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## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables the Business Studies Departments of Maine's Community Colleges Provide its Stakeholders?

Jack Buckley  
*University of Southern Maine*

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**Can curriculum changes improve the deliverables the Business Studies  
Departments of Maine's Community Colleges provide its stakeholders?**

**A Thesis/Project**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Arts for the University of Southern Maine**

**Master's Degree in Leadership Studies**

**By**

**Jack Buckley**

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE

08/10/2012

We hereby recommend that the thesis of **Jack Buckley** entitled *Can curriculum changes improve the deliverables the Business Studies Departments of Maine's Community Colleges provide its stakeholders? A Thesis/Project* be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree in Leadership Studies.

\_\_\_\_\_ Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_ Reader

\_\_\_\_\_ Director

Accepted

\_\_\_\_\_

Dean, Lewiston-Auburn College

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## **Acknowledgement**

In 1989 I was halfway through an MBA degree at the University of Dallas. In December of that year General Motors transferred me from Dallas to Los Angeles. Texas credits aren't too readily accepted by California schools and, as I also soon discovered, the demands of this new position, and all subsequent positions, would preclude any further scholastic pursuits.

In 2000 I retired from GM and in 2005 I began instructing at Central Maine Community College. The first course I taught was Interpersonal Skills for Leadership. While I had led teams at GM, my feeling was that practical knowledge coupled with theoretical knowledge would help me become a better instructor for my students. However, beginning a Master's Degree this late in life did cause a little trepidation. A chance news item about the University of Southern Maine's Office for Prior Learning Assessment, gave me the idea, maybe one is never too old to learn.

Consequently, my first thank you goes to Joyce Lapping, Director of the Prior Learning Center for helping begin this endeavor. Secondly, my thanks to my advisor, Betty Robinson. Betty was not only the professor in the first class I had attended in sixteen years, she was also my advisor. She kept me on track, gave me great advice all along the way, and was never afraid to tell it like it was. I would also like to thank the other USM L/A professors I have worked with in the Leadership Studies Department, Chair, Tara Coste, Marvin Drucker, Liz Turesky.

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A singular acknowledgement goes to an old friend, Bob Holzworth. Bob is a former supervisor of mine at GM. At a time in corporate America when there were few authentic leaders and a wealth of toxic pretenders, he was the first person to demonstrate on a daily basis the difference between a leader and just another manager.

Lastly...and most importantly, I would like to thank my wife for all of her support and encouragement...basically for putting up with me through this endeavor.



## **Abstract**

Recent seminars and meetings between state officials and business leaders have established that a perceived disconnect exists between the skill's, knowledge, and abilities needed by their enterprises and the skill's, knowledge, and abilities being taught by the state's educational systems. The Maine Community College System's vision states that the system answers to a number of stakeholders by providing a two year comprehensive, affordable, and accessible college education..." dedicated to building a quality workforce for Maine" (Maine Community College, n.d.). While the MCCS is a relatively new institution, this suggests that the community college arena is the most logical starting place for investigating and identifying these disconnects. Through interviews with students and businesses, surveys for both groups of stakeholders were developed. The resulting survey data was used to ascertain any disconnects and suggest possible venues for determining if curriculum changes would address them. Suggestions for future directions are offered.

## Project

### Introduction

The issue of academia's ability or willingness to provide the competencies and skills to their students that will provide them with the deliverables that business deems necessary for success has been around for some time. The current economic debacle has geometrically increased the scrutiny of this disconnect. When Maine's Governor Paul LePage hosted several Maine employers from across the spectrum of Maine industries to address the problem of jobs in Maine, he was told that Mainers lacked the necessary skills to be hired (Russel, 2011, p.1).

There are, therefore, perceived disconnects between what stakeholders believe is needed for today's workplace and what they feel is being delivered by our educational systems. Joe Kumiszczka, Executive Director of the Maine Software Developers Association, stated in a September 2000 interview, that the number of high- technology companies in Maine more than doubled from 1995-2000. The companies involved generated about \$3 billion in revenues. When asked whether Maine colleges and universities are preparing their students well for jobs in the industry, he replied, "the universities and colleges would say 'yes,' but the business community would say 'no'" (Murphy, 2000, p. 1C). Recent business forums indicate that the situation has not improved. The Maine educational system needs to become more responsive to the needs of its major stakeholders. This research project will attempt to determine if, why, and where these disconnects exist in the community college environment. These disconnects will then be linked to the specific skills, knowledge and abilities each of these stakeholder groups feels is not being addressed. Identification of the competency disconnects between the current state of

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students readiness for their future and the desired state of readiness could then be addressed through curriculum changes.

Given the Mission of the Maine Community College System, *“The basic mission of the Maine Community College System is to provide associate degree, diploma and certificate programs directed at the educational, occupational and technical needs of the State's citizens and the workforce needs of the State's employers. The primary goals of...the Maine Community College System are to create an educated, skilled and adaptable labor force which is responsive to the changing needs of the economy of the State and to promote local, regional and statewide economic development”* (Maine Community College, n.d.), Maine's community colleges appear to be in a unique position to provide the driving force for eliminating these disconnects once they have been identified...for the businesses, for the students who want skills now for employment, and for the students who wish to use the various transfer agreements to further their education.

### **Research Question**

Can curriculum changes improve the deliverables the Business Studies Departments of Maine's Community Colleges provide their stakeholders?

Interim questions that need addressing prior to determining the answer to this question will entail learning if we can find out and specify what skills and knowledge Maine employers need new employees to have? Can Maine Community Colleges provide those skills and knowledge for their students that Maine employers think they need in their new employees? Can Maine Community Colleges negotiate more effective transfer agreements with universities (especially Maine state universities) that will enhance and streamline the journeys of those community

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college students desiring to further their education into four year and master's degree programs?

### **Sub problems**

The first sub problem is to identify the stakeholders and their needs.

The second sub problem is to determine, through research, if such disconnects exist.

The third sub problems concerns whether these identified disconnects can be addressed through curricula changes.

The fourth sub problem is to determine if such changes are possible, and what the effects of such changes would be.

The fifth sub problem, and perhaps the most difficult, is to get buy-in from the stakeholders for implementing the necessary changes.

### **Hypothesis**

The curriculum of educational systems can be modified through business process reengineering principles to manipulate the educational platforms available to students based on *their* needs. As the people of the State of Maine have varying educational needs, they need a process that can make available the most current skills, knowledge and abilities so that they can succeed as graduates. This curriculum development will enable Mainers to pursue any of the myriad of different educational paths they choose for their future career development and satisfy both academic and business stakeholders' needs.

### **Delimitations**

As the scope of this project could include many disciplines and multiple stakeholders, this study will be limited to one community college, one department of

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that college, four universities, and a representative group of surrounding businesses in the central Maine area. Central Maine Community College, the Business Department faculty and its students will serve as the core for the project. In addition to local businesses, other entities contacted will include the University of Southern Maine and the University of Maine, Orono, St. Joseph's College, and Southern New Hampshire University.

### **Stakeholders**

The primary stakeholders are identified as businesses in Maine, community college students opting for entering the workforce following their two year diploma, students currently in the workforce and seeking to enhance their skills, students desiring to further their academic careers at a four year university, and as secondary stakeholder, those four year universities in Maine to which students aspire.

### **Definition of Terms**

The term business refers to local, for profit and nonprofit businesses including organizations and agencies, with access to the Central Maine Community College campus.

Students will be Business Majors at CMCC.

Faculty is the members of the Business Department of CMCC.

Business Process Reengineering is an organizational change process that fundamentally rethinks and redesigns business processes to achieve needed improvements.

### Abbreviations

CMCC is Central Maine Community College.

SKA's are skills, knowledge and abilities identified by the literature, interviews and surveys.

USM is the University of Southern Maine.

UMO is the Orono campus of the University of Maine.

UMS is the University of Maine System.

MCCS is the Maine Community College System

SNHU is Southern New Hampshire University

### Assumptions

The first assumption is that the recognition of the need for change is shared by the stakeholders.

The second assumption requires that the hierarchy of CMCC be open to curriculum changes that address the needs of students and community.

The third assumption is that it is possible to teach the perceived needed ska's and that students' want and can learn these ska's such that they can meet the needs of employers.

The fourth assumption is that the Chair and Faculty of the CMCC Business Department are willing to share ongoing feedback with this writer.

The fifth assumption is that businesses understand the disconnects between the ska's their employee's need and what is currently available.

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The sixth assumption is that the two accredited business schools in the state university system, USM and UMO, are willing to work with the Community College System in preparing Maine students with the skills, knowledge and abilities to compete in our ever more complex global economy.

### Literature Review

In researching this disconnect, it became very evident that it has been an ongoing problem and Maine is not alone in attempting to address the issue. Articles such as *Meeting the Needs of Global Companies Through Improved International Business Curriculum* (Milhauser, & Rahschulte, 2010) and *What employers really, really want* (Kingston, 2009) indicate the worldwide scope of the discussion. While LePage's focus is on "skill-heavy jobs," these jobs need the presence of the requisite skilled leader/managers. Personal observations since my return to Maine have revealed that such leader/managers are few and far between in our state. Prior to the advent of the community college system, business management as a skill set was missing from any venue except universities. The result is that few Maine managers have had the luxury of a university education and many were put into managerial positions with no training or counseling. They were good at what they did and were consequently made a manager, but in management one no longer "does", one must plan, organize, control and lead others that now "do". While specific expertise is valuable, the skills and competencies a manager requires are far more than just knowledge of the business they are in.

The literature that this paper relies heavily on is based on that research which offers the most reasonable approximation of a facilitating study structure applicable to the problem statement. For example, while there appears to be a dearth of research on community colleges, there is a myriad of studies on MBA programs. As CMCC

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students seek two avenues through the business department, either a solid two year degree for immediate help in finding and succeeding in Maine's business environment or a solid two year preparation for progressing to a final bachelors or masters degree at an AACSB school such as USM or UMO, development of a community college platform from both four year colleges and MBA programs appears a natural avenue of synthesis. This adaptation could yield two separate curricula. Further, as there is considerable information regarding Maine's K-12 education, the shortfalls there could be explored in relation to CMCC's efforts to mitigate them through remedial programs, in this case perhaps slanted toward the workplace e.g. remedial reading and writing courses followed by Eng 101 leading into Business Communications as well as courses that deal with quantitative skills and perhaps skills that relate to technology.

Curricular change is also discussed in several journal articles (Natale & Sora, 2009), (Schoemaker, 2008) and (Milan, 2009). Competencies and skills are addressed by several others (Abraham & Karns, 2009), (David, David, & David, 2011) and (Galloway & Richards-Wilson, 2006). Many of the surveys and interview formats offer opportunities for adaptation. Organizing interviews and surveys to include relationships between curricula currently available and competencies and skills currently demanded might allow for some surprisingly insightful input. This could be especially true when these issues are raised in connection with one of the primary problems discerned in the literature, that of relative importance. “Although behavioral competencies are essential to managerial work in general, they are not equivalent in their importance to fulfilling the responsibilities associated with management” (Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009, p. 210). Dierdorff and Rubin in a 2006 article also found that the behavioral competencies of *managing decision-making*



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*processes* and *managing human capital* had significantly higher mean importance than all other behavioral competency requirements, “real world managers indicate that managing decision making and human capital are the most salient behavioral competencies needed to fulfill their managerial roles, whereas managing logistics and technology, while essential, are the least salient” (p. 211).

