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Marketing U: Preparing Students to Succeed in the Job Search Process

Emily Guyon

Abstract

Despite the extensive career services programs offered at secondary education institutions across the United States, students continue to underutilize career preparedness resources. The purpose of this research was to investigate what skills students were interested in learning more about related to the job search process and how they preferred to receive such information. It also examined if the graduate students in the Ricciardi College of Business (RCOB) at Bridgewater State University utilized Career Services, what resources they were interested in learning more about, and how they preferred these resources to be offered. The findings were consistent with previous research studies and showed Career Service resources are greatly underutilized by graduate students. In this study, 46% of students have never utilized Career Service resources compared to 34% noted in previous research findings (Fadulu, 2018). Based on the study's findings, several recommendations were given as to how the RCOB can offer Career Service resources to graduate students to improve the likelihood students will utilize the resources and benefit from their experiences.

Introduction

Statistics regarding what employers look for in their employees during the job interview process proves to be eye-opening. Typically, only 2% of applicants for a job will be called for an interview (Gladstone, 2017). Applicants for a specific job need to master pre-interview skills in order to land an interview, as well as interview skills if they want to land the job. According to research by Deloitte, Inc., “75% of the global workforce will be made up of millennials by 2025” (Gladstone, 2017). Graduating college students will continue to make up the ever-growing workforce, but will they feel confident to succeed in it? It is the responsibility of higher education to fill the gaps in their students' professional skills and experience to produce the most prepared students. How can Bridgewater State University (BSU) and the RCOB best prepare their students for success with the job search process? The purpose of this survey, as explained in the abstract, was to determine the needs of graduate students here at Bridgewater State University in order to provide these resources in a useful manner to prepare students for the job search process and how they can best market themselves to employers.

In a preliminary study conducted in Fall

2017, students in two of Dr. Kathleen Ferris- Costa's Marketing Research classes designed a qualitative study to investigate undergraduate students' perceptions of their preparedness for the job search process. Eight focus groups were conducted, with six undergraduate business students in each group, resulting in a total of 48 undergraduate student participants. The students were asked 20 open-ended questions by various moderators using a pre-approved, focus group moderator guide for consistency. A total of 25 males and 23 females were surveyed, representing 10 sophomores, 21 juniors, and 17 seniors. Overall, 90% of the students reported feeling unprepared for the job search process. The students recommended Bridgewater State University offer a credited course focusing on the following skills: cover letter writing, interviewing, job etiquette, networking, resume writing, and social media presence. The purpose of the preliminary study was to analyze how confident and prepared undergraduate students felt prior to graduation, what skills they wanted to learn more about and the preferred modality to receive such information. This study extended that research to the business graduate students at Bridgewater State University.

Literature Review

Students across the country, including here at Bridgewater State University, do not actively utilize the career services departments at their schools. Only 34% of students across the nation feel confident enough to participate in the job market, and 36% feel confident to participate in the workforce, according to a study conducted by Gallup and the Strada Education Network (Fadulu, 2018). The same study conducted found “fewer than 20% of undergraduate students [across 43 randomly selected public and private universities in the United States] reach out to their school's career centers for advice on finding jobs or finding and applying to graduate programs” (Fadulu, 2018). Students feel more comfortable consulting family, peers, and friends on important issues regarding their education and career, assuming those closest to them know what is best for their success. Christine Cruzvergara, the director of Wellesley College's career-education office, says “students will go to their trusted network to get information—that may be a faculty member—before they develop a relationship with someone in student affairs or the career office” (Fadulu, 2018). The Gallup study found that “almost 50% of current students speak often or very often with faculty or staff about their future careers” (Fadulu, 2018). A strong disconnect lies

between students and their school's career services programs – however, the bond between students and faculty remains clear.

