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REPORT: REVIEW OF OCAD UNIVERSITY CAREER SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION

Upon the retirement of Career Services Advisor Tom Fairbairn in May 2011, I undertook a short review of OCAD University's career services and programs in preparation for his replacement. The review process took place over June and July 2011 and included consultations with the campus community, including:

- Feedback from the OCAD Student Union executive and board of directors
- One-on-one meetings with interested stakeholders, including almost all program chairs
- Input via email; and
- A 2-hour Campus Roundtable discussion held on June 14, 2011 involving 18 staff, students and faculty members.

This report both summarizes the results of those consultations, identifies action taken to date as well as priorities for future development in this area.

BACKGROUND: OCAD U CAREER SERVICES 2006-2011

Since 2006, the OCAD University Career Services has been offering various services to students and recent alumni:

Career Advising: More than 300 one-on-one advising sessions were provided annually to help students and alumni connect their educational experience to careers.

Outreach and Events: One-on-one, interactive sessions with students from all year levels took place at the Learning Zone twice per week during the school year providing students with an opportunity for informal advice and feedback on a range of topics. Workshops and events included an annual Graduate Education Fair, Bachelor of Education Fair, a workshop to prepare students for dealing with galleries and dealers and employer information sessions.

Career and Employment Resources: The Career Services website is devoted to the production of materials (résumé, cover letter, web presence, etc.) as well as resources on job search strategies, information interview techniques, self-assessment, career planning, occupational information and grad school resources.

Job Board: The OCAD University Job Board has hosted between 15 to 25 new opportunities every day. In general 50 percent of the posted jobs are paid (full- or part-time.) Nearly 25 percent of the jobs are volunteer positions and 19 percent are contracts, freelance and commission jobs. Positions posted to the job board are scrutinized before being posted with aim to ensure fair compensation for art and design work is being offered.

The past five years have provided a sound base from which to further develop OCAD University's supports for students as they embark on careers as artists, designers or related professions, or consider further education. But the expansion of the school – both in size and scope – combined with a rapidly changing and challenging employment market, creates new challenges for Career Services to provide relevant supports at an appropriate scale.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR CAREER SERVICES AT OCAD UNIVERSITY

Throughout the consultations, consistent themes emerged. These themes are outlined below, along with the action taken and directions for further development in response to each.

1. Emphasize Skills Development

The emerging emphasis around broad-based, transdisciplinary career development at OCAD University is to be placed on building and enhancing transferrable skills. Students need to be better aware of the toolbox which they can add to over the course of their education, and how to leverage those tools. Our curriculum already cultivates an orientation towards generating tangible outcomes – the challenge is to help students strategically capitalize on their knowledge and abilities within increasingly specialized and challenging professional roles.

Action Taken:

I have renamed the Career Services department **Career Development** to signal a shift in emphasis away from one-on-one consultation and service provision to a unit that delivers opportunities for tangible skill development.

Zev Farber has been appointed to the role of **Coordinator, Career Development**. Zev brings a unique combination of experiences as a practicing artist, educator and a background in professional development to the role.

Directions:

With this new mandate to focus on skills development, Career Development is designing a series of highly practical, small group **workshops** to help students develop capacity around:

- Professionalism, Leadership and Building Effective Partnerships
- DIY: Entrepreneurship & Consultation
- Financial Literacy
- Building a Personal Brand
- Creating & Sustaining a Plan
- Intelligence Gathering & Career Mapping
- Lifelong Learning & The Role of Education
- Grant & Proposal Writing
- The Art of the Interview

The Career Development unit will work in partnership with the Writing & Learning Centre and other departments to emphasize the identification and application of skills gained through the curriculum – such as communication, time management, goal setting, collaboration and teamwork – to the professional environment.

It is important to note that while the formal grouping of these topics constitutes a rather generic approach to professional development, the lens through which they will be discussed is that of the globally aware, accountable and independent creative professional. These topic areas are subject to change based on the changing needs of industry and our students, and will also be informed by other institutional needs/trends.

