Interview with Rose Xu (Center for Career Opportunities)
Monday, April 27, 2020
Interview by Pamela K. Sari, Ph.D. (Director, AAARCC)
***Edited for clarity***

Pam Sari (PS):
Good afternoon, I am Pam Sari and I direct the Asian American and Asian Resources and cultural center at Purdue University and I hope everyone is doing okay and thank your Rose for being here with me.

Rose Xu (RX):
Thanks for inviting me Pam.

PS:
We have been talking quite a bit this past week. I am just so excited that finally I can be here with you and we can chat a little bit. Yeah Can we start with you and introduce yourself then?

RX:
Sure yeah. I will talk a little bit about myself. My name is Rose. I go by Rose. My original name is Xinrui Xu and it’s hard to pronounce so I go by Rose most of the time. I work at the CCO, Center for Career Opportunities Office as a Career Service Consultant and recently I have been working in the role of International Student specialist in my office specifically and that. In my role I do work with students a lot, in one on one level, directly helping with students and alumni with career concerns regarding exploring some majors or career path or going to talking about job seeking, regarding some specific documents like resume, cover letter, Linked-In profile, or something more specific like job searching strategy. Also help students apply to graduate school and other career related things that we handle in our office. So this time we are partnering with AAARCC to provide this “Catch the Career Coach” virtual office hours so that we hope we can find a way to connect with our Asian community across campus during this very trying time.
PS:
Thank you, That has been something on our mind right? How can we help our campus community think about job search and employment in this difficult time of covid-19. So the first question I would like to ask you is what have been some of the challenges that you hear through your work. What are some challenges related to career and opportunities? I mean we all know how difficult this time is.

RX:
Right, yeah I think at the national level, we all see from the news the unemployment rate is going up you know and businesses can’t run as usual. Something from our side, I have been having student appointments here and there. But one thing we have been seeing students are not really engaging with us as they used to. Compared to, you know, we are looking at our data at the same time last year we had a lot more student appointments and all different kinds of engagement with students at the center and this time has been hard. And with the student interaction that we reach out to, some students talk about their experience and one thing is that it is adjusting, you know relocation, adjusting financial stress, online learning, missing seeing their friends on a daily basis and things like that. It’s just putting a lot of stress and challenges on our students as well as on our offices in thinking about how to help our students and how to help our clients in the way that we need to.

PS:
So responding to that, we talk a little bit before the recording that you have a survey out ...you are having the survey out right now. Maybe you like to tell us a little bit about the survey and maybe students who are listening to this and watching this and they have not taken the survey yet...

RX:
Yeah sure. So we put up a quick survey recently just because we see a decline in student engagement and we’ve also learned from campus partners right around Purdue campus that students feel overwhelmed by emails. We have a-biweekly newsletter that we send out to students called Inside Track and we have seen the click rate is pretty good. Good percentage of students do open the survey... so I think a lot of students are opening our newsletter. However we don’t know- you know- do the student find it helpful or not. Is it the kind of information that they want? And we are also thinking about, you know, since we start moving all of our services to..still happening but virtually, where we have student appointments via Zoom or Webex. We are handling student’s resume requests through email..a lot of these efforts. We are wondering how we can better serve students’ level of motivation so we just started our survey.
We also want to hear from students about their experiences regarding internship or full time job offers: have they been rescinded or are they going to proceed, what the procedure looks like. That is the kind of information we are trying to get from our students.

PS:
Okay wonderful. If you’re listening to this and watching this and if you have gotten the survey in the email but you have not followed up please do. Because this will be important to the CCO and for our whole campus right!

RX:
Yeah and we are hoping to share that result with our campus partners that we are working with in case anybody wants to know more about what the students are thinking about, regarding careers and jobs.

PS:
Yea wonderful..so what is the focus of the CCO right now based on the information in the survey.
the rolling survey that you are currently doing to support students with their career aspirations?