The average job opening draws in over 250 applications (Gladstone, 2017). How can Bridgewater State University ensure their students feel prepared and confident when entering the job search process? Fostering a motivational environment is critical to ensuring students engage in preparing themselves fully to enter the job market. It was found that “first-generation and transfer graduates [are] the least likely to use career services while in college” (New, 2016). Bringing education directly to students through a class rather than a service they need to seek out and make time for in an already limited schedule would benefit a multitude of students at Bridgewater State University. Many local universities, including Bentley University and the University of Rhode Island, offer similar courses as a business elective or part of their required curriculum. A class focusing on the skills necessary to successfully begin and work through the job search process is a way to provide easy access to students and help motivate and encourage them to take charge of their careers before graduation. As with the changing trend of college career service focusing on creating “connected communities ... its new iteration offers a

stronger emphasis on building connections through partnerships with employers from a variety of sectors, experiential learning, mentoring, and developing career communities of learners and networkers that will engage students and alumni for a lifetime” (Dey, 2014). Career service departments are transitioning to include a wider range of services, but if students do not utilize the services provided, what use will the programs be?

One emerging trend in career services is “establishing stronger coordinated campus partnerships” (Dey, 2014). With the development of relationships between career services and various other departments across an institution's campus, it is possible and likely that a connection between career services here at Bridgewater State University and professors in the Ricciardi College of Business is possible, helping to develop a course that offers the same or similar programs available through Career Services. For the continued success of Career Services, “the need for career services to meet students in their space across campus and virtually” (Dey, 2014) is equally important as connecting to key stakeholders. The “existence of effective online career services may help students with the difficult task of balancing life and work” (Venable, 2010)

by delivering services through different times and methods online. Connecting to different areas on campus can help to “[leverage] the entire campus ecosystem through partnerships and collaboration” (Venable, 2010). However, our qualitative study findings indicate the majority of the BSU’s student population work outside of school and their time is limited. Therefore, unless they are earning credit or getting paid, it is unlikely they will visit Career Services. Creating a class that focuses on job search preparedness by incorporating the resources from Career Services would benefit both the students of the Ricciardi College of Business and Career Services. A collaboration between professors and Career Services would allow information to be shared and communicated with students in a timely and beneficial manner.

Methodology

The survey was created using Qualtrics, an online survey software. There was a total of 28 questions organized into 11 blocks, by topics, with corresponding questions under each. Many of these topics were identified in the first qualitative study as the areas of most importance to the students (excluding demographics). The blocks are as follows: Working a Career Fair, Networking, Mentoring, Job

Shadowing, Internships, Cover Letters, Resumes, Interviewing, Student to Professional Transitions, Conclusion, and Demographics. The demographic results are featured in the Table 1.

GENDER (n=46)		AGE (in years)	
Female	22	Average	28
Male	24	Minimum	21
Other	0	Maximum	51

Table 1: Demographics

The survey consisted of various types of questions including multiple choice, rank-order, and Likert-type scale questions that allowed participants to answer in a variety of ways, honestly and accurately. The completed survey was administered to 46 graduate students at Bridgewater State University in the Ricciardi College of Business, equal to a 57% response rate. Responses were solicited via class visits and Blackboard announcements which included the survey link. Candy bar incentives were provided to students during classroom visits. The average age of the respondents was 28 years old, with 24 males and 22 females completing the survey.

