Iman's Short Course Experience

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Iman tells us about her experience studying a short course in Data Skills for Creative Industries at the University of Birmingham. Coming from a background in Law, Iman looked to delve into data analytics, with the aim of gaining an association to creative industries.

Diversifying my skillset

Data analytics is a term and sector of work I never imagined would ever intersect with myself. I would describe myself as an individual driven by curiosity and abstract concepts such as language and analysing the purpose of semantics. This guided me towards choosing an undergraduate degree in Law where I spent most of my time reading, debating, writing and constructing arguments. Where could 'data' ever fit into this world? My limited perspective created a mental block in my ability to work with data in my job. I was intimidated by the idea of rows upon rows of information and trying to make any sense of it.

Once I saw there was a course for 'Data Skills in Creative Industries' I wondered how it was possible for these two ideas that I perceived to be mutually exclusive, to combine and be workable for not only studying but applying to a job role. Fortunately for me, I'm curious to a fault. At the time I felt as though I was drifting through life as many young people do, uncertain of how I wanted to shape my career. Deciding to apply to this skills bootcamp was a challenge I needed for myself to see if it could improve my understanding of the world.

My experience

On my first induction day, I entered the classroom and was pleasantly surprised to be met with a room of distinct characters. As a black woman, there was the fear in the back of my mind that I would be an outlier and feel less than comfortable. There was an image of a room full of people who met the "brogrammer" stereotype. This represents male coders as anti-social and hyper-competitive, imagine Mark Zuckerberg's depiction in the 'Social Network.' I was pleasantly surprised to meet individuals who came from various educational backgrounds, religions, ethnic heritage, social classes and most importantly who like me were skeptical about how data could support their career journey but inquisitive and open enough to try and find out.

The course itself was fast-paced and dynamic. We engaged with so many concepts including;

mathematical principles, practical data skills using R and Python, data visualisation, and the legal uses of data. Most significantly, widening our perspective to understand data analysis as a toolbox that can help to equip an individual to communicate effectively with others. It was very helpful having teachers with various backgrounds, including languages, to help us understand the different ways in which data can be used. Teachers who came from a background of teaching language were the ones who truly breathed life into the concept of data analysis for me. Rather than looking at data skills through the traditional lens as a purely mathematical practice, I began to see how data can help you interpret information and tell a story accordingly.

As part of the assessment criteria, we were encouraged to pick a topic that ignites passion either in your field of work, study or general interest in life and allows you to make a unique contribution to the field. Having the opportunity to work on this proposal which was ultimately a thesis felt like a perfect culmination of the learning journey made. The perceived weaknesses you find in a particular area, present challenges for exploration and deconstruction, and the analysis becomes an intellectual pursuit, by which I can synthesize a response and communicate with others my findings.

There is something surprisingly communal about this process as your work is not purely for informative purposes, but also engaging and persuasive. I feel very grateful that this boot camp was in person rather than online. The campus was a beneficial environment for stimulating ideas as I connected with so many members of my cohort who helped me and with whom I in turn could test my knowledge and engage in debate. These are connections that almost half a year later, I am still in contact with, sharing ideas and celebrating wins.

Life after learning

After completing the course, I was energized and fueled with motivation to continue practicing my data skills whether that was in measuring outcomes to make data-driven conclusions and decisions or using it to aid support my arguments. In my current role as the 'Collections Management Trainee' at the Science Museum, there has been some interesting data insights I was able to make and use to support my team. This imbued me with a greater sense of confidence and competency in my job role and I saw an improvement in my job satisfaction. The greatest outcome was my ability to successfully apply for a job within the sector which allowed me to gain more responsibility.

Applying to the Data Skills Bootcamp was the most empowering decision I could have made for my career. Before, during and after the time I spent at this course with the University of Birmingham I was provided with excellent support mechanisms, clear communication and a workable plan. This helped me overcome the challenges that come with doubting my abilities and navigating a period that tested the limits of my personal growth. Over time I spent on campus I can definitively say I

became a better person.

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