

Effective Learning in the Biosciences, July 2011

“Here’s one we prepared earlier”:
involving former students in careers advice

Dr Chris Willmott

Dept of Biochemistry,
University of Leicester
cjr2@le.ac.uk



University of
Leicester

Background: (Inter)national

- Employability has been high on the agenda of universities for some time, but increasingly so under coalition government
- Careers awareness (opportunities awareness, workplace awareness) is an important component of employability
- *"Career development learning can be promoted through extra-curricular activities. These include... non-credit-bearing special events"* Tony Watts, 2006

Background: Disciplinary

- Biological Science is an excellent platform for starting a diversity of careers
- Unlike some courses (e.g. Medicine, Pharmacy, Law) Bioscience is not “vocational”
 - students may not know some careers exist
 - they may need help in seeing beyond the “known” pathways e.g. PhD, post-grad Medicine

Background: Local

- Academic review of Biological Sciences at Leicester (Spring 2006)
 - *“some students have expressed a wish for additional careers sessions to be provided specifically for Biological Sciences students”*
 - *“Students...would like additional advice on careers-related issues. Whilst the School does provide advice in this area consideration should be given to ways in which it can be enhanced since current provision is not keeping up with student demand”*
 - Improved careers advice 1 of 6 recommendations

Birth of CABS

- Careers After Biological Sciences @ Leicester
- Programme started 2007 with support of grant from institutions Fund for New Teaching Initiatives
- Two facets:
 - series of talks about different careers
 - archiving of material for those unable to attend events
- The “spin” – all speakers are graduates from our own courses (or key gatekeepers, e.g. postgraduate admissions tutor, Head of Science at School of Edn)

Contacting speakers

- Variety of strategies used to recruit speakers
 - contemporaries of mine (1986-89)
 - more recent students I knew personally
 - recommendations from colleagues
 - opportunistic links (e.g. biogs in articles)
 - others...?
- **Facebook** (and more recently **LinkedIn**) have proven useful ways to make contact with others
 - worked through previous pass lists
 - initially general correspondence, followed by specific invitation to those with interesting roles

Brief for speakers

- All speakers are asked to speak for about 25 minutes and include three core pieces of information (in whatever order they see fit):
 - what their **current job** involves
 - how they got there from here (i.e. brief **personal history**)
 - **top tips** for anyone considering a move into the same field

Organisation of event

- Two basic patterns have been used
 - A series of 4 or 5 “twilight” sessions of 1 hr featuring 2 speakers each time (5 x 2 model)
 - 2 Wednesday afternoon sessions with 5 speakers each time (2 x 5 model)
- There are advantages and disadvantages of both models, but current preference is for 2 x 5
 - students do not necessarily perceive the value of broadening their horizons
 - 5 talks in day offers “bait’ plus 4 other” model
 - to Tea or not to Tea, that is the question?

Organisation of online resources

- Previous experience using [Wordpress.com](https://www.wordpress.com) blog
- www.biosciencecareers.wordpress.com as hub for other resources (i.e. outside institutional silo)
- Slides can be uploaded to www.slideshare.net and embedded in blog page
- Audio can be linked to slides in slideshare or uploaded separately (*used* to use Libsyn)
- Video can be uploaded to www.vimeo.com (or www.youtube.com if <15 mins) & embedded in page
- Photos of speakers enliven page

**Simple
(Cheapest)**



Intermediate



**Advanced
(Most expensive)**

Invite speakers to
careers event

Set up website or blog
to archive careers
material
e.g. Blogger, Wordpress

Collect PowerPoint
slides from speakers
and upload
e.g. Slideshare.net

Take portrait photo
of speakers

Combine audio recording
with PowerPoint slides and
upload to web
e.g. Slideshare, Vimeo,
YouTube (if <15 mins)

Make audio recording
of talks

Make video of talk and
upload
e.g. Vimeo.com
YouTube (if <15 mins)

Make short bespoke
video with speaker at
their place of work and
upload
e.g. YouTube, Vimeo

Recommendations: Who

- Involvement of alumni in careers education demonstrates the potential outcomes from present course
- Academic colleagues may be able to recommend potential speakers, but Web2.0 services such as Facebook and LinkedIn are also valuable tools
- Alumni 5 to 10 years post graduation are ideal
 - long enough out of college to be established
 - not so old they graduated before students born

Recommendations: What (1)

Event

- An afternoon with 5-6 speakers is a good format
- Discussion ought to include at least one “obvious” career (e.g. PhD, medicine, teaching)
- A range of other careers should be showcased, including *Careers from Science* as well as *Careers in Science*
- A tea break refreshes the mind, but offers opportunity for escape
- At a minimum you should aim to take a **photo** or the speakers, a **copy of their slides** and an **audio recording**

Recommendations: What (2)

Post-event resources

- Blogging services provide an ideal platform for aggregating resources:
 - low entry-level computing skills
 - in-built search facilities
 - easy addition of metadata
- Content linked via the site can include:
 - slides from the talk
 - audio recording (possibly synched with slides)
 - photo of speaker
 - video of talk
 - workplace video
 - *synopsis/reflections written by attendee*

Conclusions

- Careers education > careers awareness
- “Opportunity awareness” remains integral to effective careers education, especially in disciplines such as bioscience where diversity of potential employment is less clear than for vocational subjects
- The CABS approach offers a way to develop a body of discipline- and context-specific material for use by present, past and future undergraduates

Acknowledgements

- Fund for New Teaching Initiatives
- School of Biological Science (Jon Scott)
- Alan Cann for Web2.0 wisdom
- Jo Badge for initial data crunching
- Alumni who have been back to speak

Any Questions?

E-mail: cjrw2@le.ac.uk

Twitter: [cjrw](#)

Slideshare: [cjrw2](#)

Delicious: [chriswillmott](#)

Blogs: www.bioethicsbytes.wordpress.com
www.biosciencecareers.wordpress.com
www.lefthandedbiochemist.wordpress.com



University of
Leicester