Results

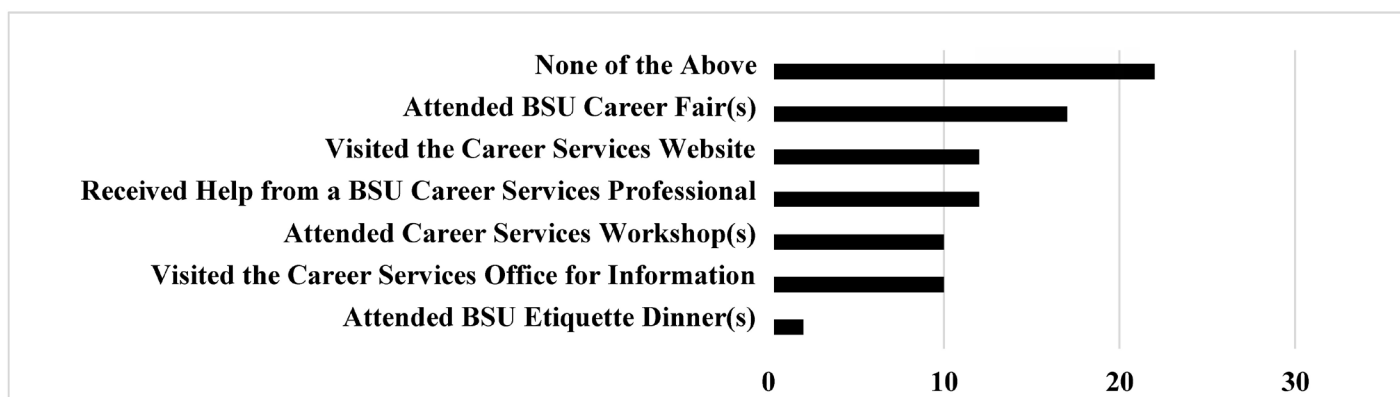
Career Service Resources

Students were asked what BSU Career Service resources they had utilized. Overall, 46% of students had never utilized any services provided by Career Services (see Figure 1). According to a study

part or full time (as analyzed in a later question).

The lack of time on campus and working off campus may attribute to the higher level of non-utilization of resources, which suggests a need for a course that would incorporate career service resources into the curriculum.

Figure 1. Students' Utilization of BSU Career Services



conducted by Strada-Gallup, “43 % of students have been to their institution’s career services office or used related online resources more than once, and 34 % have never visited the office or used the resources at all” (Strada-Gallop, 2017). The number of BSU students not using career services is slightly above average, which may be influenced by all graduate students living off campus; also, the majority of students surveyed were currently employed either

Career Fairs

A career fair, also referred commonly as job fair or career expo, is an event in which employers, recruiters, and schools give information to potential employees. Students were asked if they have ever been to a BSU or any other career fair. The majority of the students (29/46) had attended a career fair in the past, either at BSU or at another insitution. Career fairs are offered at BSU each semester and students are strongly encouraged to attend.

Most of the students (30/46) were interested in learning how to benefit from attending a career fair. While most students were interested in learning more about career fairs, many students may already have had experience with career fairs or were currently in a stable job with no intention of looking for a new one.

Online Networking

Students were asked if they have a LinkedIn account. Results indicated 45 of the 47 students surveyed had LinkedIn accounts. The majority of respondents had up-to-date accounts (29) and 15 of them had accounts that needed to be updated.

Students were asked if they would be interested in learning how to improve/create their LinkedIn account. Of those surveyed, 38 students were interested in learning how to improve/create their LinkedIn account, while 8 students were not. On average, 64% of employers view the LinkedIn accounts of potential employees (“Do Employers View Your Professional Social Network Before Hiring?” 2019). A student’s LinkedIn account is an online extension of their resume and they should know how to present themselves professionally online.

Professional networking involves connecting with others for career or business-related reasons.

Students were asked how confident they were with their professional networking skills (see Figure 2). The majority of students (38) reported some level of confidence with their professional networking skills, while only 8 did not feel confident at all. As graduate students with an average age of 28 years old, many of the participants may have networking experience. However, there is room for improvement with only 9 students feeling very confident in their skills.

Students were asked if they would be interested in learning how to improve their professional networking skills (see Figure 3). The majority of the students surveyed (41) would be interested in learning how to improve their networking skills. Between 70 and 80 percent of jobs are acquired through networking (Belli, 2017). When students improve their networking skills and expand their personal and professional networks, they are increasing their career opportunities.

Mentoring, Internships, and Job Shadowing

A mentor is someone willing to share their professional knowledge and expertise in the field. Students were asked if they have ever had a professional mentor. Most of the students surveyed (25/46) have had a professional mentor in the past.