Career Development will play a key role in the development of OCAD University's business incubator programs developed through the Research Office and will support the development of co-op programs within specific programs.

2. Focus on Helping Students Gain Experience

The imperative for OCAD University to expand its experiential learning opportunities beyond the studio and the classroom is well-articulated in the Academic Plan 2011-16 and was reinforced through these consultations. Through formal service learning and internship placement opportunities, students will gain a variety of real-world experiences to complement their studio and classroom-based learning. The Career Development unit will serve as a relationship broker in this process, linking agencies, employers, and industry partners to faculty and students.

Action Taken:

The initial work in this area undertaken by the Centre for Innovation in Art and Design Education (CIADE) has evolved into the creation of the position of **Program Coordinator, Experiential Learning**. **Angie Griffith** has been appointed to that role and is now coupled with the Career Development unit, though maintaining a strong connection to the CIADE in support of curricular experiential learning.

Angie will help OCAD U reach its goals for **service-learning, internships** and other **industry and community-based learning opportunities** through identifying potential partners, building sustained and reciprocal relationships and linking partners to faculty and students for both curricular, co-curricular or paid opportunities.

With the support of **Zachary Moss**, Assistant to both Financial Aid & Awards and Student Success Programs (the unit in which Career Development is housed), the Career Development and Experiential Learning team now has capacity to actively promote our students, advocating on their behalf – and that of the OCAD U brand – in the ongoing development of partnerships with cultural producers, industry and various associations.

Directions:

The OCAD University **Job Board** will be redeveloped to provide a more dynamic and contemporary interface with a wider range of opportunities, searchable by users, and connected to a rich back-end to catalogue and monitor activity.

The new team has also been charged with development of a new “**OCAD U Agency**” to provide students with temporary employment/volunteer opportunities on campus. The Career Development office will maintain a database of students and will facilitate contact with departments in need of student monitors or ambassadors. This could take the form of design jobs, administrative help, student leadership, research and analysis, or other forms of freelance work. The guiding mentality behind this concept is such that OCAD University is positioned as the client, with our talented students as the service providers.

3. Build on Strengths in the Context of Each Discipline

Students and faculty alike reinforced the need for career development programs to be linked to the context and objectives of the curricular programs. To put it succinctly, a specialized University requires specialized career services. Due the working style and niche interests of our students, it could be said that, for many of our graduates, inventing a job may well be better than getting one. However, we have a responsibility to create messaging that reflects the formal opportunities implicit in each discipline at OCAD U.

Directions:

The Career Development team has been charged with ensuring that programs are developed in **consultation with students, with program chairs and with faculty**. Events, information sessions, networking opportunities and professional practice seminars will be developed in partnership to complement formal programs of study. At the same time, students will be encouraged to actively think in a transdisciplinary fashion, i.e. Art and..., Design and..., and it will further be demonstrated how this kind of thinking can be actualized.

4. Develop Programs and Services for Graduate Students

The needs of the graduate student body at OCAD University are still emerging, but as the Career Development office pilots its new mandate, it is anticipated that many graduate level students would benefit from the same skills development, networking opportunities and experiential learning opportunities which will be offered to senior undergraduate students. Graduate students also have unique needs in securing research opportunities, teaching experience and in preparing for further education at the PhD level.

Direction:

The Career Development unit will undertake **consultation with graduate students** to further assess needs and develop a structure to formally address the requirements. Particularly, this would entail facilitating the connection of students directly with strategic individuals within organizations, institutions and industry.

5. Support the Career Development of Students with Diverse Needs

OCAD University's priority as an institution that values equity and diversity demands that our career development programs provide specialized support to students navigating the transition from school to work. Students with disabilities often face challenges, for example, particularly around issues of disclosure of a disability and in securing accommodations in a work setting. International students looking to stay in Canada and students who speak English as an additional language often need support in understanding the cultural context and social norms around employment search and the interview process. Mature learners often need to reposition experiences in preparation for a career change.

