

Industry Action Plan: A Three-Phase AI Career Coaching System

Jason Donati

Course Subject:	Media Arts Degree senior capstone project
Student Level:	Senior undergraduate students in Animation and Game Art
Number of Students:	8
Developed by:	Jason Donati, College of Art, Media, & Design Teaching Professor Program Coordinator for Animation in the Department of Art + Design

What Students Did

Students in ARTD 4530 used a custom AI tool (Industry Previs Studio)--built in Claude--as a semester-long career coaching partner to develop their Industry Action Plan (IAP). Working across three sequential phases over eleven weeks, students moved from self-discovery through industry research to strategic career planning, with the AI's role and capabilities shifting at each stage:

1. Phase 1 (Discovery - students engaged in exploratory conversations to help the tool understand their creative identities, goals, and constraints.
2. Phase 2 (Research) - students conducted industry research, which included analyzing job postings, tracing career paths, and studying professional portfolios, with the AI providing multi-perspective feedback on their findings.
3. Phase 3 (Planning) - students used the tool to conduct gap analyses and build 6-month and 2-year action plans.

Throughout the process, students maintained complete agency, with the AI as a thinking partner rather than a content generator. Students conducted their own research, wrote their own plans, and made all decisions themselves.

Purpose

Because animation and game industry careers are highly competitive and highly specific, generic career advice rarely serves students well. The Industry Previs Studio tool was designed

to provide a level of personalized guidance that would normally require extensive one-on-one mentorship, which is not scalable in a classroom setting. The goal was to give each student a dedicated thinking partner that knew their individual creative interests, career direction, and constraints, and could help them conduct deeper research and develop more realistic plans than they could achieve alone.

A secondary goal was to build AI literacy through meaningful, extended engagement, modeling appropriate AI use in a professional context and helping students experience AI as a thinking partner rather than a content generator.

Assessment

The Industry Action Plan was due at the end of week 13 and was evaluated against an existing rubric on quality of research, depth of analysis, honesty of self-assessment, and realism and specificity of the action plan.

Pre- and post-surveys were conducted to assess other outcomes, including changes in career clarity, research confidence, and job search preparedness.

To understand the student experience, an AI-powered survey tool that was embedded in the system was leveraged to collect structured student feedback at the end of each phase. Survey participation was 100% (8 of 8) in Phase 1 and 63% (5 of 8) in Phases 2 and 3. Four of the five respondents in Phase 3 reported increased career readiness, and 100% of respondents across all phases said they would recommend the IAP to future students.

Faculty Reflections

This was the first full implementation of the IAP as a three-phase, AI-powered career coaching system, and the results exceeded my expectations for a first run. Every student completed all three phases and every student in this high-pressure capstone semester said they would recommend the experience to future students, which tells me the tool was effective.

The Discovery phase was consistently rated the most valuable phase. Students described it as clarifying, grounding, and personally relevant in a way that traditional career planning assignments rarely achieve. Several noted it helped them articulate things about their goals and anxieties that they hadn't been able to put into words before. Students also indicated they left with a clearer picture of where they are, where they want to go, and what specifically needs to change, which is exactly what this system was designed to accomplish.

Student feedback pointed to needs for a few improvements, which I am incorporating. One change is an adjustment to the tone to sound more supportive rather than "judgy." Another change is to have the system evaluate students against entry-level expectations rather than fully professional standards, which will make the self-assessment feel more motivating and accurate. Additional future modifications include the addition of a structured portfolio input template to work around the AI's current inability to access (and evaluate) linked visual work..

There is much room for future system enhancements based on student suggestions, such as adaptive pacing based on planning style, differentiated entry pathways for students at different stages of career clarity, and optional check-in touchpoints with me at key moments in the arc. I

also want to explore placing a version of the IAP in an earlier semester course, so students can engage with it before the pressure of capstone work arrives.

Step-by-Step Directions

Step	Instructions
Step 1	PHASE 1 — DISCOVERY (Weeks 1–4) Access the Industry Previs Studio through your Northeastern Claude account. When you open the tool, it will introduce itself and explain the three-phase process. Begin your first conversation.
Step 2	Engage in exploratory conversations about your creative work, interests, influences, career direction, values, and constraints. There are no wrong answers here — the goal is to help the tool understand who you are so it can provide personalized guidance throughout the semester. Return for multiple conversations over the three weeks as your thinking develops.
Step 3	Before Week 4, complete your Phase 1 save using the provided Career Discovery Document template. This captures the key insights from your Discovery conversations and carries them forward into Phase 2. Do not skip this step — it maintains continuity across the three phases.
Step 4	PHASE 2 — RESEARCH PARTNER (Weeks 4–8) When Part A of the Industry Action Plan is assigned, the tool shifts to Research Partner mode. Begin by discussing your research approach with the tool. It will help you identify where to look and what to look for, but the research itself is yours to conduct.
Step 5	Conduct industry research across four areas: landscape analysis (studios, companies, freelance markets), job postings and role requirements, salary data and geographic trends, and career path patterns. Collect a minimum of five job postings relevant to your target role and upload them to the tool for multi-perspective analysis — the tool will respond from HR, hiring manager, and senior creative viewpoints to help you see patterns you might otherwise miss.
Step 6	Conduct portfolio forensics. Trace credits on productions you admire to find working professionals in your target role. Study their portfolios: what do they show, how do they frame their work, what seems to matter at different career stages? Upload portfolio examples to the tool for analysis and pattern identification.

Step 7	Complete your Phase 2 save capturing your research insights, then submit Part A: Industry Research and Digital Forensics (due Week 8).
Step 8	PHASE 3 — PLANNING COACH (Weeks 8–13) The tool shifts to Planning Coach mode, building on everything established in Phases 1 and 2. Begin by working with the tool to conduct an honest self-assessment: where are you now relative to the industry requirements you identified in Phase 2? Be specific and be honest — the gap analysis is only useful if it reflects your actual current state.
Step 9	Identify the gaps between your current abilities and the entry-level requirements for your target role. Use the tool to pressure-test your thinking: Does your self-assessment match what the research shows? Are there gaps you are minimizing or overlooking?
Step 10	Develop your 6-month action plan with specific tasks, timelines, and measurable milestones. Then develop your 2-year action plan with longer-term goals. Submit your Part B draft for review in Week 10, refine based on feedback and continued conversation with the tool, and complete your Phase 3 save.
Step 11	Submit your Final Industry Action Plan by Week 13. NOTE: Throughout all three phases, the tool is a thinking partner, not a content generator. Conduct your own research, write your own plans, and make all decisions yourself. Bring questions, uncertainties, and uploaded materials to enrich conversations — the more you put in, the more you get out.