Figure 2. Students' Confidence Level with Professional Networking Skills

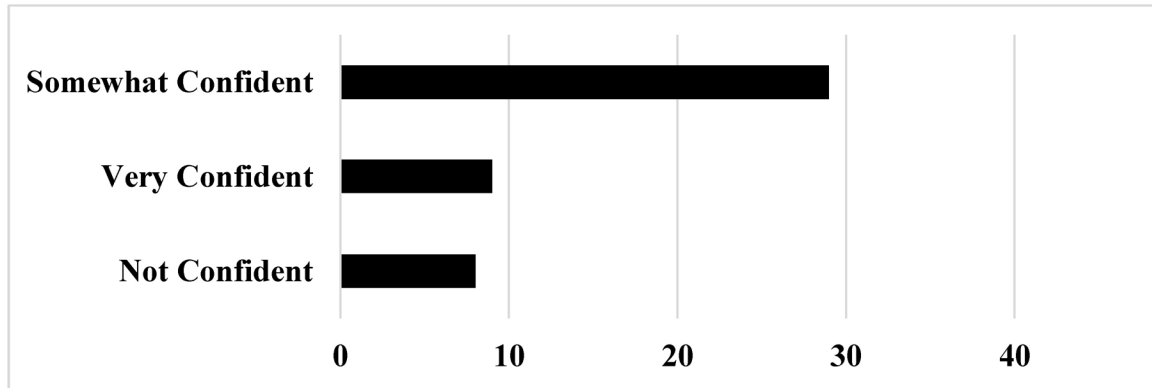
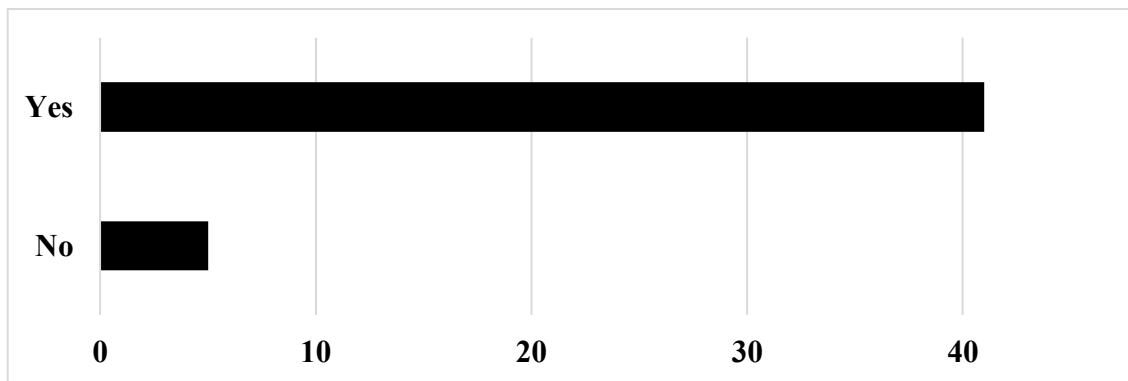


Figure 3. Students' Interest in Improving Professional Networking Skills



BSU alumni are interested in working with students and mentorships could be a possibility.

Students were asked if they would be interested in meeting a BSU alumni mentor in their chosen field of study. Results indicated 34/46 students answered they would be interested in meeting and working with a BSU alumni mentor. With the majority

of BSU students being first- generation college students, many of their parents' academic and career paths are not relatable to the students and a mentorship could prove to be beneficial.

Job shadowing is a career exploration activity that offers an opportunity to spend time with a professional currently working in a career field of

interest. Job shadowing offers a chance to see what it's like working in a specific job. Students responded if they would be interested in job shadowing a professional in their chosen field of study. A total of 32/46 participants indicated an interest in job shadowing. Providing such an experience would allow students to see what a particular job was like and whether they are interested in a chosen career.

An internship is a period of work experience offered by an employer to give students exposure to the working environment, often within a specific industry. They allow students to gain practical work experience, develop new skills, network, and apply classroom theory in a professional setting. Students were asked whether they have ever done a college internship. Nine students earned college credit for their internship, 18 did not earn credit, and 19 had not completed an internship. Students were asked if they would be interested in doing an internship. Results indicated 27 of the 46 students have completed an internship as undergraduates or graduate students. A total of 20 students were interested in doing an internship either in their current field of study or in a different field (1 student). As indicated in a previous question, more than half of the students had already completed internships. Although an internship

allows students to see what a particular job entails and provides them with the opportunity to gain real-world work experience, most of the graduate students surveyed were full-time employees and simply did not have the time or the need to complete an internship.

