FutureWork Youth Engagement
Road Map to Student Engagement

Employers from across the nation continue to express concern about a deficit of foundational and technical skills among potential employees, particularly in an emerging workforce greatly affected by automation and technology. This younger generation is transitioning with much difficulty into the workplace. If we want to enhance our collective economic prosperity, we must find creative and effective ways for students to gain the skills and knowledge to adapt to economic shifts that will impact future career opportunities, including the relentless introduction of new technologies across the economy.

The Institute for Emerging Issues engaged students across North Carolina during the summer of 2016 to talk about automation, how it is changing the nature of work, and what automation might mean for their chosen careers. This document offers a synthesis of what we learned about how best to engage youth around these topics. An accompanying lesson plan provides a step-by-step illustration of one way to put these lessons into practice.

SUGGESTED CONVERSATION STRATEGIES & TOOLS

1. Make the conversation engaging. Ground the conversation in ideas that are relatable, and find a connection as it relates to their goals, aspirations and future. For example, start the conversation with a question about their experience with automation (e.g., grocery self-checkouts, ATMs, touchpad ordering in restaurants).
2. When possible, use smaller groups. The smaller the number of students included, the better the engagement, as students feel more comfortable sharing their insights and comments.
3. Use videos to bolster comprehension of FutureWork concepts. In an accompanying lesson plan, we’ve included several video links that demonstrate ways in which technological changes are impacting our personal and professional lives.
4. Use technology to support the conversation, i.e., tablets, desktop or laptop computers, and social media platforms. Social media can be used so that students can share their career aspirations.
5. End the conversation by sharing various resources with students (as appropriate for the age group), including resources for planning for college and/or career pathways.
Middle School Students

For middle school students, setting expectations at the beginning of the conversation is a necessity. For example, if you want students engaged:

- State the expectation of audience participation.
- Challenge students to imagine their futures.
- Encourage them to identify their strengths as a student and what this might mean for a career.

Building conversation as early as middle school around academic and career plans is not only important but also advantageous for their future. Ask probing questions like:

- What will the world look like the year you graduate high school?
- How will technology advance? What will be the new technological capabilities?
- How will we communicate?
- What will office or work environments look like?

High School Students

Create a conversation with students about their futures, and have them identify their interests. Ask students to identify their fears, expectations, and misconceptions about college, as well as various pathways available to them when considering future possibilities. Some students may have already decided on a career pathway, but they may be unaware of the longevity of that field or how automation will change what training is needed. For these students, it is important to cite concrete examples of technology and its impact on the world of work. We assume that students at this age are very comfortable with technology, but their understanding is often limited to basic tech tools, like smartphones and computers.

College Students

Engage students in thinking about their career options as it relates to their chosen major. If possible, include insights from a guest presenter working in a career field of interest to the students. Suggest students consider how they think their career will evolve throughout their life, and probe their understanding of the impact of technological evolution. Thought-provoking questions can include:

- What are some of the major technological advances in your field of study?
- How well do your professors incorporate examples of real-world technology in the classroom?
- How can you gain exposure to technology outside the college/university classroom?
Conclusion

It is imperative that we inspire students to think about their futures, their career interests and related plans for additional education after high school, as well as how automation will affect these plans.

Testing of our lesson plan with community college students demonstrated that nearly 70 percent showed improvement in their understanding of program concepts. We believe these outcomes to be much higher with middle and high school students, as they have even less exposure to technology and concepts of automation. We encourage you to supplement this program with your own techniques and tools.