

Do Our Graduates Know What Companies Are Seeking In An Employee, and, Perhaps More Importantly, Do We?

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ABSTRACT

University marketing faculty teach and embrace a concept referred to as the *Marketing Concept*, which places an emphasis on customer needs as a central focus in managing the marketing effort. Understanding customer needs through marketing research is thus essential to the process. If college marketing programs are to prepare students for their customers, the companies that hiring these students, the question then follows: do college marketing faculty and college marketing graduates know what qualities employers are seeking? This exploratory study reports the results of a survey of employers who were attending a Career Fair at a Southeastern US state university which addresses this question.

Thirty representatives of companies attending the Career Fair were asked to rate the importance they assigned to selected skills and attributes possessed by candidates. The results are presented in Table 1, which presents the mean scores of the 29 attributes rated, ranked by order of importance. The results indicate that companies hire “soft skills” and attitudes, yet, in marketing as well as other College of Business courses, hard skills are often taught and emphasized. These findings are consistent with other research on the topic (Alsop 2006, Gokuladas and Menon 2014).

A number of concerns and questions arise, if the results are representative. One concern, most young people gain the “soft-side” skills and attitudes before they reach marketing classes, and, from sources other than marketing and business faculty. Second, are students and faculty of Marketing Programs, and Colleges of Business at large, aware of what companies want? Third, even if students and faculty know what is needed, are students developing the

skills and qualities they need to obtain a job? Lastly, which, if any of the most important “soft-side” attributes, can marketing programs develop these in a student?

Though exploratory in nature, this study suggests more research on these questions:

- (1) are the results of this study representative?
- (2) are faculty aware of what companies want?
- (3) are students aware of what companies want?
- (4) are students developing the attributes that companies want?
- (5) should curriculum be modified to include soft skills?
- (6) are Business Schools capable of teaching soft skills and attitudes?
- (6) is it appropriate for colleges address attitudes and personal qualities of students?

It should be mentioned that interviews to collect the data were collected by students in a marketing class, and that each student who involved was surprised at the results.

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TABLE 1

Mean Ratings: Importance of Selected Attributes of College Business Graduates Among Company Recruiting Representatives, Reported By Level of Importance

1.	Positive Attitude	4.83
2.	Respectful Of Others.....	4.80
3.	Energetic/Hard Worker.....	4.79

4.	Trustworthy.....	4.76
5.	Takes Responsibility.....	4.72
6.	Takes Initiative	4.72
7.	Cooperataive/Team Player.....	4.61
8.	Good Communicator/Interpersonal Skills.....	4.60
9.	Ambitious.....	4.39
10.	Organized/Prompt.....	4.37
11.	Self-Confident.....	4.36
12.	Discretion.....	4.30
13.	Critical Thinker/Analytical Skills.....	4.27
14.	Dress/Demeanor/Personal Appearance	4.20
14.	Leadership Ability	4.19
15.	Strong Personality/Presence.....	4.17
16.	Courageous.....	4.09
17.	Fun Personality/Sense Of Humor.....	4.02
	Dress/Attractive Demeanor.....	4.02
18.	Giving/Compassionate.....	3.60
	Good Writing Skills.....	3.60
19.	Knowledge Of Corp or Business Strategy.....	3.56
20.	Knowledge Of Functional Area (Mrkt/Mgt).....	3.50
21.	Computer software skills.....	3.39
22.	Work Experience.....	3.16
23.	Quantitative/Stat./Math Skills.....	3.10
24.	High Grades.....	3.04
25.	Active In Student Prof. Org.....	2.78
26.	Knowledge of Finance.....	2.61
27.	Knowledge of Global or International Business...	2.52