Direction:

In collaboration with the Centre for Students with Disabilities, the International Student Services Office, Writing and Learning Centre and other relevant units, the Career Development unit will develop **resources to meet the specific needs of students who face additional challenges and barriers to success in business and the job market**, in addition to ensuring that opportunities generated are accessible and inclusive.

6. Facilitate Networking and Mentorship

One of the most valuable aspects of an education at OCAD U is the network students develop with each other, with faculty and with professionals in the fields of art and design. The Career Development office will need to help facilitate and foster this kind of invaluable internal networking/relationship building. In order to do so, the emphasis will need to shift away from one-to-one advising and counseling by Career Development staff, and toward a facilitative role, one that connects students to the people who can provide field-specific advice and direction.

Action Taken:

The Career Development office has already built upon the success of previous **Graduate School Fairs** by securing participation from a wider range of institutions and ensuring all graduating students were aware of the opportunity to network and ask questions of representatives.

The office will be charged with developing **additional networking opportunities** through presentations, video and events featuring:

- Alumni Success Stories
- Information Sessions (Specialized Topics)
- Art & Design Career Opportunities
- Networking and mentorship opportunities with gallerists, dealers and professional supports as well as with faculty
- Graduate Schools

7. Enhance Outreach, Information & Resources

While the work of the career services unit grew steadily over the past five years, most of the individuals consulted in the review had relatively low awareness of the services offered. Because services focused on one-to-one advising, profile across campus was relatively low. The new Career Development unit will need to be outward facing, integrated with the OCAD U community and present on multiple platforms, including social media.

Directions:

Staff in Career Development will prepare a **social media strategy** that brings value to students by connecting them to career-relevant resources in media they are accustomed to using.

Career Development will also be compiling a variety of **physical and online resources**, to be housed in the library and on the OCAD U website respectively, which will be kept current and relevant for student, faculty and alumni access. The website in particular will need to adequately reflect the context, tenor and scope of the offerings outlined in this document. Career Development will continue to partner with the **Learning Zone** and other sites to reach out to students and provide opportunities to access resources and interact with Career Development staff.

The **Job Board** will continue to play a pivotal role in providing information on employment and volunteer opportunities. However, a complete redesign is planned such that the site will eventually function as a comprehensive database. In addition to job postings, the myriad relationships with external partners - which have been developed by faculty and administration - will have a home in this new system. Intended to be leveraged by numerous stakeholders with different access levels, this shared knowledge will serve the long-term needs of the institution as a whole.

8. Collaborate and Partner to Build Broad-based Capacity at OCAD U

Career Development is committed to results-oriented services for students and recent alumni, which has ancillary benefits for recruitment, retention and alumni relations. Such services will largely take the form of placements and other meaningful options facilitated by Career Development and Experiential Learning. The development and management of long-term, high profile partnerships with the cultural sector, non-profit sector and industry will be our gateway towards achieving this.

On the basis that our brand can provide value-add, it is envisioned that our partners will also be able to contribute elements of their own networks, resources and information. The long term goal is to develop a systematic method for developing opportunities for our students.

Finally, it cannot be stressed enough the role our faculty can play as both partners themselves and in assisting with opening the door to their contacts.

A WORD OF THANKS

I am grateful for the time and thoughtful input provided to me by all of the staff, faculty and students who met with me in June and July to help me develop a new vision for career development at OCAD U. My appreciation also goes to **Kelly Dickinson, Cassi Wong-Lee, Mary Wilson** and **Candace Ferris** who advised me in the selection of our new Career Development and Experiential Learning staff members.

And my deepest thanks to **Niloofar Inalouei**, Faculty of Art student and Career Services assistant, who not only attended virtually all of the consultation sessions but prepared all of the materials and collated all of our notes and findings.

And finally, I want to acknowledge the tremendous contributions to the OCAD U community of **Thomas Fairbairn**, who, along with Manager **Jennifer Hamilton**, created the Career Services department and provided us with a solid foundation upon which to build.

I welcome feedback on this report and look forward to a continuing dialogue with all stakeholders as we move forward on the directions outlined here.

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