RX:
We don’t have interventions based on the survey results yet, we’re still collecting the data, but something that we’ve been doing since the COVID-19 outbreak and after students went back, start this alternative learning format in March, we’ve been doing something to move all of our services to an online format. So before COVID-19, we were seeing the need of CCO as a centralized career office, meaning we have a very small staff compared to the number of students we have on campus. So we’ve been trying to scale up some of our services, because our one on one appointments, we can only serve so many students all at once, so we’re trying to see if there are better ways to make a bigger impact on our students and provide the service that they need. So we’ve been moving to- you know- providing more on demand resources like smart resume review tool that’s 24/7 available to students. We have a mock-interview platform with all the other services we have, like, kind of career specific major resources like Purdue Roadtrip Nation- what can I do with this major, etc. So maintaining all these services and moving them to online has been a priority.

And also, I don’t work on the employer coordination team specifically so that I don’t know all the measurements they’ve been doing, but I know our team has been reaching out to
employers proactively and also trying to advocate for students who got their internship or full time offer. Full time offers normally got postponed in most industries, unless it is those industries that got hit really hard by the COVID-19. But internship offers have been tricky. Some of them got canceled, some of them got offered an alternative form, some of them got postponed to next year or next fall. So I’ve been trying to coach the students to negotiate and advocate for themselves and sometimes we try to step in and advocate for the students.

And some other things we’ve been doing is really just trying to keep up with what’s happening and networking with other colleagues across the country who are working with career services and HRs. And also we’re developing specific task forces, like very small teams within our center, to make sure we tackle all different kinds of issues that we’re seeing right now. Like thinking about how we could offer more content, make videos available online which traditionally were offered as in-person workshops so we can confer one of our career fairs into a virtual career fair. And I think it’s really about achieving that balance of not overwhelming our students but at the same time, make sure everyone knows we’re here and available to help out all the time. That’s about the general kind of what we’ve been doing.

PS:
And it’s a lot of work to do this. So, just grateful for you and other career consultants at the CCO for doing all of this for us. And I know you are also doing the outreach that you do, that other career consultants are also doing right now, outreaches to cultural centers. So again, if you are watching this or listening to this, I would encourage you to check out our cultural centers’ websites and also subscribe to the newsletters, so you can find some of the outreach activities that the CCO is currently doing with us.

PS:
So, Rose, and this, I’m asking this with the understanding that this is a difficult time and the focus is on everyone’s safety and health. So many of us have to do different work in terms of caring for our family members and our closest friends and families so asking this with that understanding. What are some of the things you would think we all can do whether it’s with students or others, alums, faculty, staff, who are thinking about employment. And I mean employment in general whether it would be with students looking for jobs or us looking for networking with companies for example, what can we do in this time?

RX:
Right. I think as much as this is a very difficult time for the majority of us, and we’re all dealing with all different kinds of stress, challenges, and challenging situations. I think we
all see that silver lining in a lot of people trying to help out each other. So I think that’s a really heartwarming thing that we’re seeing more and more people are helping their neighbors, helping people in their communities, helping out families and friends to stay healthy and stay strong. So one thing that we’re doing to encourage our current students as I think as a career coach on behalf of myself, is really priorities like take care of yourself, give yourself that grace. If you don’t feel like doing too much, just taking care of the basic requires a lot more than it used to be, so taking care of yourself is important, and if you have some energy and time you want to devote to, if you’re a student looking for a job, or an alumni looking for a job, or alumni offering opportunities, there are a few things that could be helpful for everyone who’s thinking about career development. If you are a student, I think definitely getting an internship at this moment is really hard. If you had one before, it wouldn’t work for some employers to honor that in certain ways that offer alternatives or make it virtually or remote internship or offer some stipend but cancel the program, different kinds of things.

Something that you can consider is how can you build or have a meaningful summer experience, say for now, after finals is to think about if there are any micro internships, like smaller projects they can work on. Not necessarily the full scale traditional internship because it’s harder to get these and it’s hard for employers to offer these things, right? But still there are opportunities out there for you to develop some professional skills and also practice using your technical skills you learn from your classes.