When comparing percentages of competency coverage to this benchmark, there appears to be a considerable mismatch between the levels of importance incumbent managers assign to these competencies and the degree to which these same competencies are covered by the essential courses that are required on average by MBA programs.

The situation's significance is shown by various comments:

*"Institutions of higher education are scrambling to make program changes to improve the quality of learning and assessment of learning in the face of pressure from multiple constituencies"*(Weldy & Turnipseed, 2010, p.268).

*"Nearly 21 years ago, however, Porter and McKibbin (1988) discussed that business school graduates are not considered to be well prepared for employment in business following undergraduate school education. In the ensuing years, however, researchers have echoed this contention..."* (Abraham & Karns, 2009, p.350).

The complexity of the problem lies in both the natures of the two major players, business and academia and the nature of business today and is best presented by Schoemaker with the following quote,

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*"On one hand, universities must hold true to the time-honored tradition of scholarship and the associated principles of scientific inquiry. On the other hand, whatever universities teach and explore within their professional schools must be relevant to the clinical art that defines that profession at the time. Unlike such professions as law, medicine, engineering, or architecture, business has yet to develop a unifying professional identity or a standard for professional certification..." (Schoemaker, 2008, p. 120).*

There are accrediting groups that created a model or guides for what business schools should be doing and how they should operate. And within business there are clearer identities for people in accounting. But for general business this comment does hold true.

Several specific and highly relevant areas of disconnect were also found in the literature. These areas were business communication skills (Newberry & Conrad) and specifically oral communication (Gray, 2010), conflict management (Lang, 2009), experienced based learning (Graen & Hui, 2006), lean management (Fliedner & Mathieson, 2009), service learning (Steiner & Watson, 2006) and lack of customer focus (Abraham and Karnes, 2000, p. 352).

Newberry & Conrad stated in their article, *Identification of Outcome Based Communication Skills*, "Despite academia's considerable efforts there remains a gap in communication skills delivered by new graduates versus those desired by business practitioners"(Newberry & Conrad, 2010, p.28). Their work centered on the theory that the gap is caused by business practitioners seeking outcome based skills, while academia teaches basic fundamentals of communications. Through an exhaustive literature review, the authors identified 24 outcome based

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communication skills most needed in business organizations. These 24 skills were divided into three basic categories: "organizational communication skills," "leadership communication skills," and "interpersonal communication skills". These categories are described as:

### *"Business Communications Construct Definitions:*

*1. Organizational Communication Skills - are the communication and information processes that allow the organization to interact with the larger, external environment and the units that they are composed of permitting coordination among people and organized behavior*

*2. Leadership Communication Skills - are the skills used to communicate the vision and values of the organization employing communication methods including rich channels of communication, stories, informality, metaphors, openness, and strategic dialogue to create trusting and supportive relationships with, and among, colleagues and staff*

*3. Interpersonal Communication Skills - are a level of communication where two or more people exchange thoughts in face-to-face verbal and non verbal contexts by sharing information, providing feedback, or simply maintaining a social relationship" (p.29).*

In a review of over 200 articles, the authors used only the skills most frequently cited in these articles. They are as follows:

### *"Organizational Communication Skills:*

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*1. Initiating open discussion - the ability to create the act of discussion and dialogue exploring opposition by individuals who advocate their positions and convince others to adopt those positions through logic, argument, or debate.*

*2. Resolving conflict - the ability to employ a range of processes aimed at alleviating or eliminating sources of conflict through processes including negotiation, mediation, and diplomacy.*

*3. Creating information networks - the ability to design and institute formal or informal systems for managing the flow of information and providing person-to-person relationships through which information flows.*

*4. Teaching important skills - the ability to provide skill remediation to employees in areas such as job performance, technical competency, interpersonal communication, and problem solving.*

*5. Using information technology - the ability to employ equipment (usually computers) that enables managers and staff to access ongoing and relevant company information including reports, planning data, and employee and customer feedback.*

*6. Providing performance feedback - the ability to assess employee performance and provide performance feedback as a review of the performance of employees, which helps to set targets or future performance targets.*

*7. Negotiating - the ability to produce an agreement upon courses of action, to bargain for individual or collective advantage, or to craft outcomes to satisfy various interests.*

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8. *Writing business correspondence - the ability to produce written communication used in business including letters, memos, bulletins, and reports.*

9. *Making convincing presentations - the ability to provide informal or formal talks delivered to decision making groups to convey information or make a point.*

### *Leadership Communication Skills*

1. *Arousing enthusiasm - the ability to inspire a whole-hearted devotion to an ideal cause, study or pursuit, or merely being visibly excited about what one's doing.*

2. *Being a change catalyst - the ability to initiate change through provision of information to employees that will convince them of why a change is necessary and will compel them to embrace it.*

3. *Creating group synergy - the ability to compel organizational members to interact and produce a joint effect that is greater than the sum of the members acting alone.*

4. *Building team bonds - the ability to establish team cohesiveness, which is the extent to which members stick together and remain united in the pursuit of a common goal.*

5. *Expressing encouragement - the ability to provide support and confidence raising or increasing one's self-esteem and confidence to make choices and decisions.*

6. *Providing motivation - the ability to move a person or group toward desired goals by increasing their willingness to exert effort and energy to achieve the goals.*

7. *Being persuasive - the ability to guide people toward the adoption of an idea, attitude, or action by rational, and logical means relying on appeals rather than coercion.*

8. *Building optimism - the ability to create a disposition or tendency to look on the more favorable side of events or conditions and to expect the most favorable outcome despite obstacles and setback” (pages 29-31).*

The ability to communicate is essential to any organization's survival. From personal experience, there is a lack of basic reading, writing, and speaking skills in a significant number of the students I see every semester. It should also be pointed out that this situation exists in students of all ages, however, it appears more frequently in younger students. As Newberry & Conrad state, “The skills sets proposed in this review could be useful in focusing course materials on outcome based communication skills demanded by business” (p.31). Gray also pointed out similar problems with graduating accountants. He stated that one limit of this approach is that graduates’ perceptions do not necessarily match the perceptions of accountancy employers wishing to hire new graduates. His study also found that students reported a significant skill deficiency in the specific areas of “interpersonal skills” and “oral expression (Gray, 2010, p.43).

Interpersonal communications skills are also essential in conflict resolution. Conflict is a normal facet of any human interpersonal relationship. In business team environments, destructive conflict impairs performance and costs money. Team leaders and team members all need to understand the costs and be involved as a team to minimize such conflict with dispatch. Constructive conflict, on the other hand, tends to enhance team performance.

“Regardless of the specific definition of conflict applied, firms have increasingly moved from efforts to eliminate conflict to effectively managing conflict, thereby acknowledging that conflict is simply an expected (and sometimes even desirable)

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byproduct of organizational processes” (Hignite et al., 2002). As a result, acquiring people-related skills such as negotiation, conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, and problem resolution is critical for all levels of an organization” (Lang, 2009 p. 240).

The growing complexity of organizations, use of teams, group decision making, increasing ethnic and generational diversity, and globalization are all contributors to the fact that the time managers spend on conflict resolution has doubled to nearly 20%. Management, however, cannot be solely responsible for dealing with this problem. Employees should also share the burden. “Employees need conflict management skills to manage their internal functioning, make decisions, and work effectively in the ever increasing team environment of today’s organizations” (p. 240). The author’s conclusions stated, “Because most college graduates work in one form of an organization or another, it is essential that conflict management training be emphasized, especially in business programs. There is sufficient evidence to require, at a minimum, conflict resolution training for all business school students and, more appropriately, for all undergraduate students. Completion of a required conflict resolution course should result in better group and team performance, improving management effectiveness for graduates as they move into organizations abundant in conflict” (p.244).

Golman and Boyatzis brought the inherent power of emotional Intelligence and its effect on people forward in their 2008 article, *Social Intelligence and the Biology of Leadership*. “The salient discovery is that certain things leaders do - specifically, exhibit empathy and become attuned to others' moods - literally affect both their own brain chemistry and that of their followers. Indeed, researchers have found that the leader-follower dynamic is not a case of two (or more) independent brains

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reacting consciously or unconsciously to each other. Rather, the individual minds become, in a sense, fused into a single system. We believe that great leaders are those whose behavior powerfully leverages the system of brain interconnectedness” (p.76). They further suggested in another article a year later, "Hard-bitten executives may consider it absurdly indulgent and financially untenable to concern themselves with such theories in a world where bottom-line performance is the yardstick of success. But as new ways of scientifically measuring human development start to bear out these theories and link them directly with performance, the so-called soft side of business begins to look not so soft after all” (p.30).

Steven Eric Abraham and Lanny A. Karns of State University of New York at Oswego, New York published *Do Business Schools Value the Competencies That Businesses Value* in the *Journal of Education for Business* in 2009. The authors stated their purpose as using survey research, “to determine the congruence among the competencies that businesses identify as being indicative of successful managers, the competencies that business schools identify as being indicative of successful graduates and the competencies that are emphasized in business school curricula” (p. 350). The basic research question the authors wanted to address could be best paraphrased as; do business schools provide the emphasis in their curricula that business seeks in new employees? Abraham and Karns utilized fifteen relevant articles to determine whether business schools are providing their students with the necessary skills to be productive in business after graduation. The writers developed two surveys to form the basis for their findings. They first surveyed businesses to determine the skills they sought in employees and then surveyed business schools to determine the emphasis they placed on the same competencies and skills. The context of their work involved representatives of both business and academia.



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The methodology is best expressed in the authors' Research questions:

"*RQ1*: Do business schools identify the same competencies as describing "the highly successful graduate of the undergraduate program(s) at [the] school" that businesses identify to describe "the highly successful manager/executive?" *RQ2*: Do business schools emphasize the same competencies in their undergraduate programs that businesses identify as describing "the highly successful manager/executive?" *RQ3*: Are business schools emphasizing the same competencies in their undergraduate programs that they identify as describing "the highly successful graduate of the undergraduate program(s) at [the] school?" (p. 350).

While at first glance questions 2 and 3 appear redundant, *RQ2* focuses on highly successful manager/executives and *RQ3* focusses on highly successful students. Their methodology involved utilization of the results of a previous pilot study which identified 23 competencies for *RQ1* because the results of the new stage 1 survey contained considerably more competencies. This former survey "listed the 23 competencies from the pilot study (Karns & Mena, 1998) and had two columns. Column A asked the respondents to place a checkmark . . . 'next to those competencies that you feel would tend to describe the highly successful manager/executive working in your organization,' and Column B asked the respondents to place a checkmark; next to those competencies that are used to evaluate that executive's work performance" (p. 351).

The Stage 2 survey was sent to 200 business schools in Canada and the U.S. with AACSB accredited undergraduate programs. It "listed 21 of 23 competencies from the pilot study (Karns & Mena, 1998) and had two columns. Column A asked the respondents to place a checkmark . . . next to those competencies that they felt

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would tend to describe the highly successful graduate of the undergraduate program at their school and Column B asked them to place a checkmark if that competency is currently emphasized as part of their undergraduate program(s)” (p351). For *RQ1* they looked at the percentage of schools identifying “the highly successful graduate...” with the percentage that businesses identified with “the highly successful graduate” (p.352). For *RQ2* the authors compared the percentage of those business schools that emphasized a particular competency in their undergraduate program with the percentage of businesses that identified that same competency as describing “the highly successful manager/executive.” For *RQ3*, they then compared the percentages of business schools emphasizing a competency or skill in their undergraduate curriculum with the number of schools identifying the same skill or competency as describing “the highly successful graduate. The authors used a cross sectional study utilizing the opinions and intuitions of the both the business and academic interviewees to conceptualize through survey rankings whether the curricula did indeed accomplish what academia thought it did and how that correlated to what business said it needed. The dependent variables were made up of the competencies and skills identified as being desired by both populations, while the independent variable becomes the relative emphasis or importance to each of them of the skill identified.

