

Annual report ReDI School NRW

Digital Career Program Autumn 2020

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Abstract

ReDI School of Digital Integration has started the new school in the West German region North Rhine-Westphalia. The first pilot “Autumn Semester 2020” kicked off in October and completed in December 2020. In this short report, we cover a brief overview of the community demographics, semester performance, impact, learning and our next steps.

Partnership and resources

The Digital Career Program is funded by Microsoft Philanthropy and Accenture. The office and learning space was provided by Handelsblatt Media Group in Düsseldorf. The Cybersecurity Workshop series was provided by Cisco. Some many other companies and organisations supported us to run the program successfully.

The Digital Career Program in NRW is run by 2.8 times full-time employees (2 x 100 %, 2 x 80%), 4 courses, 70 laptops, 84 Microsoft Office 365 NGO accounts, 2 office desks for employees, and 1 space for learners in Düsseldorf.

Community demographics

In the Autumn Semester 2020, we had 53 students from 18 different nations and 34 % of women and 28 volunteer teachers. More than 80 people participated in the kickoff event in October. Four students presented their outcome at the DemoDay in December in front of 70 audiences.

We required the following skills for students to apply for the Digital Career Program in the ReDI School NRW.

- Basic use of the computer (eg. email, web browser, MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint)
- English B1 level (speaking, listening and writing)
- Availability of using a laptop with an internet connection (ReDI offers free laptop rental and use of a learning space with internet in Düsseldorf)
- From 17 years old (the program is not for kids and youth)

Semester performance

In the semester we hold four courses: HTML and CSS, Web Design Fundamentals, Introduction to Python, Networking Fundamentals.

In August we started to promote the ReDI School in NRW for potential students on our Facebook page. At the same time, we recruited teachers and started planning the course curricula.

In September applicants were screened and students participated in the Cybersecurity Workshop run by Cisco.

In October our first ever semester in NRW was launched. At the kickoff event, we had more than 80 participants. We had notable guests speakers such as Neven Subotic (professional footballer) and Thomas Jarzombek (Economic Affairs Ministry's Commissioner for the Digital Industry and Start-ups in Germany).

Between October and December, we held four courses twice a week in the evenings. In total, we provided 80 classes and 9 career-related workshops with a total of 160 teaching hours in 10 weeks.

In December four students successfully presented their outcomes at the DemoDay in front of 70 audiences. Four represented teachers from the courses were on the jury's board. We invited Hellen Fitsch, Accenture, and Roman Gaida, Mitsubishi Electric, to the panel discussion. The event was moderated by Mirko Lorenz, Deutsche Welle.

Impact

Numbers

73.5% of the students have completed the semester by attending more than 70% of the lessons.

During the semester, 13 students had earned an industry-recognized certification or credential.

After completion of the semester, five students were employed. One of them was employed in tech or tech-enabled role.

Stories

Student A came to Germany with his forced migration background. Before he found the ReDI School NRW, he applied for a scholarship in his country to study in Germany. The area of his study used to be Pharmacology, although his interest was IT. He gained the knowledge and was convinced to change his subject area to IT while attending the Networking Fundamentals course at ReDI School NRW. At the end of the semester, he gave us the following feedback: "thank you very much for the life-changing opportunity. I have a job orientation, have grown my professional network, now understand the

recruiting processes better, and improved my communication skills." As a result, he is now willing to assist teachers next semester while he continues his study in IT.

Student B is an asylum seeker in Germany who currently lives in a refugee camp. Although he had a study background as an IT Infrastructure Engineer in his home country, he did not have any access to extend his career path or learn further in Germany. During the semester he could join the course from his camp with a well-functioning laptop that we provided. We receive more applicants for the next semester through his network.

Learnings and next steps

What have we learned?

Because of the pandemic situation, it was challenging to implement a strategic outreach on our target groups in NRW. As in-person contact is restricted, all promotion events were suspended at migrants' information centres and refugee camps. As a result, the school attracted a large number of students from one specific country, who came to Germany as university student.

We have planned to offer a blended learning experience to our community (partly in class, mainly online). However, the pandemic situation drove us to conduct all of the activities on MS-Teams.

Through this, we found that the online setting works better in NRW, where we can reach a wide range of target audiences in different cities in the metropolitan region of Germany.

It played a significant role in the semester to build up a new ReDI team. Completely new members gathered from different locations, nationalities and expertise. Due to the pandemic situation, we needed to operate the hiring process, onboarding, meetings and workshops all online while everyone relocated into the new city, Düsseldorf.

Consequently, it made a struggle to involve a sufficient number of volunteer teachers. We lacked efficiency and facilitation in the curriculum planning sessions. Although many teaching teams benefitted from existing materials from other ReDI locations, some classes did not establish a system to distribute materials and homework to students.

After the semester started, we launched the activities from the Digital Career Services including career workshops, the mentorship program and the HR summit and the Job Fair across three ReDI locations. It confused some student with the dates and purposes of these activities.

The regular exchange with partners (eg. weekly meetings) helped us largely to align the expectations and build trust. Our main partners Microsoft and Accenture invited keynote speakers to the events and involved teachers and mentors in the program. As some partners have office branches across German cities, it may be efficient for them if the ReDI School offers location-wide volunteer opportunities. For example, Microsoft can announce the ReDI volunteer opportunities of three cities in Germany, so the

employees can choose a course respecting their availability on location, time and technical set-ups (online or in-person etc.)

What changes will we make according to our learnings?

We will keep offering instructor-led online courses for the upcoming semesters to reach our targets across the NRW-wide cities. On the other hand, we will coordinate more in-person ceremonial events such as kickoffs, meet-ups and Demo Days to engage the local community.

To encourage diversity in the community, we have limited students from one nationality to a maximum of 40%.

To accommodate the right target audience, we implement measurement of people with a forced migration background in the application form. Besides, we collaborate closely with regional integration centres in NRW to outreach more refugees.

We encourage colleagues to be more data-driven and document tasks and operations on each role well to conduct hand-over procedures more efficiently. We refine the hiring process to assess team match and skillset more precisely to sustain the team culture.

We schedule the curriculum planning sessions in advance and apply the Design Thinking methodology to the planning process. With this, all teachers attend the sessions to get to know each other, share the common course goals and create coherent curricula.

We align with the Digital Career Services team in terms of scheduling the workshop and event dates and its requirements.

We further research the administrative system of the Jobcentre and the local government in NRW to raise an engagement of the public sector.

Partners and supporters development

We continue negotiating with potential partners to further develop the curricula and services. To provide more efficient communication with them, we share semester reports, course updates and program impacts across all ReDI locations. From next semester we will start implementing industry-recognized certification offers on Microsoft Learn and Cisco Networking Academy. Through the collaboration with the current partners, we will offer German language support for our students to accelerate job market integration. We will offer intermediate and advanced level courses with new volunteer teachers and our corporate partners from the Autumn 2021 semester.

What is our plan for the next 3 years?

By the end of the spring semester of 2023, the number of graduates will be 660, with 50 % of women and 50% of forced migration background.

Conclusion

From the pilot semester, we have learnt many matters to build up a new community and operate the school in a digital space. We are convinced that online learning is the solution for our branch in NRW for the future. To connect and engage the community closely, we will plan more social events online and in-person after the pandemic situation. To make our community diverse and target the right audiences, we will refine the application process and will reach out to refugees' communities in NRW through social media and at local integration centres. To develop our course curricula further, we refine the process of planning sessions and work closely with our partners to involve more teachers and offer industry-recognized certifications for students.