CIWEA Hosts, “Let’s Chat Series,” on Virtual Employee Engagement and Internships in the Covid-19 Era

On October 27 & 29, the California Internship and Work Experience Association (CIWEA) hosted a “Let’s Chat Series” conversation on Virtual Employee Engagement and Internships in the Covid-19 Era. Both chats were heavily attended and discussion flowed.

A series of questions were posed to attendees from CA Community Colleges, 4-year Universities, and Industry Representatives. Many colleges reported that in the beginning of lockdowns, their engagement slowed but as time progressed they began to find ways to encourage engagement opportunities.

Tamara Warren, West Hills College Lemoore, shared her experience facilitating a virtual job fair. The Zoom hosted event featured industry partners and students that were able to engage in breakout rooms. The overall evaluation was positive and included some great engagement opportunities.

Christy Jewell, William Jessup University, shared that while things were quiet for a few months, she was able to begin much more targeted recruiting of larger employers. These recruitment efforts have “produced more fruit than previous career fairs”.

Warren added, “With all of our courses being held online our students are learning to better navigate the virtual world. They are participating more in virtual job fairs and seem to be liking the platform.” Jewell felt that likewise employers are finding the need to reach out virtually to find qualified applicants.

Julie Collier, Los Rios Community College, shared that she hosted a week long virtual event focused on internship information. Industry partners were able to present information and answer questions from students. A discussion continued and many participants felt that Zoom is a great format for human connection without intimidation. Students can be intimidated by industry partners, but the behind-the-screen format seems to be less stressful.

Warren shared that another industry partner engagement opportunity has been what she calls, BizChats. Various partners are given a list of career oriented questions to prepare for the event. Warren serves as the host of the Zoom event and poses questions to the partner. The partner is encouraged to share information about their specific industry. Students register for the event in order to receive the Zoom link. Students are muted and able to ask their questions through the chat function. Tamara reads the questions in order to reduce microphone interruptions. She shared that all BizChats are recorded and shared so they can be embedded in course learning management systems or viewed from the college website.

Co-host Shawn Fawcett, San Diego Mesa College, asked participants about any challenges that they have been facing due to Covid-19. Jewell shared that some of her students had difficulties gaining internships over the summer. She was tasked with getting creative to set up special projects on campus for students to complete the requirement. Co-host Andrew Solis, Mission College, added that it is important that students understand the integrity of working remotely and staying focused.

Brook Oliver, Sierra College and President of CIWEA, shared that she is feeling the need to check in with students more frequently. Oliver added, “When campus is open, students will pop into my office on a regular basis. I have added to my Canvas shell some regularly scheduled check-ins. I want to make sure things are going well and that they know they can come to me if they need assistance.”
Amy Babb, West Hills College Lemoore and Secretary of CIWEA, shared that not a lot has changed with her work experience practices besides the method of checking in with students and industry partners through video conferencing.

Many schools reported that their work experience enrollment numbers were down. Most reported enrollment was half of what it was pre-Covid. Babb reported that she was able to increase her enrollment when the campus career center sent out an email blast to students explaining the course and encouraging them to attend an informational orientation. The email blast was sent out for the full term 16-week course and the short term 9-week course.

Overall, there was no shortage of conversation among the attendees. Best practices and challenges were shared and discussed. Attendees expressed interest in continuing these “Chats” on a monthly basis. If you missed this “Chat” you can view the “Chat” in its entirety through the links below:

10/27/20 Session 1
10/29/20 Session 2