**TABLE 1. Comparison of Businesses' and Schools' Descriptors**

Competency	Businesses' descriptor (%)	Schools' descriptor (%)	Difference (%)	(df = 317)
Communication skills	92.8	100.0	-7.2	-4.63
Customer focus	84.5	40.5	44.0 <sup>†</sup>	5.52
Team worker	81.6	88.1	-6.5	—
Interpersonal skills	87.0	95.2	-8.2	-2.10
Dependable	81.6	83.3	-1.7	—
Foreign language proficiency	6.9	21.4	-14.5	-2.21
Problem solver	89.2	97.6	-8.4	-2.79
Purposeful	40.9	47.6	-6.7	—
Technical expertise	76.9	61.9	15.0	—
Flexible/adaptable	81.9	88.1	-6.2	—
Staff developer	65.3	14.3	51.0 <sup>†</sup>	8.27
Experience in a foreign country	5.8	16.7	-10.9	—
Results oriented	87.7	73.8	13.9	—
Leadership skills	85.9	97.6	-11.7	-3.69
Hard worker	66.1	83.3	-17.2	-2.66
Quality focused	80.1	64.3	15.8	2.01
Business expertise	73.3	64.3	9.0	—
Time manager	47.3	47.6	-0.3	—
Professional dress	30.0	47.6	-17.6	-2.13
Imaginative	51.6	64.3	-12.7	—
Risk taker	50.0	47.8	2.2	—

*Note.* Dash indicates no significant difference at conventional levels ( $p < .05$ , two-tailed).

<sup>†</sup>Difference > 20%.

(Abraham & Karns, 2009, p. 352)

**TABLE 2. Comparison of Businesses' Descriptor and Schools' Emphasis in Undergraduate Programs**

Competency	Businesses' descriptor (%)	Schools' emphasis (%)	Difference (%)	t (df = 317)
Communication skills	92.8	90.5	2.3	—
Customer focus	84.5	26.2	58.3 <sup>†</sup>	8.10
Team worker	81.6	83.3	-1.7	—
Interpersonal skills	87.0	66.7	20.3 <sup>†</sup>	2.61
Dependable	81.6	40.5	41.1 <sup>†</sup>	5.13
Foreign language proficiency	6.9	14.3	-7.4	—
Problem solver	89.2	90.5	-1.3	—
Purposeful	40.9	21.4	19.5	2.74
Technical expertise	76.9	81.0	-4.1	—
Flexible or adaptable	81.9	33.3	48.6 <sup>†</sup>	6.30
Staff developer	65.3	2.4	62.9 <sup>†</sup>	16.90
Experience in a foreign country	5.8	16.7	-10.9	—
Results oriented	87.7	45.2	42.5 <sup>†</sup>	5.29
Leadership skills	85.9	73.8	12.1	—
Hard worker	66.1	54.8	11.3	—
Quality focused	80.1	38.1	42.0 <sup>†</sup>	5.29
Business expertise	73.3	61.9	11.4	—
Time manager	47.3	28.6	18.7	2.44
Professional dress	30.0	23.8	6.2	—
Imaginative	51.6	33.3	18.3	2.30
Risk taker	50.0	23.8	26.2 <sup>†</sup>	3.66

*Note.* Dash indicates no significant difference at conventional levels ( $p < .05$ , two-tailed).  
<sup>†</sup>Difference > 20%.

(Abraham & Karns, 2009, p. 352)

One of the most disparate results in their study involved customer focus. After nearly forty-five years in business, this was a particularly interesting descriptor for this writer to follow. Marketing, as a business function, has evolved over the last several decades from a strictly sales/profit focus to a customer centric/profit focus. No company big, medium, or small can survive without putting the customer front and center throughout that company's operations. There was a huge disparity

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between the percentage of schools identifying the skill as needed for the *highly successful graduate of the undergraduate program at the school* and the percentage of businesses that identified the competency as needed for *the highly successful manager/executive*. I found the difference of 44% personally alarming. When the authors then compared business's descriptor percentage with the results of the business school survey questions identifying the emphasis placed on that same competency the results were a 58% discrepancy between the two. When the percentages the business schools used to identify this competency were compared with the percentage of the emphasis placed on the competency by the school, the difference was 14.3%. This lack of such focus from the business schools is a shortcoming that could be remedied by curriculum changes.

**TABLE 3. Comparison of Schools' Descriptor and Schools' Emphasis in Undergraduate Programs**

Competency	Schools' descriptor (%)	Schools' emphasis (%)	Difference (%)	<i>t</i> ( <i>df</i> = 317)
Communication skills	100.0	90.5	9.5	2.08
Customer focus	40.5	26.2	14.3	2.35
Team worker	88.1	83.3	4.8	—
Interpersonal skills	95.2	66.7	28.5 <sup>†</sup>	4.05
Dependable	83.3	40.5	42.8 <sup>†</sup>	5.45
Foreign language proficiency	21.4	14.3	7.1	—
Problem solver	97.6	90.5	7.1	—
Purposeful	47.6	21.4	26.2 <sup>†</sup>	3.81
Technical expertise	61.9	81.0	-19.1	-3.11
Flexible/adaptable	88.1	33.3	54.8 <sup>†</sup>	7.39
Staff developer	14.3	2.4	11.9	2.35
Experience in a foreign country	16.7	16.7	0.0	—
Results oriented	73.8	45.2	28.6 <sup>†</sup>	4.05
Leadership skills	97.6	73.8	23.8 <sup>†</sup>	3.58
Hard worker	83.3	54.8	28.5 <sup>†</sup>	4.05
Quality focused	64.3	38.1	26.2 <sup>†</sup>	3.81
Business expertise	64.3	61.9	2.4	—
Time manager	47.6	28.6	19.0	3.11
Professional dress	47.6	23.8	23.8 <sup>†</sup>	3.58
Imaginative	64.3	33.3	31.0 <sup>†</sup>	4.23
Risk taker	47.8	23.8	24.0 <sup>†</sup>	3.41

*Note.* Dash indicates no significant difference at conventional levels ( $p < .05$ , two-tailed).  
<sup>†</sup>Difference > 20%.

(Abraham & Karns, 2009, p. 353)

The so-called soft skills are also extremely important in customer focus. Researchers have found that the interaction between customers and customer contact employees may be the most important interface a company has. As David Zerfoss, the president of Husqvarna said, "in our company, 'Everyone sells'. Everyone who comes into contact with a customer has the ability to influence customer relationships" (Zerfoss,

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2003, p.6). His point is obvious. We have all experienced the donut shop clerk who treated us not as their livelihood but more like an unfortunate inconvenience in their day. A company is known by its employees. When I signed up for a satellite network, the first employees I saw were two installers; they both needed lessons in manners, hygiene, and appropriate dress. However, they were not actual employees but had been contracted out for the work. Of course a customer wouldn't have known that and even if one did, it would have made no difference...they represented the company. Zerfoss goes on with while, "All employees must have a thorough knowledge of the products, services, and policies of the company...Each employee needs the opportunity to cultivate and enhance interpersonal skills that will result in success in the customer service arena". His final recommendation goes on to recommend that not only should employees receive product and policy training, but they should also receive "professional training in interpersonal skills," that leaders need to lead by example, and to, "encourage your employees to learn the art of conversation" (p.7).

Other researchers have found that the human interaction component of customer service delivery is essential to the determination of satisfaction; in particular, the behavior of customer contact employees has an influential effect on the customer. Strong quotes Sarel and Marmorstein, 1998, "Whilst the performance of all employees is consequential, customer contact personnel who actually interact with customers are a more discernible entity in the delivery of a customer focus strategy. Their behaviours (sic) are those that customers directly encounter and are therefore what customers associate with the organizations (sic)" (Strong, 2006, p. 150).

Graen, Chun, & Taylor did a study on experience based learning in 2006. They stated "Teams are the backbone of the flexible organizational designs required to

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cope with the new knowledge economy" (p. 448). Teams are the common environment in over 80% of organizations with 100 or more employees. Their research found that businesses are seeking employees who possess team leadership, knowledge, and skills in order for the team to function and be able to respond to team challenges. They concluded that there is a definite need for the development of team leadership skills in the academic venue (p. 448). This writer's personal experience with self directed teams bears out their final statements that fair dealing, mutual trust and respect, and a commitment to the team endeavor are all necessities for successful team integration and performance. Consistently teaching these behaviors throughout a business curriculum, where team citizenship and leadership becomes the norm, will better prepare our students to assimilate more quickly into the business environment and become productive team players. Further, the results should be considerably improved for all stakeholders, both students and the businesses that hire them, when learning and practicing these skills takes place for the first time in an academic setting rather than "on the job." Some possible venues of different educational experiences are also offered through the literature such as involving undergraduate students in community projects utilizing academic/business partnerships (Fish, 2011) coupled with a similar discussion by Malm (2010).

### Generations:

With all the business interviews I held, there was one common disturbing note, a seeming lack of engagement, by not all, but many of the youngest new employees. The universality of this perception was a deciding factor in adding this section on generational disconnects. When asked " What skills, knowledge, abilities or behaviors do you look for when seeking new employees?" the responses indicated a series of behaviors one might take for granted... hygiene, interest in the work,



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showing up on time...just showing up...and continuously wanting time off. Perhaps a better understanding of the Y Generation could be of significant assistance in providing the curricula and environment for tomorrow's managers. A book by Lipkin and Perrymore, "Y in the Workplace," was recently added to the literature due to a book report from one of my students. He was very supportive of the ideas put forward both for relating to his generation and for his generation to succeed. He wrote, "Our generation may be hard to deal with, but with this book, any manager can figure out the most effective ways to get the most out their new employees." Perhaps it can also help us give them the skills necessary to become the leader/managers Maine needs now and will need even more in the future.

In their book *Y in the Workplace*, Lipkin and Perrymore (2009) state that while there may be no consensus on what they are called, the generation born between 1980 and 2000, are as influential as the Baby Boomers were and they are very different. "They are the first generation of 'winners,' because they were not allowed or able to lose in school, and basically got gold stars just for showing up" (p. 15). Some of the Gen Y behaviors the authors suggest need to be addressed are texting while working or in meetings, suitable business attire and visible piercings, adhering to business hours, no- you aren't going to be the boss tomorrow, respect in speech when dealing with others in the business environment, and finally...since they've never been wrong before, "Mending meltdowns when a mistake is made" (p. 17).

In *Managing the Millenials* by Espinoza et.al. the authors bring up very similar findings in their quote from managers:

*"They do not care about customers."*

*"If you correct them, they quit."*

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*"They think there's always an excuse that can make being late okay."*

*"They want a trophy for just showing up."*

*"Yelling and screaming is the only thing they understand."*

*"They pick up computer and cash register skills quickly, but if it breaks they can't count back change from a \$10 bill."*

*"She asked for an extended lunch hour to go shopping with friends after her third day on the job."*

*"They assume it's okay to call me by my first name like we're buddies. I am their boss."*

*"Anything extra nice I do, they act as if I owed it to them."*

(Espinoza, Ukleja, & Rusch, 2010, pages 9-10)

Lipkin and Perrymore pointed to many of the reasons for Gen Y/Millennials' problems in the workplace, "self-inflation" or having always never lost they have difficulties in failing. Since mistakes were still wins, they may have difficulty accepting feedback, being realistic, understanding others' perspectives, being accountable, taking ownership, and focus. When Gen Y did make a mistake, blame was always placed on others" (p. 29).

