

# Northern Berkshire Adult Education Program

Profile of an Early Adopter of Career Ready 101

## Overview

Thelma Margulies, Director/Coordinator and Robert Bouquet, Career Advisor, Teacher and Technology Coordinator explain on how they used ACT Career Ready 101 at the Northern Berkshire Adult Basic Education Program in North Adams, MA. This is a summary of a telephone interview given in January, 2015.

Describe the setting, participants, programs, and tools used. What was your goal in using the tools?

We always had a computer lab as part of the program and used KET GED® Connections, Workplace Essentials, A+LS, McGraw Hill and other online programs, so it was natural to look for other tools to support college and career readiness. Career Ready 101) was purchased two years ago to use with our adult basic education students in a college and career readiness class. We wanted to use Career Ready 101 as a supplemental program for our college and career readiness class. In addition to college and career planning, we had as a goal to improve learners' work readiness skills.

How were the tools integrated into the program design?

The class met once a week for three hours. The first two hours of class were spent with reading and discussion, and sometimes with guest speakers. In the last hour, students used Career Ready 101 in the computer lab. Sometimes Career Ready 101 was used to stimulate discussion while at other times it was used to follow up on a reading or presentation.

Students began the course by taking the Career Cluster Interest Survey in Career Ready 101. We spent the first weeks talking with students about their interests. Over the course of 3-4 weeks we provided material related to student career interests. The interest survey was a good way to get students thinking about what they wanted to do as well as other possible career pathways that they had not considered.

Students moved through the survey at different speeds, and some who finished early visited college websites (for example, Berkshire Community College) and examined specific programs in depth.

Others searched Google to explore the types of fields they could go into with their particular interests and investigated those career paths. Participation in the interest surveys motivated students to continue with individual research.

When students are looking at websites there needs to be direction and guidance.

By setting up a process and then having the research flow from that, outcomes are more productive. We provided student with handouts that included links to online resources. Students shared results with the class, and participated in discussions.

As part of the overall investigation we also covered the requirements involved to enter the careers students were interested in. This



WORLD EDUCATION

generated discussion about options for continuing their education, e.g. 4-year degree, 2-year degree, technical school, etc.

We invited the coordinator from Project Link (a transition to college program) to speak with students. Parts of the content that students were exposed to in the Career Ready 101 program matched with success skills talked about in the presentation.

#### What outcomes have you observed?

Students enjoyed the Career Ready 101 program because it was interactive and they were able to get results and feedback instantly.

Observing student progress and seeing the reports helped us to pinpoint where they were and the path the class should take. These reports aided lesson planning and assisted us on such things as how we could use online resources in delivering the upcoming lesson.

Even though we did not set up any expectations for independent work, once they were introduced to it, some enjoyed the program so much that they used it outside of class on their own. This sometimes led to further exploration of the information they found and what was available in their area of interest.

We collaborated with Goodwill Industries to work with students on building work habits and work readiness skills. One outcome was that they saw how the curriculum matched with the world of work.

Having Career Ready 101 allows teachers to use modules to stimulate thinking before a guest speaker comes in or as a follow up. The key is the connection between having real-world experiences in the classroom and the curriculum offered in Career Ready 101.

Connecting and integrating the speaker and the Career Ready 101 content enriches the classroom experience.

#### What are the strengths and limitations of the tools?

We look forward to using more of the features this time around. This will be useful when encountering specific needs. For example, there are sections on Applied Technology and Math, which may be useful for students entering fields requiring these skills.

Career Ready 101 is a big program with a lot of tools. That is great, but it could be overwhelming if you do not target its uses. It offers a wide range of resources, but we need to keep in mind that it won't do it all. It is one tool out of many that you need. It's a support piece.

The National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) has a lot of potential. It will be important to see how the employer/business community will recognize and respond to it. We are hesitant at this juncture to have students put in so much preparation for the National Career Readiness Certificate and want to know if employers will acknowledge the certificate and how it will actually help people get a job.

#### Do you have any thoughts about how you might expand the use of the tools?

There are aspects of Career Ready 101 that we would like to gradually roll out. We plan on implementing it in three ways:

1. At orientation for all students coming into the program:  
One idea is to use the online interest



survey to introduce students to the program. Students will have had an introduction to the program at orientation and will be more familiar with it if they begin using the program in advising or classes.

2. Introducing Career Ready 101 to our advisors:  
Have them use parts of the program to interact with the students and help them get comfortable with the technology.
3. Introduction into academics:  
Faculty and students will benefit from the an introduction to the technology so they are more comfortable using it in class. After introducing Career Ready 101 into orientations and students being exposed to it in advising, we will then be using it in our College and Career Readiness class. Parts of Career Ready 101 such as Applied Math or Applied Technology could supplement related classwork.

What sort of training or other assistance would you recommend for staff incorporating the tools into coaching and/or instruction?

We learned to build training gradually and targeted a starting point and built from there. There was a lot of time needed for specific staff members to become familiar with the program, and we need to be mindful about supporting key staff in learning how to use the program.

We felt the easiest way of bringing Career Ready 101 into the classroom was to get the teachers and the students interested in the program together.

What suggestions do you have for other sites getting started?

We have had the experience of trying to integrate quite a number of computer-based tools into the curriculum. Career Ready 101 has many features. From experience, we have found that to be successfully adopted by staff, what works best is a step-by-step process of training and integration. Since Career Ready 101 is so robust, a concern is that there could be an expectation that Career Ready 101 is rolled out and seen as the only remediation tool a program might use to get learners career ready.

Consider opting for webinars or other virtual trainings that will not over burden your program and staff with travel time.

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