Cover Letters and Resumes

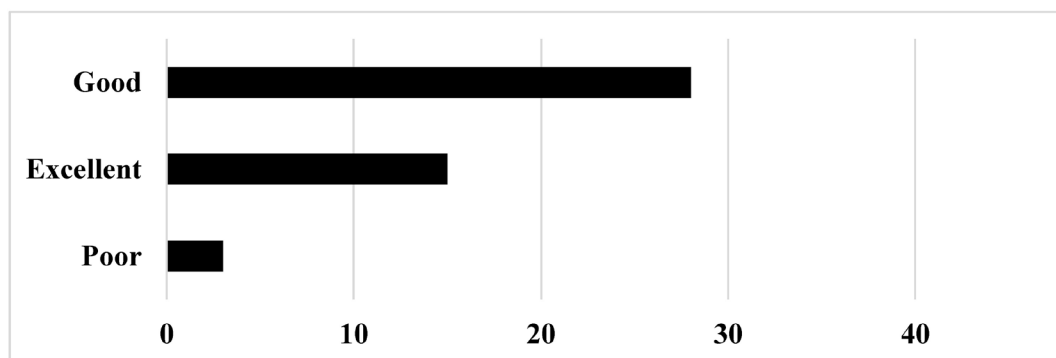
A cover letter is a document sent with your resume to provide additional information on your skills and experience. The letter provides detailed information on why you are qualified for the job you are applying for. Students answered if they had ever written a cover letter. The majority of students surveyed had written a cover letter in the past. Students were also asked if they would be interested in learning how to improve their cover letter writing skills. Most of the students surveyed (44/46) had experience in writing cover letters, and 34/46 were interested in learning how to improve their cover letter writing skills.

A professional resume is a formal document submitted to job recruiters which represents an applicant's work experience, education, and skills. Students were asked if they had a resume, with 100% responding affirmatively. Students were then asked to rate their resume writing skills (see Figure 4). The majority of the students (43/46) rated their resume

rating skills as good or better. Although all students have resumes, 38/46 were interested in learning how to improve their resumes. As a member of the work force, it is advantageous to always have an updated resume that is a true representation of your accomplishments and abilities. The ability to write a strong, professional resume is an asset to any graduate student.

job interview used for training purposes. The conversational exercise usually resembles a real interview as closely as possible, for the purpose of providing experience for a candidate. Students responded if they had ever done a mock interview and if they would be interested in learning how to improve their interviewing skills. Of those surveyed, 18 of the 46 students had done a mock interview and 39 students were interested in learning how

Figure 4. Students' Assessment of Resume Writing Skills



Interviewing Skills

Students were asked to assess their confidence levels with their professional interviewing skills. The majority of the students (43/46) had a good level of confidence in their professional interviewing skills, but there was room for improvement with only 22 % being very confident.

A mock interview is an emulation of a

to improve their interviewing skills. The graduate students' responses identify the importance of good interviewing skills and their interest in learning how to improve such skills.

Workplace Transition

Students assessed their levels of confidence with their overall abilities to successfully transition from

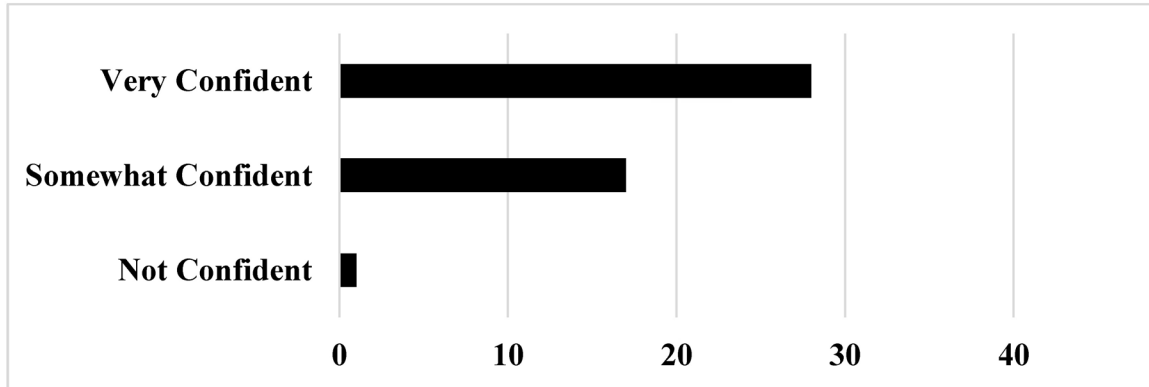
a student to a professional; these skills include time management, etiquette, social norms, attire/professional dress, and the ability to handle different cultures, personalities, and backgrounds. Additionally, they were asked if they would be interested in learning skills that would assist in their transition. With the average age of the graduate students surveyed being 28 years old, it was expected that almost all of those surveyed (45/46) would report some level of confidence in their abilities to transition from student to professional (see Figure 5). However, 70% of the students indicated they were interested in learning additional skills to improve their chances of success.