Espinoza et al, in turn offered some interesting thoughts on Millennials' perceptions of themselves:

*"We are not defined by our job."*

*"We want to have a say (in the work itself) when we work."*

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*"We want to have a say about when we work."*

*"We do not expect you to be our best friend, but when you evaluate or critique us, we want you to do it in a friendly manner (just like our parents did)" (p. 10).*

Lipkin and Perrymore also provide some takeaways for coaching GenY's, takeaways that might be infused into the classroom, things such as recognizing the generational differences that will be encountered in the workplace. While technology has changed the way different generations communicate, the use of certain forms of generational jargon stifles it altogether. Perhaps ensuring all classes insist on strict adherence to correct English usage in all forms of academic communications is needed. Managerial classes could teach one-on-one coaching and how to positively give quarterly feedback to their future employees.

Espinoza et al. suggested that, "You have to give Millennials a reason to care. (p. 151). "They need to know why before they are motivated." Meaningful challenge can be as simple as *explaining the meaning of their work* before *explaining the how*" (p.150). They have to be engaged.

Tony Bingham in an article entitled *Learning gets Social*, quotes two sources to help us understand the nature and importance of this generation. He quotes Don Tapscott in his book, *Grown Up Digital* (2009), who, while he agrees with the accuracy of some of the stereotypes applied to this generation, "...they can't make a decision, don't want to 'pay their dues,' ignore hours and dress codes, need constant feedback, their parents are involved in everything, and so on" (Bingham, 2009, p. 57), also goes on to suggest a somewhat different slant when he says, "The evidence is strong that they are the smartest generation ever. Raw IQ scores are climbing by three points a decade since World War II, and they have been increasing across racial,

income, and regional boundaries...This generation thinks it's cool to be smart, and they see themselves as an essential part of the world's future success" (p. 57). The second quote comes from Tony Karrer, CEO of *Techempower* encouraging companies to "start adapting to the current trend in informal learning because otherwise, they will find themselves *marginalized in the business*"(p.56). learning being defined as learning from experience rather than formal classroom learning. Finally, Bingham also quotes a May 2009 *T + D* article by Josh Bersin of Bersin and Associates, "It's not informal learning taking over everything; it's a modernization of the learning function" (p. 59).

## **Methodology**

The research design used a mixed method approach. Both quantitative analysis and qualitative analyses were employed. Qualitative responses were generated through interviews with the businesses and CMCC's students. These interviews were framed such that the issues confronting both entities would hopefully emerge. These were then correlated with the competency disconnects identified by the literature. A focus group involving students provided further qualitative information that provided the basis for a set of surveys exploring the issues with these stakeholder groups. These surveys formed the quantitative basis for addressing the problem.

The format was as follows:

Students... focus group and survey

Business...interview/survey

University Business Studies contact...interview

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The student focus group involved invitations to forty faculty selected students. There was a preselected set of topics (figure 1), followed by an open free flow brainstorming type of discussion. It was held on April 23, 2012. While the number of responding students was disappointing, the quality of the input was impressive. The session took nearly an hour. Four graduating students, two in the workplace and not looking to go on to a four year university in the immediate future and two moving on to four year universities were present. Their discussions were extremely cogent. They voiced their concerns, needs and had a number of suggestions. Coding of their responses was then used to develop the current student survey (figure 2). The generated survey went out to all business students on May 4, 2012. Thirty two responses were generated of which twenty four were usable. Eight surveys were received blank. A modified survey was also conducted over the phone with six graduates from the CMCC Business Studies Program (3).

The CMCC Business Department Advisory group provided four candidates for the business interviews. Interview questions were developed from the literature (figure 4). These responses were then coded to develop the business survey sent to businesses identified by the Androscoggin County Chamber of Commerce on July 1, 2012 (figure 5). The Chamber sent out the survey to three hundred Chamber members on July 23, 2012.

We have previously identified three major stakeholders and one secondary stakeholder in our attempt to answer the question, "Can curriculum changes improve the deliverables the Business Studies Departments of Maine's Community Colleges provide its stakeholders?" This analysis will look at each of the stakeholder groups individually and relationship with one another.

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### Student stakeholders

There were three student groups studied; students proceeding directly into the workplace, students intending to further their education at a four year university, and previously graduated students. As can be seen by exhibits 6, 7, and 8, students in all three categories were very close in their overall responses to certain questions. As can be seen by the exhibits, Question 1 on the survey differentiated between students going directly into the workplace and students intending to continue their college careers.

<b>Central Maine Community College</b>					
Business Studies Department					
Total Student Survey Percentages					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
2) CMCC's Business Studies Department provides quality business curriculum.	33.3%	56.7%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
3) CMCC's business instructors are well organized and knowledgeable about their subjects.	50.0%	43.3%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%
4) CMCC's degree programs are easily understood and courses progress logically.	33.3%	56.7%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
5) Business student advisers are well versed in what I need for either employment or for progressing toward a higher	23.3%	46.7%	16.7%	6.7%	6.7%
6) CMCC's business classes are presented in a stimulating and professional manner.	36.7%	60.0%	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%
7) Hands on "Real World" experience is important in an instructor.	70.0%	26.7%	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%
8) CMCC's business curriculum has too much redundancy in its courses.	16.7%	36.7%	33.3%	10.0%	3.3%
9) CMCC's course schedules are flexible enough to accommodate my work schedule.	36.7%	26.7%	23.3%	6.7%	6.7%
10) Interpersonal relationship skills are important both in my education and in my future career.	76.7%	23.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 3

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

Question 2, "CMCC's Business Department provides a quality business curriculum"

was answered with an overall Strongly Agree/Agree rating of 90%. The three individual groups posted a range of 88% to 100%. Student comments were:

*"CMCC was a wonderful stepping stone for enhancing my career and an opportunity to consider attending a four year college. (I plan on enrolling for fall classes at USM L/A in Leadership Studies). Thank you CMCC and thank you CMCC Instructors!"*

*"For me, as an older student going back to college after being out in the work force while attending college, I was able to relate/and gain the knowledge and competence to make me a more professional business person."*

However, several comments were similar to the following:

*"I enjoyed my time at CMCC, and it was a worthwhile experience. However, there were often times when I felt that the material presented was aimed at students who were moving into higher levels of education and/or who would be working in very large scale businesses. My personal desire was for more practical information which would target the needs of a small/micro business, as my priority is to be in business more than study it. For instance, while I enjoyed Principles of Supervision, I found little that I could use to actually supervise employees. Also, Employment Law was a very good course, but I found that the content was almost exclusively regarding discrimination in the workplace and did not really explore other employment issues. Abstract theory is not a bad thing, but I wanted more practical knowledge that I could learn and apply to a business setting. I think CMCC as an institution focuses greatly on pushing*

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*students on to 4-year programs at the expense of offering students the technical skills to succeed at a Certificate or Associate degree level."*

Question 3, "CMCC's business instructors were well organized and knowledgeable about their subjects", delivered an overall 93% Strongly Agree/Agree rating, however, despite the scores, there were student comments positive and negative:

*"I've sat through twenty teacher reviews, and I have listened to complaints from other students for four semesters. It seems there is nothing a teacher can actually do to please some people, and I hope the teachers in this school don't take all of those complaints too seriously. I tend to think those students who struggled at all were unsatisfied with their experience, apparently believing their grades are supposed to be handed to them. Just saying."*

*"CMCC's business instructors were dedicated and accessible. Instructors were prepared and committed and shared their wealth of knowledge. What drew my attention the most was their passion."*

*"I've had one teacher who didn't seem to care if the student's learned anything and another who was on top of his subject matter"*

A comment from one of the graduated students is probably most indicative,

*"As with any school, there are good teachers and there are not so good teachers. I have had both here at CMCC. Specific to the business department, I can say they are the better professors."*

The most troubling, however, was something mentioned several times,



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*"Every year we fill out student evaluations on poor instructors, but they don't seem to mean anything. The same people come back and do the same things."*

Question four, "CMCC's degree programs were easily understood and courses progress logically," was given a 90% Strongly Agree/Agree rating, however, here again certain comments deserve consideration its analysis.

*"Understanding Business should be a prerequisite for Marketing and Supervision."*

*"I think the courses could be organized better depending on whether you are going to work or going to a four year college."*

*"I had three projects due the last day of classes, one mini business plan, one big business plan and a marketing plan all due the last day. Maybe you guys could coordinate better."*

*"There should be two separate programs for students...one for going on to college and one for going to work."*

Student advising was the subject of Question 5 and the results were somewhat different. While the overall Strongly Agree/Agree rating remained at 90%, the Strongly Agree rating on its own fell to 23.3 %, significantly lower than any other positively worded survey question. Student comments offer considerable insight as to the possible disconnects between what students expect and need and what they actually get.

*"When it comes to transferring our courses are not even close to what the four year schools will accept."*

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*"While a two year student might need Managing Office Procedures, a four year student needs a four credit science with a lab that transfers."*

*"We need more Micro (economics) courses...nearly all the four year schools accept that."*

*"Why is Marketing transferable and Supervision just counts as an elective?"*

*"My advisor had no idea what I needed to get into a four year college...did it myself."*

Given the statements made by employers during the interview process, certain disconnects suddenly become more obvious.

*"They don't even know how to send a fax."*

*"I think there should be a basic office procedures program."*

Certainly, the results of Question 5 and these responses need further scrutiny.

Question 6, "CMCC's Business Classes are presented in an interesting and stimulating manner" garnered a 96.7% rating for Strongly Agree/Agree.

*"CMCC's business instructors were dedicated and accessible faculty. Instructors were prepared and committed and shared their wealth What drew my attention the most was their passion."*

*"Many of the business classes that I attended were presented in a stimulating and professional manner. Very "down to earth", with different ways of teaching such as text book, power point, movies, projectors, personal experience and even us presenting to the class."*

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*"Most of the instructors have interactive classes and that's how I learn things the best"*

Question 7, "Hands on "Real World" experience is important in an instructor" was given a 70% Strongly Agree rating with another 26.7% indicating Agree. Student comments were unanimously favorable in this area.

*"I really really strongly agree with this statement, it not only is important, but it reflects on the teachers teaching, they might not think it shows if they don't have the experience, but it reads clearly, that's one of the main reasons that I picked CMCC, actually it's the only college I applied to because I knew the teachers actually have experience in what they teach, they're knowledgeable both bookwise and lifewise. The classes are great, and the overall college itself has a great feel to it".*

*"Theory can only take you so far. Hands on experience is a must for a total experience."*

*That's what I really think is great about (CMCC's Business Program). The instructors have done what they teach...they're not just educated professors..."*

Question 8, "CMCC's Business Curriculum has too much redundancy in its courses" had mixed results with 53.4% Strongly Agree/Agree and 43.3% Disagree/Strongly disagree.

Student comments reflected this difference.

*"Supervision is a course that is redundant with other courses."*

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*"I have found that the redundancy is actually helpful for more thoroughly learning the material.*

*For example, having Microsoft PowerPoint, excel programs, etc. coincided with many of my presentations due in other classes."*

*"There is a lot of the same stuff in several of the classes."*

One of the comments from Question 4 is also relevant here.

*"I had three projects due the last day of classes, one mini business plan, one big business plan and a marketing plan all due the last day. Maybe you guys could coordinate better."*

Question 9, "CMCC's course schedules are flexible enough to accommodate my work schedule" was rated 63.4% in agreement and 37.7% disagreeing.

