

Transforming Career Services: Insights from Bucknell's STEM Career Coach

With Christa Matlack

Bucknell University

Christa Matlack chats with Kelly Driscoll, the co-founder of Digication. They discuss why reflection and self-awareness matter in our careers. Christa is a Career Coach in STEM at the Center for Career Advancement at Bucknell University. She shares her experiences and the lessons she learned.

She highlights how her diverse background helps students find their way.

Christa's career journey shows the benefits of balancing academics with Co-curricular activities. It highlights how a well-rounded education matters. Her experience also shows the benefits of using ePortfolios.

Christa's Journey: From Student-Athlete to Career Coach

Christa Matlack's journey began just down the road from Bucknell University in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania. She grew up in the area and knew about Bucknell. She hadn't decided on getting a university education but then came recruitment to play soccer.

Despite her busy sports schedule, Christa managed to keep up with her studies. She studied biology and also took classes in studio art and philosophy. She played soccer at Bucknell for all four years, contributing to the team's success in reaching the conference tournament each year.

After graduating from Bucknell, Christa earned a master's degree in biology from Clarion University of Pennsylvania, now PennWest Clarion. Her biology major and studio art and philosophy minor helped her see problems differently.

Being a student-athlete taught her valuable skills. She learned time management, discipline, and teamwork. These skills would later help her in her career.

The Importance of a Liberal Arts Education

Bucknell's liberal arts education was crucial to Christa's development. It provided her with a well-rounded skill set, and her diverse educational background allowed her to approach problems from multiple perspectives.

Her experience fostered both analytical and creative thinking. The liberal arts education helped Christa develop transferable skills such as critical thinking, communication, and resilience. These skills enhanced her academic and athletic performance and equipped her to help students navigate their career paths effectively.

Career Path and Lessons Learned

Upon completing her graduate degree, Christa pursued a greater sense of career direction. She applied for college soccer coaching jobs and biology research positions and got many callbacks for soccer coaching but none for biology.

She added a master's and then moved to a research technician role at Geisinger. However, she realized that advancing in this field required a PhD and felt she needed more time to prepare. This realization led her to a job in product development at First Quality Enterprises, where she spent four years designing tampons. A twist of fate led her to begin her career as a soccer coach at the University of Scranton. There, she found a passion for coaching and helping young athletes.

Christa's career changed again when she became the interim head coach at Penn College in her hometown. She blended this role with her full-time job at First Quality.

This experience reinforced her love for coaching and working with students. However, the demands of full-time coaching and motherhood led her to seek more work-life balance.

"My career path 100 percent set me up for what I'm doing now. My experience of navigating it and also having a similar feeling of not knowing what you want to do. So now I'm teaching them how to navigate it and letting them understand that like your major doesn't have to be what you do at the end of the day for a career. It may not even line up."

Christa Matlack

Career Coach in STEM, Center for Career Advancement, Bucknell University

From Coaching to Career Coaching at Bucknell

Christa's diverse experiences culminated in her current role as a STEM Career Coach at Bucknell University. In 2021, she applied for the position, which nicely matched her STEM background and interests.

Her background in higher education, STEM, and industry experience made her an ideal candidate. In this role, Christa leverages her journey of navigating various career paths to help students find their own. She emphasizes that one's major does not have to dictate one's career path and encourages students to explore what is meaningful to them.

Christa's journey from student-athlete to career coach shows the value of a liberal arts education. It also highlights the importance of being flexible and resilient in career development. Her experiences have prepared her to help students with their career paths.

She shows them how their education and experiences can lead to many rewarding job opportunities. Building portfolios requires considering how learning materials show what students have learned. This high-impact practice promotes critical thinking skills, ownership, and agency.

The Role of ePortfolios in Career Development

Student portfolios have many uses in student development. Our featured guest and Bucknell University mainly use ePortfolios as a high-impact practice for specific skill development. High-impact practices, or HIPs, are active learning methods. They help students learn deeply by increasing their engagement.