Students ranked their interest (1 being the most interested, 5 being the least interested) in the following ways to learn more about the career skills mentioned in this survey. Table 2 shows students' preferences (in rank order) for how they would like to receive information regarding the career skills and resources mentioned in the survey. Their first choice is for a credited hybrid course to be offered, followed by a credited fully online course. Workshops and guest speakers were also popular options and easily could be incorporated into the hybrid and online courses. Visiting career services, which is the main form of modality for students to access career resources,

was at the lower end of the list along with an online certification course. Results of the preliminary qualitative study indicated that students are pressed for time and that, unless they are getting paid or receiving credit for their efforts, it is highly unlikely they will utilize any such resources. These results support these findings and indicate students are most interested in modalities that provide them with course credit.

Lastly, students were asked what their career plans were upon graduation. The majority of the students (32) were planning to continue in their current job upon graduation, 3 students were starting a new job, 3 students were continuing their education, and 18 students would actively look for a new job upon graduation. Although the percentage of undergraduate students looking for jobs upon graduation would presumably be greater than the 40% of graduate students who indicated they will be job searching upon graduation, it is beneficial for all graduate students to have the opportunity and resources to improve their preparedness for the job search process. *According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics ("Number of Jobs Held," 2017), the average worker currently holds ten different jobs before age forty, and this number is projected to grow.*

Figure 5. Students' Confidence Level of Ability to Transition



MODALITY
1. Credited Hybrid Course
2. Credited Online Course
3. Workshops and Guest Speakers
4. Visit Career Services
5. Online Certification Course

Table 2: Students' Information Modality Preferences

Recommendations

The results of the survey are consistent with previous research findings of comparable institutions and show that the resources provided by Career Services are underutilized by the business graduate students here at Bridgewater State University. As stated earlier, with the majority of our students working (many full time),

unless they are receiving course credit or getting paid, they simply don't have the time to visit Career Services.

The first recommendation is to create a business hybrid elective course, offered to both undergraduate and graduate students. The course objectives would focus on the skills identified in the survey including resume writing, networking, interviewing, LinkedIn development, cover letter writing, and career fair navigation. The course information would be delivered through lectures, discussions, videos, podcasts, interactive learning, in-class workshops and guest speakers. Ultimately, the course would feature both in-class and online elements in order to appeal to students and their busy schedules,

while also allowing for the most effective teaching of these skills through high impact learning techniques.

Within the course, Career Services would sponsor workshops specifically designed for the business students on how to navigate a career fair, learn about job etiquette, and perform mock interviews. For maximum impact, professors would partner with Career Services to deliver information and enhance students' learning and preparedness for the job search process.

The course would also feature guest speakers from local businesses. The business professionals would share their work experiences, lessons learned throughout their careers, and suggestions on how to best transition from student to professional. The guest speakers could be alumni and/or professionals looking to hire from BSU and willing to impart their wisdom to students. Representatives from management, marketing, human resources, accounting, finance, and aviation organizations can provide a wide range of information for the business students.

Finally, the course would feature networking events for students and local business professionals. Students would connect with local business leaders and BSU alumni and have the opportunity to participate in job shadowing, mentorships, and

internships.

Conclusion

Students are feeling unprepared for the job search process and the current methods of offering career service resources to students are ineffective. Study results indicate students are interested in learning more about these resources, and the best way to provide them is to offer a credited course. Professors should partner with the professionals from Career Services to develop a course focused on increasing students' preparedness for the job search process and their chances for job search success. The information is the same, it's the modality that needs to change to better meet the needs of the BSU students' time constraints due to school, work, and family obligations.

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About the Author

Emily Guyon graduated in 2019 with a degree in Management and two concentrations, in Marketing and Human Resources. Her research was completed in Spring 2019 with the help of Dr. Kathleen Ferris-Costa (Marketing). Emily presented her research at the 2019 Northeast Decision Sciences Institute and placed fourth overall in the poster competition. She plans to work in the Human Resources industry, eventually obtaining a Master of Business Administration degree.