*"Very accommodating, morning afternoon or evening. Mostly I attended evening classes."*

*"I have found online courses the easiest way to obtain my degree and still be able to work full time."*

*"There are many different class offerings at many different times. Although this last semester, the classes I needed were not offered at night so I had to take time off from work to attend day classes."*

*"There are some classes that are only offered during the day so they're tough to schedule into my work schedule."*

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Finally, Question 10, "Interpersonal relationship skills are important both in my education and my future career" scored a 100% Strongly Agree/Agree, with Strongly Agree given a 76.7%.

*"Interpersonal relationship skills was/are very important while I was in college and in my career now. I engaged myself more with others and shared and or connected influencing and being influenced."*

*"Interpersonal relationships and the skills to properly execute them is everything, in college, work, and life."*

While the analysis of the student stakeholder group shows as robustly positive, certain disconnects are apparent. Remediating these disconnects could enhance the overall Business Studies department deliverables. The first disconnect becomes evident in the student responses of Questions 2, 4 and 8.

Considering the two paths that students might choose, going directly into the workplace or continuing on to a four year program, the current curriculum does not answer the needs of either group as well as they could.

The second disconnect is evident from the ratings and student comments from Question 5. Providing good counsel and advice to students as they progress through any course of study is the mark of an institution vested in the future of its graduates. It is part of the product the institution provides. From the comments, those students planning on continuing their education are the ones most affected by advisory lapses. Knowledge of the requirements for acceptance of the various four year institutions, which courses transfer as a major's credit and which are only accepted

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as electives, and what is actually available to the student (e.g. classroom, hybrid, or online), were the primary areas of concern.

The third disconnect is evident in Question 8 and is a known concern. There is a certain amount of redundancy in the curriculum. Both with student comments and with the 43.4% agreement of respondents, it is a definite disconnect with student stakeholders over the college's deliverables.

Question 9 presents the fourth disconnect. It is in regard to the flexibility and timing of CMCC's Business Studies Department's course offerings. While 64.3% were in agreement that curriculum was flexible and met their needs, there was a significant percentage that felt CMCC could improve its scheduling.

### **Four year university stakeholders**

Those four year universities identified previously are USM, UMO, SNHU, and St Joseph's College. These colleges all have four year business programs and regularly attend CMCC's transfer fairs. A discussion of these stakeholders would not be complete without recognizing the natural competition that exists for students between community colleges and these other institutions, especially other state institutions. In a 2011 article in the Portland Press Herald, Leslie Bridgers notes that as UMS's enrollments have dropped 9%, MCCS's enrollment has risen 77%. USM has dropped 18% while SMCC has increased 163%. Rosa Redonnett, executive director of student affairs for the UMaine System is quoted, "USM is in the unenviable position of being in the most competitive market in Maine," listing St. Joseph's College, Kaplan University and Southern New Hampshire University among its competitors." Former UMaine System Chancellor Richard Pattenaude "attributes the initial decline in the university system's enrollment to the expansion

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of the community college system.” This competition is exacerbated by a decrease in high school graduates.

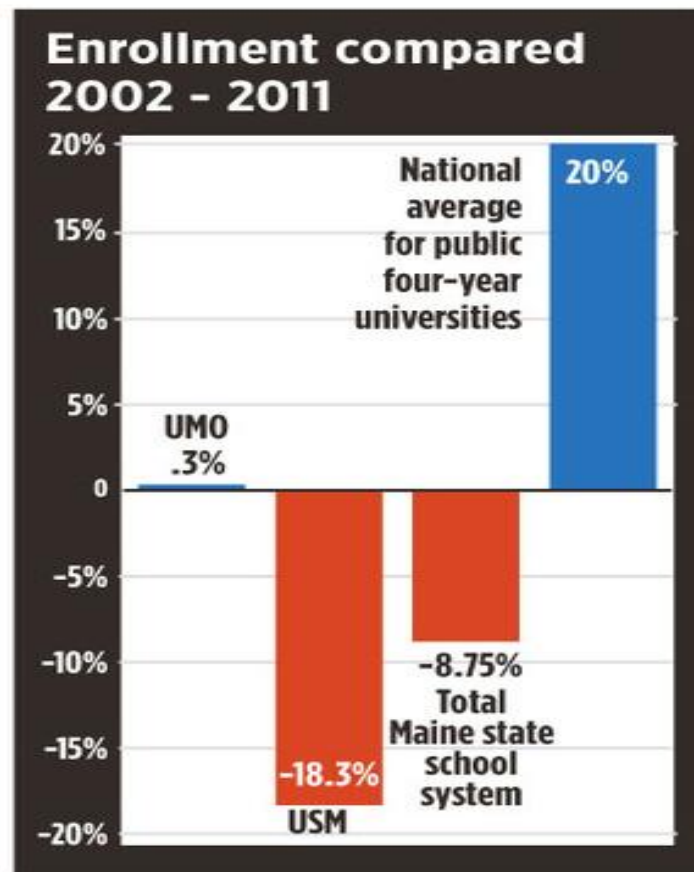


Table 5

Maureen Salisbury, guidance director at Deering High School in Portland, said she’s “seen an increasing number of students choose Southern Maine Community College over the University of Southern Maine, because community college is cheaper” (Bridgers, 2011, p. B1). Natural competitors for dwindling resources, especially in lean times, seldom have collaboration as top of mind. Further, with at least one of these universities, when asked why more CMCC courses didn’t transfer as major credits, an official gave “academic hubris” as one significant answer.

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The myriad of choices today's student can consider, the restrictions, the courses, the programs, the accreditation agencies, and the course formats (online, classroom, or hybrid) involved for one college is daunting. Multiplying that by the number of colleges available gives evidence of how complicated this process has become. For example, CMCC's marketing class Bus 215 is accepted as Marketing 260 for a major credit at USM but at UMO it is only accepted as a business elective. CMCC's BUS 100 is accepted at UMO as a major credit course, Intro to Business, while it is only a business elective at USM. Accounting classes ACC208 and 265 transfer to USM as major credits, but will expire in 2014. ECO 201 and 202 both transfer as major credits at both USM and UMO but also have expiration date.

St. Joseph's College for in classroom programs requires a major 4 hour lab and a 4 hour lab science elective. Their online program, however, requires 6 hours of science taken as two three hour courses. CMCC science courses would satisfy these requirements. At the same time, none of these colleges gives any credit for Business Writing. Adding to the mix, both UMO and USM have AACSB accreditation, SNHU has ACBS accreditation, while St. Joseph's College has no accreditation. These agencies have curriculum standards that must be adhered to in order to maintain their accreditation status.

Given the above, it is obvious and understandable that a disconnect exists between what CMCC's students need and what they receive. Three of these institutions complemented CMCC's Liz Oken, for reaching out and working with them. They also added that is impossible for one person to keep up with what's out there today, let alone the fact that these programs are in a continuous state of flux. Further, for CMCC to serve its students, it must serve them through these institutions. Brian Langley, Chairman the Legislature's Education Committee has said that while UMS



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enrollment is part of their focus, the primary purpose is to increase the collaboration among state schools with the objective of increasing the number Mainers pursuing and attaining post secondary degrees (Bridgers, p. B1).

### Business stakeholders

The four business interviews not only provided the basis for the Survey developed, their comments were in lock step with the findings Governor LePage received during the state seminars he held with Maine businesses. Three hundred surveys were sent out and 34 were returned.

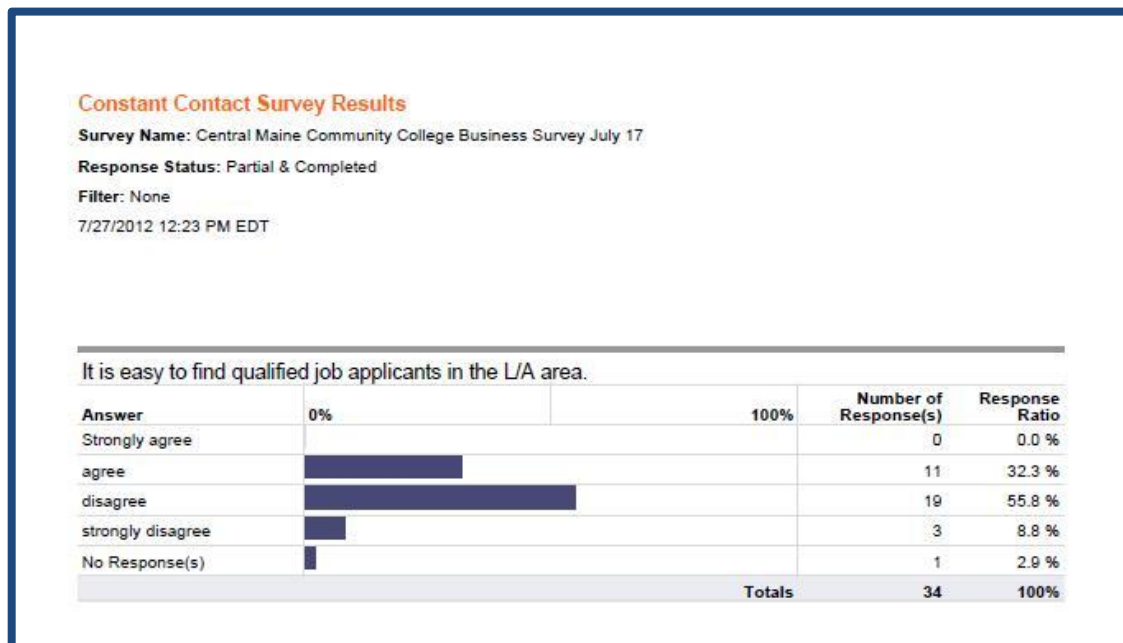


Table 6

While no respondents Strongly Disagreed with the Question 1 statement, “It is easy to find qualified job applicants in the L/A area,” nearly one third of the respondents Agreed. However, with over two thirds of the recipients responded by either Disagreeing or Strongly Disagreeing, the problem becomes quite evident. This is further brought forth from some of the respondent’s comments.

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*“We are willing to train for many of our positions. Our challenges to hiring quality employees includes applicants with sporadic work history and poor presentation at interview.”*

*“Surprisingly, it has become increasingly difficult to find qualified candidates, despite the higher unemployment rate. There seems to be a bigger disconnect between skills needed.”*

*“Many job applicants but few who have skills necessary.”*

These comments echo some of the more graphic comments of those interviewed.

*“Be nice if they took a shower and showed up for work...on time!”*

*“The people I get want to work just long enough to get a I Pad, then they quit. They never get engaged with the business.”*

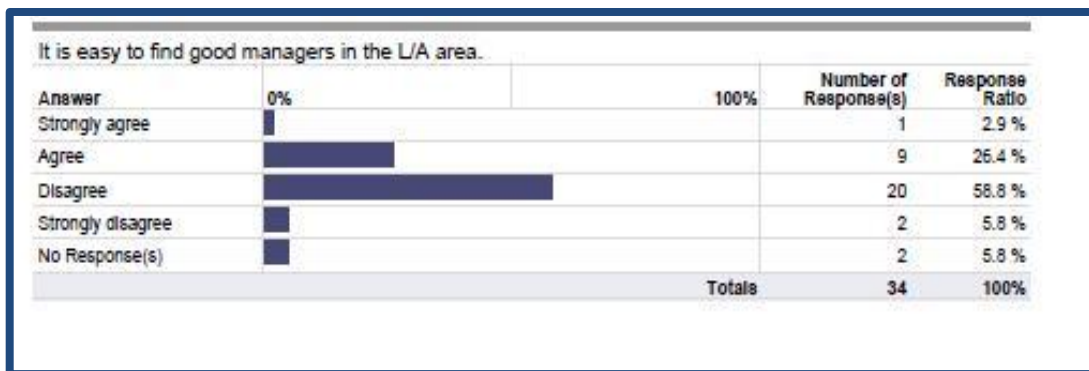


Table 7

Question 2, “It’s easy to find good managers in the L/A area.” produced the same results. One third answered the survey question by Agreeing or Strongly Agreeing, while over two thirds either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Their comments were similar.

