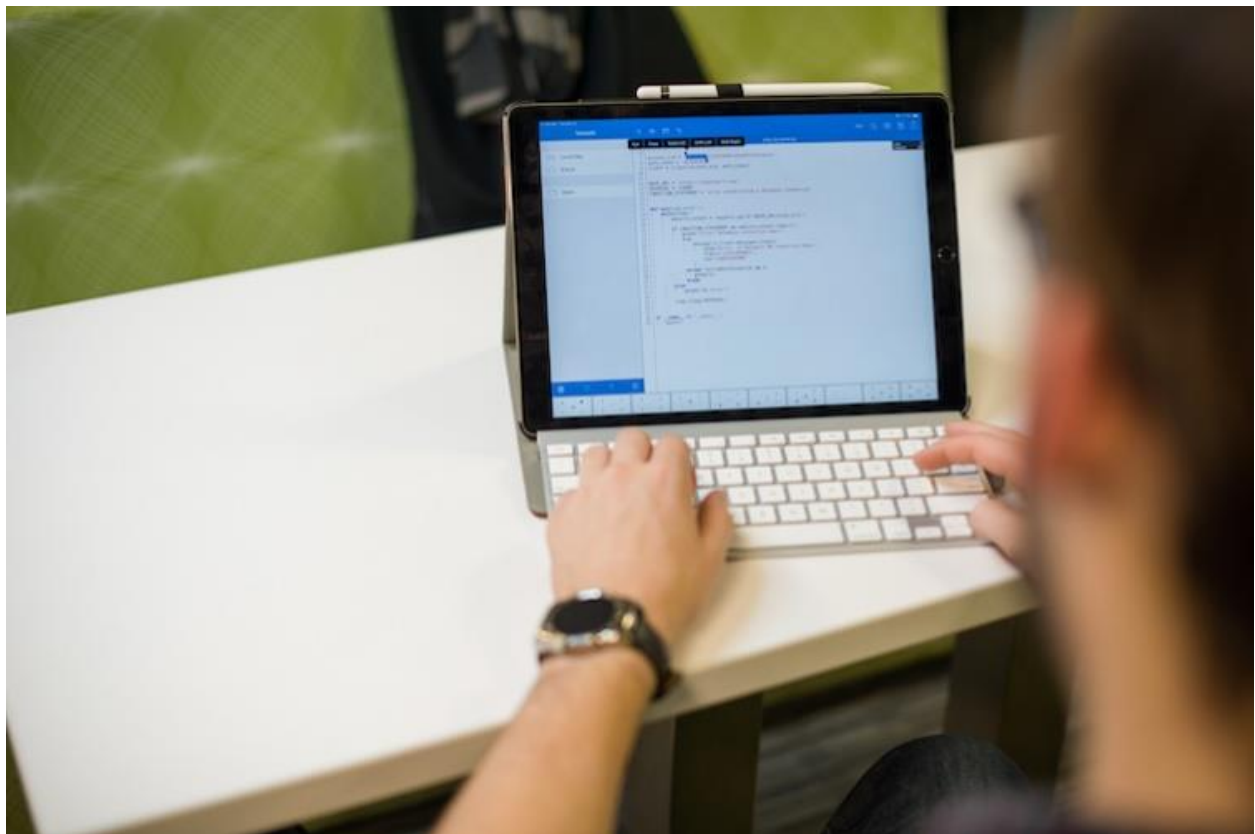


Getting Down to Business

First virtual career academy helps students adapt

Tuesday, June 2, 2020

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CODING IS ONE OF THREE SKILL-BUILDING TRACKS STUDENTS CAN FOCUS ON DURING THE FIRST-EVER SUMMER CAREER ACADEMY.

Job hunting amidst COVID-19 isn't just a challenge for recent graduates and internship-seekers on the frontlines of today's economy. It's also a priority for the career team helping them navigate it.

That's what prompted Raina Sprague '11, director of employer relations at [Career and Professional Success](#), or CaPS, to launch their first-ever overall employer survey this past March. CaPS wanted to get at the pulse of hiring trends — and get out in front of the questions important to students: What will happen to internship programs? How will entry-level employment be affected? And, perhaps, most critically: What skills do I need to stand out?

The survey went out to some 3,000 of the university's employer partners right as many companies across the region shifted to virtual workplaces. The spring semester is also typically a peak hiring season, but the initial survey responses forecast instead a horizon of question marks, a season of uncertainty more so than offers.

For instance, 53% of employer respondents said that they were unsure how they were going to proceed with summer internship offerings; 38% anticipated their typical entry-level hiring would also take a hit. And when the second round of the survey went out later, 25% of respondents said they would be canceling or postponing their summer internship programs.

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But employers also resoundingly shared that they were keen to see how students stayed productive and resilient during what career researchers have coined 'COVID summer.' In other words, what do you do when your internship's canceled or your dream company institutes a hiring freeze?

“That's going to be the interview question,” Sprague says.

One of the outcomes of this data was the university's inaugural [Summer Career Academy](#) (SCA), an online, 6-week skill-building program that kicks off this week. Jonathan Constable, a senior CaPS career coach and one of the masterminds of the free program, witnessed the many career curve balls affecting students. Like a student who applied for 15 internships, interviewed for two, and then, at the beginning of the summer, discovered both were canceled.

The SCA, he says, isn't just about skill-building. It's also about providing a dose of agency he calls “realistic optimism.”

“You can't control a global pandemic, but you can make a better resume,” Constable says. “Do what you can to steer yourself.”

Students who register for the SCA — and there have been more than 220 to date — can choose one of three skill-building tracks to focus on over the course of the summer: digital marketing, coding and data analytics. Alongside their daily work on that skill — say a crash course on search engine optimization — they'll also take [proactive steps](#) towards their career goals, like setting up a virtual informational interview with an alum in their field using Wildcat Connections, UNH's student and alumni networking platform.

Constable '14 and his colleagues' designed the program to harness [free online resources](#) and the [Wildcat Way to Professional Success](#), UNH's career development model. The program is delivered through on-demand instructional modules, and provides a modicum of what all students need: structure.

"We're one of the few universities out there doing something like this," Constable says.

The SCA is giving students the tools and capacity to make moves toward their career goals, even amidst a challenging landscape. When they're asked why they're enrolling for the SCA, many students will say things like, "my internship was canceled."

"But a lot of participants haven't lost anything," Constable says. "These students are saying things like, 'I want to learn to code the summer before graduate school.' Or, 'I know data is important, but I don't even know how to use Excel.'"

At the end of the summer academy, students will get a certificate of completion from CaPS and various badges to post on their LinkedIn and Wildcat Connections profiles. However, the program's unique cross-college approach means they'll also be able to apply their in-demand skills to a diverse range of fields.

"If you're a nursing major and you want to study digital marketing, let's do it," Constable says.

The Summer Career Academy runs through July 10 and is open to students on both Durham and Manchester campuses.

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CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS



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