PG Cafe Forum – guest speaker series

The project brief

The PG cafe forum speaker series offers postgraduates the opportunity to learn how to better use their research experience and skills, to improve their communication with the non-specialist audience and to develop connections between students from across disciplines. In addition to creating a forum for exchanging ideas, students develop confidence in presenting their work engagingly and in expressing the big-picture context of their work. Students also gain an appreciation of research conducted outside their own speciality.

The aim of Guest Speaker events is to provide personally reflected experiences of Alumni and professionals, in order to:

- Provide doctoral researchers with a platform for thinking ahead for their career path
- Offer ideas about how to use transferrable skills in various ways

Talks cover a variety of topics to broaden views of students about their potential future career by viewing the future from a different angle.

Key impacts

In general, we have two typical groups of students groups. The first group are very young and with a little experience of real jobs. This group is extremely interested in hearing from Alumni that work in big companies and great positions. For this group, even knowing that many companies, in particular business sector might require PhD graduates from other disciplines, is helpful.

- It is an opportunity for knowing about research in different disciplines
- It gives a unique opportunity for practicing presentations to a general audience
- It facilitates networking among students from across the university that rarely happens in other programs.
- It is a place for encouraging students and future researchers in an interdisciplinary approach to their research. In addition to above
- PGRs learn about transferrable skills from a PhD and how the guest speakers used them for their jobs

The other group are mature students who have more experience in the job or even research. This group are interested in getting insights regarding how to link their skills and experience and to their work. The Alumni speakers and their talks about using skills for different career paths (inside academia or outside academia) were very interesting.

Overall, the PG cafe can be a very unique place for taking students out of the comfort zone of their disciplines. Typically discussion continues after the seminars have concluded and new associations, networks and potential collaborative links are formed.
Outcomes observed

Before the beginning of project, the project lead announced the launch of this new event series on the facebook page of PG cafe forum. In the first session, before the first guest speaker’s presentation, the rationale behind the guest speaker events was explained to the audiences and a questionnaire was distributed among students to find out how they think about their future career. From the questionnaire, it was found that many students did not have any clear decisions or expectations about their future career path or they were not sure about employability situation.

In the sessions where guest speakers were from famous companies or positions, there were an increased number of students.

Speakers were targeted from areas where there has been less focus in various workshops and seminars. For example, in the first session Collin Williams from ICOSS came to give a talk about interdisciplinary research, which was very well received and similar talks were requested for the future.

The legacy

Starting the guest speakers series has helped cement and widen knowledge of the PG café brand - various departments now know about it.

For PGRs who attended, the individual legacies are:

• Increased career awareness
• Increased awareness of flexible paths that utilise PhD experience for future research careers

Resources available:

• Website
• Videos
• Presentations

Improving the series

This year the PG Cafe event series were on Thursdays 6-8 pm. At this stage, the project faces some limitations including available time for the presentation and a convenient time for speakers. The guest speakers’ presentations usually take 10-15 minutes, followed by students’ questions for 15 minutes. This short time is a challenge when inviting alumni from a long distance away as there is a need to allow them convenient travelling time after the event ends. There is demand for more than one event per month.

We need more involvement from other departments or professional services to help us with the venue. We also need to have speakers from various discipline backgrounds.

We need to consider the use of new media technologies to deliver this e.g. webinars.

To find out more contact

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1st October 2013