*“Few with the education, experience, and soft skills necessary”*

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*“Lack of leadership skills.”*

Another answer was also brought up during the interview process.

*“We typically hire for this thru our internship program so I cannot agree or disagree with this question, but from history I can say that we have very limited numbers of managers from the local area.”*



Table 8

Question3, “While I can teach job specific skills to a new employee, they need to bring basic skills (reading, writing, and math skills) with them” had a 79.4% Strongly Agree and 14.7% Agree. Only one response disagreed. Comments backed up the responses.

*“I am in retail and all of the students I have hired, high school and college (not from CMCC) couldn't make change. They didn't even know the value of a role of quarters, dimes or nickels.*

*They also think when you are scheduled for 9 you show up at 9, punch in and then hang up your jacket and use the bathroom, etc.”*

*“Too often A.S. degree holders have poor oral and written communications skills.”*

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

*“Common sense, respect and manners is sadly lacking and hard to train”*

Other interviewees also offered,

*“They don’t seem to be able to relate to the other people in the office.”*

The dichotomy here is obvious. While both students and employers view these basic skills as extremely important, according to employers, it is lacking in the new employees they seek to hire.

An employee's willingness to step in and do what needs to be done is important to me.				
Answer	0%	100%	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Strongly Agree			31	91.1 %
Agree			3	8.8 %
Disagree			0	0.0 %
Strongly disagree			0	0.0 %
No Response(s)			0	0.0 %
Totals			34	100%

Table 9

Question 4, “An employee’s willingness to step in and do what needs to be done, is important to me,” was suggested by comments offered by all four of the interviewed businesses. “Going beyond just being at work” was how one employer put it. Again, we appear to be concerned with engagement. As Table 9 indicates, this question generated 100% agreeing with 91.1% Strongly Agreed. The comments were also very much on point with those of the interviewed employers.

*“Too many will just sit and wait to be told what to do. Need the initiative to see what needs to be done and step up to just do it!”*

*“We need self sufficient employees, we give them the skills/tools they need to be*

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

*successful then we expect them to execute using those skills.”*

*“Say what you will about our "work ethic" -- it wasn't passed down. Neither were critical thinking skills or the idea that you don't get anything handed to you.”*

*“Attitude is the most important factor. The rest can be taught.”*

It is important that new employees be somewhat tech savvy (Microsoft Office, Quicken Books)				
Answer	0%	100%	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Strongly agree			20	58.8 %
Agree			13	36.2 %
Disagree			1	2.9 %
Strongly disagree			0	0.0 %
No Response(s)			0	0.0 %
<b>Totals</b>			<b>34</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 10

Question 5, “It is important that new employees be somewhat tech savvy (Microsoft Office, Quicken Books)” showed 97% in agreement. While there were no comments from survey respondents, the issue was raised by three of the respondents and was therefore included in the survey. It also relates to a student comment regarding CMCC’s business curriculum and programs and what students going directly out into the workplace may need, but that those going on to college may not. There were no comments.

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

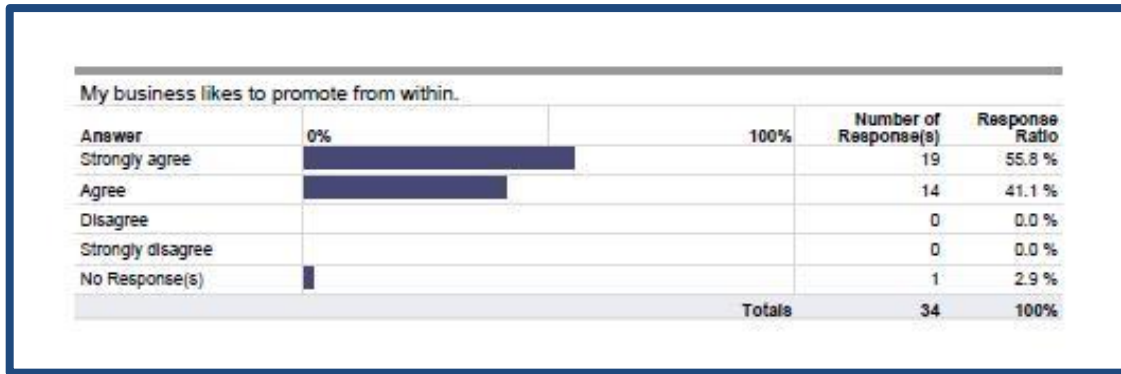


Table 11

Question 6's responses were very similar and also had no comments "My business likes to promote from within." 96.9% either Strongly Agreed or Agreed. Most of the interviewed company representatives said they preferred to promote from within.



Table 12

Question 7, "Locally available new manager training would be valuable to my business," had 23% negative responses and 77% positive. While two of the interviewed employers agreed there was a need for such training, they used either in house or an outside source for their training. One was interested in the BIW/CMCC concept. The following comments were sent regarding this question and the state of management in Maine.

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*“Are you suggesting we need a 4 year college in L/A, yes good idea.”*

*“We have many corporate trainings available to new managers and since each business may have different PVP's(purpose, values and principles)I'm not sure that it would be of value for us at this time.”*

*“I think it's a good idea...it just wouldn't apply to my business.”*

One of the interviewed businesses saw it a little differently.

*“We really don't have many real managers...leaders...in Maine.”*

Questions 8, 9, and 10 were weighted response questions.

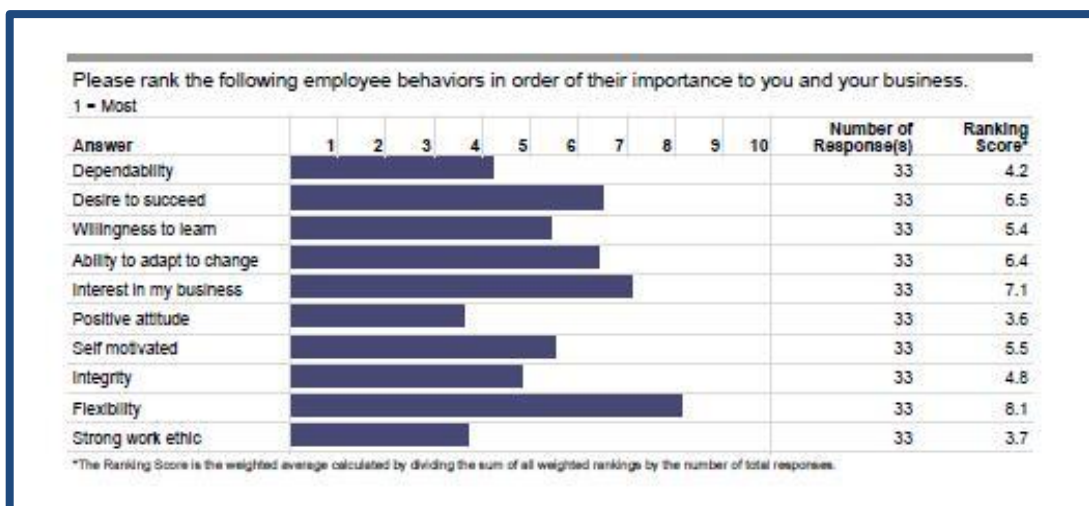


Table 12

While there is certain amount of business knowledge as well as many desirable skills, abilities and behaviors needed in the workplace, their relative importance to employers could well be the determining factor in any curriculum changes taken.

As can be seen from Table12, Question 8, ranked the relative importance of certain employee behaviors. Having to rank these behaviors caused some consternation among respondents.

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

*“All are important”*

*“It is hard to rank - Integrity, Strong work ethic, Positive Attitude, Dependability.*

*These are the top 4 things we look for. Then the others are 2nd most important and so on.”*

*“Very hard to rank order, some are a bit of a duplication, all of these things are important”*

*“After 1 and 2 (dependability and desire, all others are nearly equal”*

While a positive attitude, a strong work ethic, and dependability were ranked one through three, there was little difference across the desired behaviors. This was pointed out in one of the comments.

*“Hard to rank these as most would be a "1" for me.”*

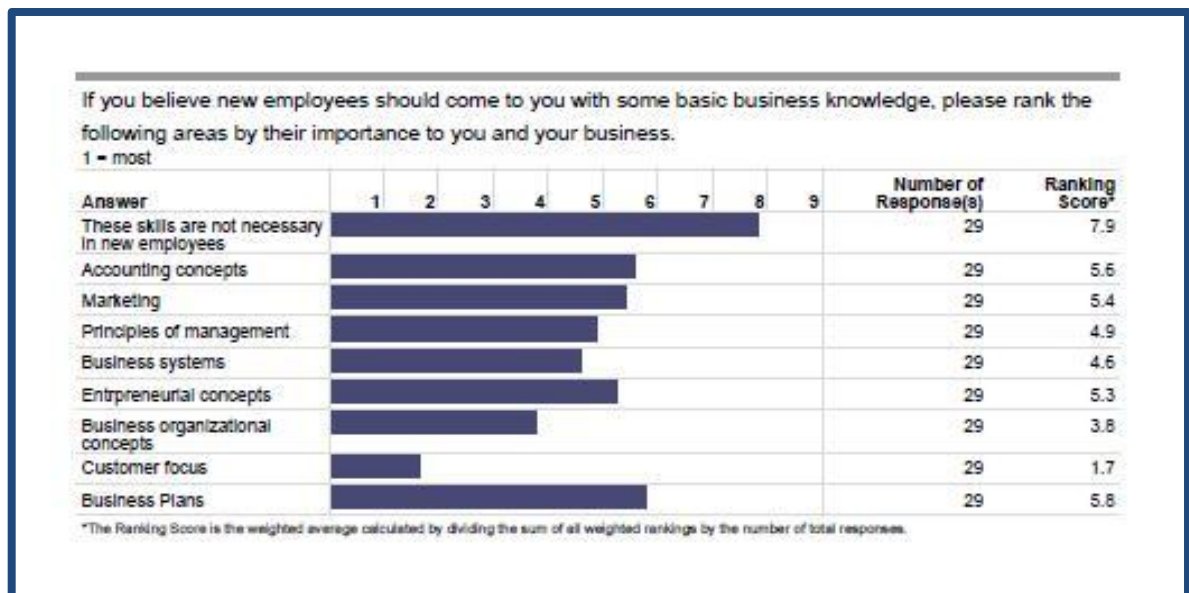


Table 13

Question 9 asked respondents to rank certain areas of business acumen in order of their importance to the employer. The first obvious result is that the Abraham-Karns



## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

article discussed in this paper's Literature Review found the same result for customer focus. Business finds this ability/behavior the most important and yet CMCC has only one course, Effective Customer Relations, available for this business need. Business Organizational Concepts was ranked second most important followed by Business Systems. These results were very much in line with those of the employers interviewed. Given the fact that these businesses are filling this survey out as it applies to entry level new hires, demonstrates that the represented businesses need new employees to appreciate the customer and to have at least some idea as to what transpires in a business setting day by day. CMCC's Business Studies Department, however, is not just charged with preparing students for their entry level employment, but to prepare them for a career in business upon graduation or to continue their business education at a four year institution.