And also another thing to consider is to work on your personal branding. So this time is a really good time for you to reflect on what you want, who you are as a professional, and have these been reflected on your professional documents like resumes, redo your cover letter, or really scale up your Linkd-In profile. Make sure it looks good, it’s professional, it represents all the greatest accomplishments that you have. And a third thing that’s really important for job search during COVID-19 and in the near future is networking. Like before, we talked to our students and clients about... it’s really important to network. A lot of jobs are in the hidden market, they do not necessarily put it out there as an advertisement, but this time has to be even more, because networking at this moment, even though it might not lead to an immediate job right at this moment it is still meaningful that you can learn about different, you know, learn about industries or learn about the companies you’re always wondering about. And we’ve heard from colleagues around the country that people are more willing to talk to strangers over Skype, or Zoom, or Webex, all of these platforms. So it’s a really good time to think about reconnecting with some previous family, friends and talk to them about their work experience and also try to make new connections with alumni and other people.
PS:
Wonderful. Thank you-

RX:
Oh wait! Everybody, I got a cat! [out here with us together...]

PS:
We always welcome coworkers! Lovely! So this is the last question for today. I'm wondering if you have any useful resources or links that you would like to share with us.

RX:
So, that's my first thing. That we're advocating for what we are doing at the CCO is that... get on our website. We have all our traditional services also converted to virtual resources. If you're thinking about doing a rebrand of your personal brand, like thinking about tuning up your resume, cover letter, LinkedIn profile, you can definitely use some of our virtual resources and also we're seeing this trend, even before COVID-19, there are a lot of interviews going online if you want to practice interview skills. There are resources there for you. So if you want to have more individualized, personalized advice, career advice, or career counseling and coaching appointments, schedule an appointment with us. You can schedule an appointment with us through boiler connect and if you're alumni, check out our alumni page. You can also reach out to us to schedule appointments. We want to be here to be helpful and I think that only happens when you start to think about engaging with Career Development and try to find us out and we're there for you. We want to provide the best experience possible for you to support your career development. So that's definitely one resource. Go to our website.

And then there are a lot of interesting resources out there and Purdue has this career search portal that has a list with all the views for resources that CCO has been working with different campus partners like the library, different colleges, departments, to create this comprehensive resource guide and I'll provide the links to you, Pam, later. It's also embedded on the website, all that we have. We're known for our website. We have too much overwhelming information, so that's another resource. And then we have a page that lists all our virtual resources available for you as well. So I think that's also a third link that I would recommend. In terms of non-CCO resources, I think there are, if you're following Twitter or LinkedIn, there are hashtags about hiring and you can check out some popular blogs and I'm going to send that link as well. And there are some things about giving job search tips in general about COVID-19.
Also, I know there are a lot of amazing people out there updating everybody about hiring or hiring processes from their company or just reporting their own experience. I would say these resources are really awesome, but we are looking at this kind of spreadsheet about which company’s hiring, which is freezing. Be careful that it’s self-reported so it might not reflect the overall strategy. We hear from a few companies that they hire in certain areas, but they freeze hiring in different areas, so be careful. And also, be careful about job fraudulence. I’ve heard about that too. Fraudulent jobs got spread across, especially during this time. It’s sad that people are still thinking about doing that. So whenever you have something in your mind and have doubts, reach out to us. We’re here; we’re always here to support you and go through this job search process and career development with you.

PS:
Well, thank you, Rose! I’m so glad that we got to talk and, everyone, Rose will be gracious to send us this link and we at the AAARCC would be happy to post this alongside the interview.

RX:
Thank you, Pam. Thank you, everybody. It’s really been great that we got a chance to work with AAARCC during this time to roll out this initiative.

PS:
And I look forward to having you again at our Lunch and Learns, just seeing you in person!

RX:
Yes, of course. I look forward to that a lot!

PS:
Yeah, collaborating together again in person! Until then, stay healthy, Rose! Stay safe!

RX:
You too!