STACK EDUCATION
Scaling Career Readiness Certificates through Program Evaluation
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To evaluate its Clinical Trials Management Intensive Certificate Program, Stack Education (Stack) partnered with WGU Labs (Labs). Stack works with colleges and universities to deliver on-campus and online curriculum preparing students with the credentials, knowledge, and job-ready skills needed to transition into new careers. In partnering with Labs, Stack gained insight into how using learning science strategies in their program design can drive student outcomes and help their company scale quickly.

**How does the CTM certificate program work?** It’s a fully online, 16-week, accelerated program. In addition to completing online course work, students meet for group live sessions via video conference 3 times a week, for 3 hours per session.

**Evaluation Goals**

Stack wanted to evaluate the following areas of the CTM program:
- The overall student experience
- Assessment and feedback
- Opportunities for asynchronous learning
- Who the target learner population should be for the program

They also saw this evaluation as a learning opportunity to gain:
- Research-backed strategies for optimizing student learning
- Techniques to design new programs efficiently and effectively in the future

**How can program evaluation help a company scale?**

Recognizing a skills gap in the healthcare workforce, Stack created a new program: the Clinical Trials Management (CTM) Intensive Certificate Program, which prepares students for clinical research and trial roles such as Clinical Research Assistants, Clinical Research Coordinators, and Clinical Research Associates. In late 2021, Stack wanted to expand their offerings into more colleges and universities across the country. To do this, they needed to ensure their newest program continued to effectively address students’ needs across a larger and more diverse student population. Stack set out to evaluate and prioritize improvements for their CTM program.
Assessing the Clinical Trials Management Program

Stack partnered with WGU Labs Learning Experience Designers (LXDs) to conduct a program evaluation. This collaboration would help Stack develop learning-science based strategies to improve student outcomes, increasing Stack’s credibility with future college and university partners.

PHASE ONE: USER-CENTERED CONTENT REVIEW

To address Stack’s program evaluation goals, LXDs interviewed students and staff and observed CTM live sessions. They then used these perspectives to guide their comprehensive content review, identifying any misalignment between learning goals, feedback, and assessments. This process offered Stack informed insights into what’s going well and what could be improved.

Stack asked the following questions, and found answers through user-centered content review:

- **Should we offer a fully asynchronous CTM program?** Student interviews revealed that the CTM program should not be offered asynchronously—students found benefits in attending weekly live sessions.
- **Who should our learners be?** Students with or without medical backgrounds? Stack learned that students with medical backgrounds perform better, but that offering more asynchronous content (e.g. definitions, videos), scaffolding, and feedback to students without this background could support their success.

PHASE TWO: RECOMMENDATIONS GROUNDED IN LEARNING SCIENCE

LXDs created a report that not only offered design recommendations, but also addressed Stack’s desire to understand strategies for optimizing student learning. In the report, LXDs explain different learning science principles, and then use contextualized examples to illustrate how these principles could be applied to specific program improvements. This report offered Stack clearer understanding on ways to design feedback, learning activities, and assessments that drive student outcomes.

Testimonial

“Working with the WGU Labs team was a wonderful collaboration. After the first meeting, we could tell there was much alignment on values. By focusing on our newest product, we were able to gain the confidence and knowledge needed to improve our CTM program within 2 months. We have now launched our new product, with many of the design recommendations from WGU Labs, in month 3. That is the kind of speed and rigor we need to scale impact widely.”

—Peggy Yu, CEO Stack Education
Program Updates

Stack went live with a new version of the CTM program in Fall 2021, implementing many of the recommendations from the Labs LXD team.

NEW CHANGES

- **Asynchronous Content**: Students will be given key questions that they should be able to discuss and answer in class after completing the videos. These are based on the key learning objectives for each asynchronous class.
- **Scenario-based exercises**: Emulate real-world interactions, providing more “hands-on” challenges & learning opportunities for students to draw on in their new careers, and to reinforce the key learning outcomes of the course.
- **Assessments**: New assessments are being introduced in the form of live, verbal scenario-based roleplays, as well as written scenario-based assignments.
- **Feedback**: Students will receive written feedback on all assignments within 7 days of submission, in addition to their number-grade.

UPCOMING CHANGES

- In Winter 2022, Stack intends to implement more Labs recommendations, including additional pre-assessments, more asynchronous content, and changes to specific modules in the program.