*“In our business, the key skill above all is customer focus. The other skill sets are at a higher level in our business and don't apply to new employees, but it is ALWAYS helpful to have some understanding in these areas.”*

*“Depends on the job--filled this out for a non-management position”*

*“Depends on position”*

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

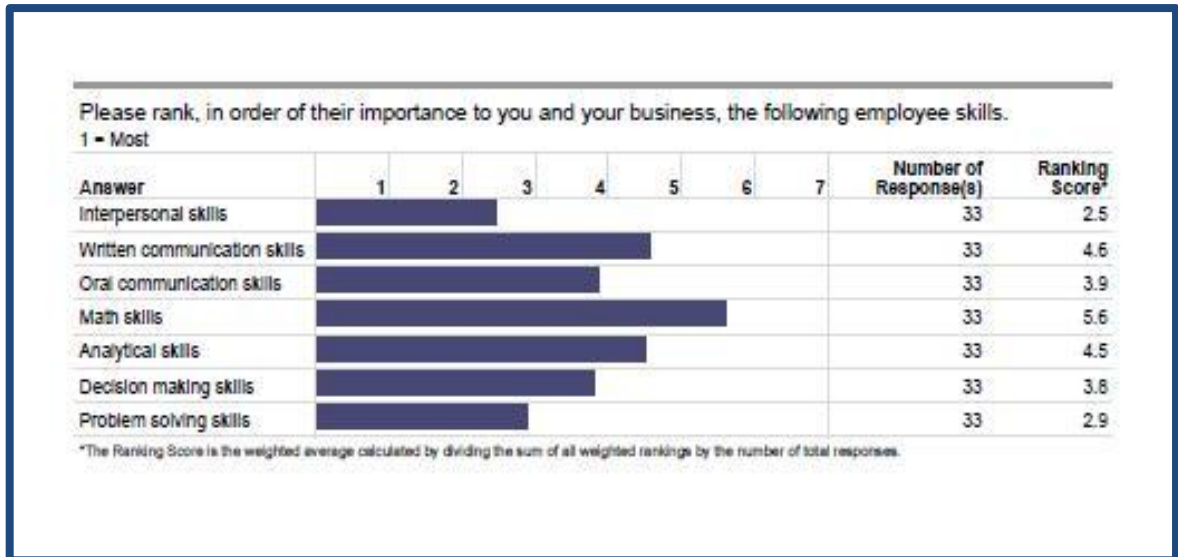


Table 14

The final question was also a weighted response question. As Table 14 indicates, the responses refer to a basic skill set most employees should possess. They include interpersonal, oral communication and written communication skills, as well as math, analytical skills, decision making and problem solving skills. Businesses agreed with students when it comes to the importance of interpersonal skills. Both rate this skill as a top priority, and yet this so called soft skill is shown as sadly lacking in both the literature and employer interviews. Problem solving skills and oral communication skills were two and three in ranked importance. While math skills ranked least important, interviewees indicated this had a great deal to do with the job being performed. **It should be noted that there is a close relationship between skills such as decision making, oral communications, and problem solving.** All of these require interpersonal skills to be effective. There were only two comments.

*“They lack interpersonal skills.”*

*“It really depends on the position. This would be ranked differently for a manager than for a teller.”*

*“Depends on the position.”*

## **Results**

This study's second sub problem, to determine through research if disconnects between CMCC's Business Studies Department's deliverables and stake holder needs actually exist, has been answered positively. The research does demonstrate that disconnects do exist for each stakeholder group. The study suggests eight identifiable disconnects. The third sub problem concerns whether these disconnects, upon being identified, can be addressed through curriculum changes. The study suggests that some can, albeit not all through the Business Studies Department, and others cannot.

While the analysis of the student stakeholder group shows as robustly positive, it also shows that if CMCC mitigates those certain disconnects within its purview, CMCC could significantly enhance the Business Studies Department's deliverables to its stakeholders.

Disconnect #1 comes from the student research. There is an obvious disconnect between needs of the two student stakeholder groups. Despite question 2's high student ranking, the remarks from this question, plus the ranking and remarks from question 5 point to this problem. Two separate programs with slightly different curriculum are needed. This disconnect can be remedied through curriculum change.

Disconnect # 2 comes from question 3 of the student survey. With an overall 93% positive ranking, there would initially seem to be no disconnect. The underlying comments regarding some instructors, however, should not be ignored. While a mentoring program for new adjuncts might be in order, this disconnect is beyond the purview of this study as it cannot be addressed through curriculum change.

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

Disconnect #3 comes from student survey questions 4 and 8. Despite question 4's 90% positive ranking, comments from that question, plus the significant agreement with the premise of question 8 regarding too much redundancy in the Business Studies curriculum, identify this as a disconnect. As this a curriculum problem, curriculum change is the only way to eliminate it.

Disconnect # 4 involves question 5 and is inextricably entwined with Disconnect #1. This disconnect also involves this study's secondary stakeholder, the four year universities that absorb those members of the student stakeholder group planning to continue their education. Once again, comments and interviews, rather the survey question itself, identify this disconnect.

Understanding the curriculum needs of the universities and advising those students as to what CMCC courses best fit their needs suggests part of the remedy would be a curriculum issue.

Disconnect # 5 comes from student survey question 9. Comments and a 30% negative survey result suggests this disconnect. This student concern, however, is a scheduling concern and not a curriculum concern. It is therefore being presented to CMCC management for their information only.

While the business survey bore out much of what has been reported by the news media and various public officials, much of what local businesses see as disconnects don't necessarily apply to CMCC's Business Studies Department's curriculum. However, two disconnects could be addressed by through the business curriculum and others through possible collaboration with other local area educational institutions.

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

Disconnect # 6 is less a disconnect than an opportunity, which if missed, would become a costly disconnect and comes from business survey questions 2 and 7. The lack of good managers is not new. There have been numerous articles on Maine's lack of good managers over the last several years. This is a curriculum issue.

Disconnect # 7 involves business survey question 5 and what business interviewees termed "tech savvy". While businesses indicate they would like to see new employees better prepared to use their software programs when they are hired, both student stakeholder groups would benefit from understanding and being more proficient in utilizing the available various business software such as Quicken Books and Microsoft Office. This would come under the Business Studies Department curriculum.

Disconnect # 8, is apparent from employers' rankings and comments. Customer focus begins with realizing the importance of customers to a business and understanding their needs and wants. It also requires excellent interpersonal skills. From much of the literature and comments, many new employees are lacking in those skills. CMCC's curriculum needs courses that focus on the "soft skills," empathy, respect, and courtesy. Currently, the course, "Interpersonal Skills for Leadership" is the only class this author is aware of that discusses these behaviors. As noted before, while more basic business and office knowledge is desired by employers, CMCC also needs to provide them with a more complete view of the business world, and to convey those skills that graduating students will need in the future.

Disconnect # 9, while not specifically a Business Studies Department or a CMCC disconnect, is so pervasive and toxic, it needs to be addressed. Many Mainers lack

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

sufficient basic skills to hold a job. Many high school graduates have not been given the necessary skills to compete and survive in a competitive global economy. On July 25, 2012, this author participated in a registration program for incoming new students enrolling for the Fall semester. One of those worked with needed a remedial Basic Writing class. All 13 classes offered were already full and the semester start was more than a month away. This lack of basic skills is also identified in business survey question 10 and is a problem that confronts Maine's entire educational industry. It will take collaboration with all the entities in that industry to remedy it.

### **Going Forward**

The author will review the study and its findings with CMCC leadership group and the Business Studies Department. Further, while it is not within the scope of this paper or within the purview of the author to recommend curriculum specifics, suggested approaches to eliminating those disconnects that might be addressed by curriculum change are offered in this section.

Suggestion 1 would be that the Business Studies Department adopt a team approach to addressing the issues posed and collaborate in a process reengineering format to initiate any curriculum changes they felt necessary for each of the disconnects.

Suggestion 2 would be to mitigate Disconnect # 1 using a concerted, early on effort through the business advisers, to determine which path new Business Majors plan on taking. Utilizing the curriculum changes identified by the process, two separate curriculum paths could then be developed to better satisfy the needs of each of the two student groups. As one size never fits all, the two programs could accommodate any other minor changes needed by a particular student.

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When addressing this disconnect, it would be extremely important to recognize that those students proceeding directly into the workplace may sooner or later want to continue their education. Consequently any such two program approach must be flexible.

Disconnect # 2 is not a curriculum issue.

Suggestion 3 involves Disconnect # 3. Course content and flow could be improved with more collaboration between instructors. The sharing of syllabi, maintaining an awareness as to the expectations of other courses and instructors, and identifying any areas where courses overlap, could make the determination as to what, if any, action should be taken in that instance. Working more closely might also reinforce certain business tenets making the experience as a whole more rewarding to the students. A final suggestion for this disconnect would be a Sophomore Capstone Course utilizing a business simulation. Both students heading into the workplace and students going on to a four year university would benefit from such a program, and such a program could enhance the rest of the curriculum in the eyes of the four year universities.

Suggestion 4 concerns Disconnect # 4 which evoked the most concern among students. While advising students is a rewarding experience, there is only so much time and there is so much constantly changing information an instructor needs to know in order to give good advice. The discussion on transfers strongly suggest that knowing all the ramifications of the various articulation agreements is nearly impossible for one person. Further, it is very contentious among the four year universities. This author would suggest a little teamwork and a little “connective leadership.” Rather than everyone needing to know everything about all the

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institutions, individual faculty members become an expert on one of the four or five most transferred to universities. Further, in an attempt to understand these universities' needs better and to allow more of our courses to count for course credit, each of these experts becomes the liaison with the admissions and business departments of these schools. Establishing a personal relationship with the representatives could minimize competitive angst and promote more collaborative and cooperative environment, enhancing our students' advising experience. Based on both student and business responses, this author believes building a closer relationship with USM L/A specifically, could prove very beneficial to both institutions and to the area's population. While no Business Studies classes are available as such at USM L/A, synergy is possible both through current programs, such as, the Leadership Studies Program and the Lean Leadership program. These programs offer a 4+1 Program for a Masters Degree and a certificate in Lean Leadership. Given the obvious need for leadership, as stated in the business comments above, this could be a venue for increasing the "soft skills" both the literature and the employers say are missing. There also be possibilities for USM's Business Studies Department, in collaboration with CMCC to hold some hybrid classes at USML/A for the second and third years of their business programs, also better serving the local L/A population.

Disconnect # 5 is not a curriculum concern.

Suggestion 5 is to take advantage of the opportunity Disconnect # 6 offers. With nearly 80% of business surveys indicating that locally available new manager training would be an asset, there is an obvious opening to rectify the second question by better marketing of CMCC's current management courses and programs and to develop some additional "out of the box" programs with course curriculum additions



## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

suggested by area businesses. Offerings such as BIW or last year's program with local businesses could be greatly expanded. More integration with the Chamber of Commerce would also be beneficial.

Suggestion 6 deals with Disconnect # 7. This disconnect could be easily eliminated by first determining what programs are needed and offering them. It should be remembered, however, that just because a graduate stocking shelves in Shaw's may not need PowerPoint now, we are also concerned with all students' futures and would remiss if we did not provide a solid business studies curriculum for all of our students.