As a tool for high-impact learning, ePortfolios help students engage in active learning and deep reflection. That's because ePortfolios go beyond static resumes. It encourages students to curate projects, achievements, and experiences that showcase their skills and growth.

Building portfolios requires thinking about how learning materials show what students have learned. This process helps develop critical thinking skills, ownership, and agency. Christa further discusses how Bucknell uses ePortfolio to support student career journeys.

How Bucknell University Uses Digication's ePortfolio Platform to Support Career Journeys

Bucknell University sees the potential of ePortfolios as a high-impact practice for supporting student exploration and development. Thus, it launched Pathways, designed to introduce students to career opportunities while fostering self-reflection and self-discovery through ePortfolios.

Pathways encourages students to stay informed about career opportunities and evaluate the connection between their academic experiences and their lives beyond the classroom and into their long-term jobs.

The ePortfolio is structured into two key strategies: the My Career Journey template and the four-credit career courses.

"It (The My Career Journey Template) was designed to get them to start thinking that, 'Oh, maybe I don't have to do something that lines up with my major'. Like it doesn't have to be a straight path. It can, you can go straight for a while and then veer off to the left or the right. And you could always circle back and end up figuring out what the right career is."

Christa Matlack

Career Coach in STEM, Center for Career Advancement, Bucknell University

Transforming Career Services: A Holistic Approach

Career services are changing a lot to meet the needs of today's students. Today's students are skilled with technology. They focus on abilities that fit a changing job market. They juggle various commitments and require flexible, personalized career guidance.

Traditional career paths hold less relevance, and mental health and well-being are key considerations. Career services need to change to meet new demands. They should support different work options, such as freelancing and entrepreneurship.

In response to these demands, Bucknell University has strategically shifted its approach from a one-on-one to a one-to-many model. Traditional career services rely heavily on one-on-one meetings, which can be limiting and take time. Now, Bucknell uses different strategies to connect with more students. They aim to reach students in their own time and space.

At Bucknell, this shift involves extensive collaboration across campus. The university still offers one-on-one appointments because they are essential. It also works with different departments and student groups to help more students. This approach includes class visits, collaborations with student groups, and faculty partnerships to integrate career services into coursework.

"It's just like anything else. It's keeping up with the times, right?"

Christa Matlack

Career Coach in STEM, Center for Career Advancement, Bucknell University

Using ePortfolios to Showcase Skills and Experiences

ePortfolios empower students to showcase their skills and experiences dynamically and engagingly, complementing their resumes and providing a more holistic picture to potential employers.

Using the STAR method in ePortfolios allows students to craft compelling narratives that effectively demonstrate their skills and experiences. Students can write detailed stories about situations, tasks, actions, and results. These stories show their problem-solving skills, teamwork, leadership, and other vital abilities.

Selecting the most relevant experiences and skills to showcase is crucial for creating an impactful ePortfolio. Students should go beyond just mentioning their major. They should also share unique experiences that make them stand out.

ePortfolios complement resumes by providing a more holistic view of a candidate. While resumes offer a concise summary of qualifications, ePortfolios allow for a deeper exploration of skills and experiences. Christa highlights techniques to demonstrate the design process and iterations, including pictures of projects, sketches, and final products.

The Future of ePortfolios in Career Services

ePortfolios can impact hiring by making candidates' skills and experiences more accessible and transparent. Christa Matlack points out that ePortfolios have changed education faculties. They help students share their work easily with search committees and potential employers.

This transformation in the education sector presents new opportunities for students in other fields, such as STEM fields like engineering and Veterinary Medicine. By having ePortfolios in job applications, engineering students can show a fuller picture of their skills.

They can highlight projects, designs, and problem-solving methods in ways that regular resumes cannot. This approach improves their visibility and meets the growing need for clear and reliable

proof of skills in many industries.

The future is bright for students trained to match their skill sets with current market demands. As Christa Matlack suggests, ePortfolios are poised to transform how students present themselves to potential employers. Students create a strong story that makes them unique. They reflect on challenges, show their diverse skills, and demonstrate self-awareness.

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