their lives, I take the opportunity to point out that today, no one does. The idea of having one continuous career in a single field of work has largely become a relic of the past.

Conversations like these give us an opening to help students grow comfortable with the idea of career evolution as they move forward after graduation. We can further support students by helping them identify and articulate the career-ready skills they are learning in each course they take. These might be technical or specific to stated career paths, but they likely also include transferable skills that students might not at first identify, such as interpersonal communication, problem solving, perseverance, and leadership. As AI and other technological advances move the workplace toward increased automation, these skills are increasingly valued as “durable skills” or “human skills” in contrast to those that may eventually be supplanted by AI or other tools.

At a recent conference of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, I heard Cathy Day, professor of English at Ball State University, speak about integrating career preparation into the college classroom and curriculum. She stressed that career readiness must be baked into every course, not bolted on as an add-on or optional feature. As Day pointed out, the students who most need assistance identifying and planning for future careers are often the least likely to seek that assistance, so incorporating it into all of our teaching and advising is key.

Suggestions to increase students' awareness of career preparation in college courses include enlisting help from recent alumni as well as guidance from career development staff on campus. In one of her courses, Day developed an assignment that required students to identify, research, and report on the hidden job market in their chosen field. As a department chair, she founded a program to help students

navigate from college to career by connecting them with alumni and identifying post-college career pathways, beginning from their earliest steps as a student.

In my own work, I recently coached students to use free resources from the U.S. Department of Labor, especially the Occupational Information Network or O*NET, as a way of expanding their mindset toward future possible careers. The O*NET interest profiler (www.onetinterestprofiler.org) is a valuable starting point for discussions of career flexibility. Seeing the hundreds of job titles listed as potential matches to their stated interests helped my students understand how the skills they learn now will carry forward to serve them throughout their lives.



KELLY MATTHEWS

(Framingham State University) is a professor of English at Framingham. A graduate of Harvard, Trinity College Dublin, Boston University, and the University of

Ulster, Matthews teaches English methods and supervises student teachers seeking the English 5-12 teaching license.