Suggestion 7 relates to Disconnect # 8. There is marked difference in the importance indicated by employers and by academia for certain skills and knowledge, **such as, Business Planning, Accounting concepts, Marketing and Business Systems**. While CMCC has a vested interest in entry level skills, it also has a vested interest in our graduates futures. Both of these venues can be served. More office skills and perhaps work/study arrangements with some local businesses could be utilized by those going directly into business, while more courses involving the soft skills could be available for all. Current courses such as psychology and communication could also be added to the business curriculum. While "Interpersonal Skills for Leadership" is considered a business course, this course could be considered important enough to be mandatory for all students. Nurses, machinists, service providers, sales people, and even educators would benefit from the skills taught in this course.

Suggestion 8 concerns final disconnect. We have noted the appalling percent of Maine high school graduates lacking basic skills. While, as previously stated, this is

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

not the singular responsibility of CMCC's Business Studies Department, the scope of this issue is such, that it must become a priority of every department. The need for collaboration between K-12 and the MCCS is evident, as are institution wide guidelines as to how each department can contribute to alleviating this problem.

What might prove the most effective and have the shortest turnaround time would be a College wide effort by all departments and all instructors to add more importance to the "basics" in every class every day. Another suggestion from both businesses and students was making available apprenticeship programs. This endeavor could not only provide our students with an exciting planned learning venue, but might also enhance the value of the deliverables CMCC's Business Studies Department provide in the eyes of our students, local businesses and the four year universities.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the survey population sizes in this study, given the significant scoring of some of the survey questions, plus the focus group and interview data, and its correlation with the literature, the author believes that the basic research question, "Can curriculum changes improve the deliverables the Business Studies Departments of Maine's Community Colleges provide its stakeholders?" has been answered. Curriculum forms the basis of the ska's the community colleges and other universities provide to students. The author during this endeavor has heard from some members of academia, that education is not a business. It is. As with any business, inputs (students, teachers and educational programs), go through a process (academic programs made up of a curriculum), and generate outputs, in this case, graduates well prepared for their futures. As with any business, we are judged by the quality our product, our graduates, by the users of that product, other businesses.

## **Contribution**

This project was undertaken in the hope that the community college system could enhance its ability to impart the skills, knowledge and abilities needed by its graduates for a successful beginning of their career paths. Further, that these enhancements will provide the state's business community with the best trained talent for the positions they need filled. Longer term, this could lead to a better educated population, a better paid population, a more dynamic business community, and a more robust state economy. While this project is limited to just the business studies department of CMCC, it is also hoped that, if successful, the project could provide a platform for other departments to reach out with their stakeholders groups.

## Appendices

Figure 1

### Focus Group Topics

- 1) What are future plans after receiving your Associates Degree in Business from CMCC?
- 2) Do you feel that CMCC's Business Department is providing you with the skills, knowledge and abilities necessary to assist you?
- 3) How do you feel CMCC's Business Studies Department could improve its contribution to your success?
- 4) Are there any specific actions the department should take to improve its offerings?
- 5) If you could change three things about the business studies program, what would they be?
- 6) What three things do you feel the program does well and should not be changed?

**For current students participating in focus group/brainstorming session**

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

Figure 2

### Central Maine Community College

Business Studies Department

Student Survey

Please answer the following questions by marking the appropriate box. Room for comments has also been made available. Your comments are encouraged.

				Yes	No	
1)	I am planning on entering the workforce upon receiving my two year degree.			<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
	I plan on using my two year degree to transfer to a four year institution.			<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
2)	CMCC's Business Studies Department provides quality business curriculum. Comments:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3)	CMCC's business instructors are well organized and knowledgeable about their subjects. Comments:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4)	CMCC's degree programs are easily understood and courses progress logically. Comments:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5)	Business student advisers are well versed in what I need for either employment or progressing to a higher degree. Comment:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6)	CMCC's business classes are presented	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

in a stimulating and professional manner.

Comments

- |    |   |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|----|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 7) | Hands on "Real World" experience is important in an instructor. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
|----|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|

Comments:

- |    |  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|----|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 8) | CMCC's business curriculum has too much redundancy in its courses. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
|----|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|

Comments:

- |    |  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|----|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 9) | CMCC's course schedules are flexible enough to accommodate my work schedule. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
|----|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|

Comments:

- |     |   |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 10) | Interpersonal relationship skills are important both in my education and in my future career. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
|-----|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|

Comments:

Please add any other comments or ideas you feel are important.

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

Figure 3

<b>Central Maine Community College</b>					
Business Studies Department					
Graduated Student Survey					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
CMCC's Business Studies Department provided quality business curriculum.	3	3	0	0	0
CMCC's business instructors were well organized and knowledgeable about their subjects.	4	2	0	0	0
CMCC's degree programs were easily understood and courses progress logically.	2	4	0	0	0
Business student advisers were well versed in what I need for either employment or progressing to a higher degree.	0	4	0	0	2
CMCC's business classes were presented in a stimulating and professional manner.	3	3	0	0	0
Hands on "Real World" experience is important in an instructor.	5	1	0	0	0
CMCC's business curriculum has too much redundancy in its courses.	0	4	2	0	0
CMCC's course schedules were flexible enough to accommodate my work schedule.	1	3	2	0	0
Interpersonal relationship skills are important both in my education and in my future career.	4	2	0	0	0
CMCC gave me a good start on my career.	3	3	0	0	0

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

12) I wish CMCC had \_\_\_\_\_.

Comments:

13) I would like to recommend that CMCC's Business Department consider \_\_\_\_\_

14) I would like to recommend that CMCC consider \_\_\_\_\_

Please add any other comments you would like.



Figure 4

Interview Questions for Employers

- 1) What skills, knowledge, abilities or behaviors do you look for when seeking new employees?
- 2) As an employer, how would you rate the job readiness of the applicants you interview?
- 3) Can you identify a few of the primary drivers that cause you to hire one applicant over another?
- 4) What behaviors do you consider essential for one of your employees to demonstrate in the workplace?
- 5) What are the most common reasons for letting an employee go.
- 6) Other than company specific skills, what other business skills, abilities and knowledge do you need your employees to possess?
- 7) Do you find that these skills and abilities are readily available in potential employees in your local area?
- 8) Have you ever interviewed or hired a graduate from CMCC's Business Studies Department?
- 9) Can you identify any specific skills, abilities or behaviors these applicants had that you felt would enhance their performance in your employ?
- 10) Conversely, can you identify any specific skills, abilities or behaviors these applicants had that you felt would hinder their performance in your employ?
- 11) Do you find today's new hires becoming engaged in your business?

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

Figure 5

### Constant Contact Survey Results

**Survey Name:** Central Maine Community College Business Survey July 17

**Response Status:** Partial & Completed

**Filter:** None

7/27/2012 12:23 PM EDT

1. It is easy to find qualified job applicants in the L/A area.

- Strongly agree
- agree
- disagree
- strongly disagree

- Comment:

2. It is easy to find good managers in the L/A area.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

- Comment:

3. While I can teach job specific skills to a new employee, they need to bring basic skills (reading, writing, and math skills) with them.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

- Comment:

4. An employee's willingness to step in and do what needs to be done is important to me.

- Strongly Agree

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

• Comment:

5. It is important that new employees be somewhat tech savvy (Microsoft Office, Quicken Books.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

6. My business likes to promote from within.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

7. Locally available new manager training would be valuable to my business.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

• Comment:

8. Please rank the following employee behaviors in order of their importance to you and your business.

(1 = Most)

- |                                 |                                |                            |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="text" value="--"/> | <input type="text" value="▼"/> | Dependability              |
| <input type="text" value="--"/> | <input type="text" value="▼"/> | Desire to succeed          |
| <input type="text" value="--"/> | <input type="text" value="▼"/> | Willingness to learn       |
| <input type="text" value="--"/> | <input type="text" value="▼"/> | Ability to adapt to change |
| <input type="text" value="--"/> | <input type="text" value="▼"/> | Interest in my business    |
| <input type="text" value="8"/>  | <input type="text" value="▼"/> | Positive attitude          |
| <input type="text" value="--"/> | <input type="text" value="▼"/> | Self motivated             |

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

- Integrity
- Flexibility
- Strong work ethic

- Comment:

9. If you believe new employees should come to you with some basic business knowledge, please rank the following areas by their importance to you and your business.

(1 = most)

- These skills are not necessary in new employees
- Accounting concepts
- Marketing
- Principles of management
- Business systems
- Entrepreneurial concepts
- Business organizational concepts
- Customer focus
- Business Plans

- Comment:

10. Please rank, in order of their importance to you and your business, the following employee skills.

(1 = Most)

- Interpersonal skills
- Written communication skills
- Oral communication skills
- Math skills
- Analytical skills
- Decision making skills
- Problem solving skills

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

Figure 6

**Central Maine Community College**  
Business Studies Department  
Student Survey

Planning on proceeding into the workforce.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
2) CMCC's Business Studies Department provides quality business curriculum. Comments:	2	7	1	0	0
3) CMCC's business instructors are well organized and knowledgeable about their subjects.	3	7	0	0	0
4) CMCC's degree programs are easily understood and courses progress logically.	2	8	0	0	0
5) Business student advisers are well versed in what I need for either employment or progressing to a higher degree.	1	8	1	0	0
6) CMCC's business classes are presented in a stimulating and professional manner.	4	6	0	0	0
7) Hands on "Real World" experience is important in an instructor.	8	2	0	0	0
8) CMCC's business curriculum has too much redundancy in its courses.	1	2	4	2	1
9) CMCC's course schedules are flexible enough to accommodate my work schedule.	7	0	1	1	1
10) Interpersonal relationship skills are important both in my education and in my future career.	7	3	0	0	0

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

Figure 7

**Central Maine Community College**  
Business Studies Department  
Student Survey

Planning on continuing their education

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
2) CMCC's Business Studies Department provides quality business curriculum. Comments:	5	7	2	0	0
3) CMCC's business instructors are well organized and knowledgeable about their subjects.	8	4	2	0	0
4) CMCC's degree programs are easily understood and courses progress logically.	6	5	3	0	0
5) Business student advisers are well versed in what I need for either employment or progressing to a higher degree.	6	2	4	2	0
6) CMCC's business classes are presented in a stimulating and professional manner.	4	9	1	0	0
7) Hands on "Real World" experience is important in an instructor.	8	5	1	0	0
8) CMCC's business curriculum has too much redundancy in its courses.	4	4	4	2	0
9) CMCC's course schedules are flexible enough to accommodate my work schedule.	3	6	4	1	0
10) Interpersonal relationship skills are important both in my education and in my future career.	13	1	0	0	0

## Can Curriculum Changes Improve the Deliverables

Figure 8

**Central Maine Community College**  
Business Studies Department  
Graduated Students' Survey

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
2) CMCC's Business Studies Department provided quality business curriculum.	3	3	0	0	0
3) CMCC's business instructors were well organized and knowledgeable about their subjects.	4	2	0	0	0
4) CMCC's degree programs were easily understood and courses progress logically.	2	4	0	0	0
5) Business student advisers were well versed in what I need for either employment or progressing to a higher degree.	0	4	0	0	2
6) CMCC's business classes were presented in a stimulating and professional manner.	3	3	0	0	0
7) Hands on "Real World" experience is important in an instructor.	5	1	0	0	0
8) CMCC's business curriculum has too much redundancy in its courses.	0	4	2	0	0
9) CMCC's course schedules were flexible enough to accommodate my work schedule.	1	3	2	0	0
10) Interpersonal relationship skills are important both in my education and in my future career.	4	2	0	0	0
11) CMCC gave me a good start on my career.	3	3	0	0	0

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