

Is the Job Market Tight for Your Grads? Beyond the ABCs of Job Search: ‘Suit’em Up’, Inside & Out, and ‘Brand’ Them

Ruth Taylor, Texas State University

This paper focuses on ‘fear’ found most common among upper-level college students and military veterans in today’s tight job market. One principles of marketing educator’s experiential project, entitled ‘Suit’em up,’ inside & out, and ‘brand’ them is discussed at length with implementation details and perception survey findings provided along with pre-project related mini-lectures. The project moved individual participants beyond the typical ABCs of the job search process to that of creating for a mission-centric, introspective-based marketing plan with the ultimate goal of finding meaningful, life-satisfying work. Implications for student cohorts- at large and academic, veteran, and at-large career counselors are identified.

With the U.S. economy lagging in 2011 and employment rates exceedingly high, educators are encouraged to advise students, veterans and other job seekers to re-think their personal job search readiness strategies. And, to encourage them to move beyond the typical ABCs training of a job search learned in school: the resume, the cover letter and personal interview skills. Helpful job search readiness actions that go beyond the ABCs the following elements: (1) an introspectively-determined armor of skills; (2) a competitive position with a brand catch phrase; (3) an intensive study of industry of interest and alternative industries of interest; (4) a personal marketing plan; and (5) a meaningful long-term, life-satisfying employment-oriented networking plan. The experiential project discussed in this paper, entitled ‘Suit’em up,’ inside & out, and ‘brand’ them (hereafter referred to as the Suit’em up...project) is a means of accomplishing these above listed actions and is most beneficial if completed before students begin to write their resumes and cover letters, make job applications. Thus, the project is appropriately assigned at the junior level of a student’s academic studies.

This project was assigned as a required experiential project in a principles of marketing course. It was designed to accomplish two main comprehensive objectives: (1) give students experience in applying the principles and practices of marketing, and (2) help students increase their job search readiness. Individual project activities helped to move students toward taking personal responsibility for gaining the meaningful, life-satisfying work job seekers commonly desire. Many U.S. unemployed/underemployed people still actively seeking employment’ (i.e., still part of the so-called workforce), and the many workforce dropouts (those unemployed, discouraged, former job seekers who are ‘no longer actively seeking employment), are all hurting psychologically and financially. These people may not have thought about the readiness element needed in preparing for a meaningful job search and the flexibilities necessitated by a necessitated by a tight job market, and necessitated by other job markets changes.

The intent of this paper is to the share major details of the experiential project, Suit’em up,...’to share the nine introductory mini-lectures associated with the project; to share empirical findings regarding students’ perception of the project’s worth in terms of helping them with job search readiness; and to share students perceived fears as related to job searching in a tight job market. The project is introduced and explained in terms of its usefulness in teaching principles of marketing course content and in terms of its usefulness in training students to develop a job search readiness plan and personal marketing plan as part of their job search readiness efforts. The project directed students as job seekers to complete the following actions: (1) conduct a drill-down personal assessment of abilities; (2) conduct intensive industry of interest and alternative industry of interest experiential research; (3) create personal branded position; (4) write an introspective-based brand catch phrase; (5) design a personal marketing mix; and (6) construct an individual-centric/alternative industries-centric networking plan.

Empirical findings discussed include the following: (1) focus group findings of sixty-five, upper-level business students’ greatest ‘fear’ in today’s tight job market, and their need for help in overcoming it; (2)

findings of literature reviews regarding job search needs of unemployed military veterans (Campbell, 2011); and (3) three-year project implementation findings. Project details and survey findings hold implications for other academic educators, veteran and at-large career counselors; and for all job seekers, regardless of major area of academic study, prior work experience, or military service.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current ‘Tight’ Job Market

Today, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (June, 2011), the unemployment rate of young adults (ages 18-24) is at a crisis point of 26.8%; the general population unemployment rate is at 9.0% (Campbell, 2011); at least 50% of 2010 business school graduates and most of 2011 graduates are still seeking employment (Business News, 2011); and the unemployment rate of military veterans seeking civilian jobs is at 8.8% (Campbell, 2011). Training people to develop different job search strategies in different types of labor markets and getting them to access their readiness for a meaningful job search are prerequisites in career counseling, albeit not always put into practice. According to Piggott (1997), we need people who can reinvent themselves, as market changes occur, doing so to give themselves a competitive advantage. Job seekers need to be encouraged to broaden their scope of job search by being curious about the way job market works in various industries and how their skill set is applicable in a variety of occupations in a variety of industries. Some educators, career consultants, and U.S. government entities are beginning to provide enhanced training, although, as survey findings discussed in this paper demonstrates, more intensive training is needed that regard job search readiness and training in the value of and development of a personal marketing plan as part of one’s life-satisfying job search effort.

Help Strategies

In essence, based on reviews of current literature and websites analyses, it can be said that there are many and varied entities reaching out to help today’s job seekers. Although this paper will not make a complete review of each helping entity, the essence of some help strategies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Job Search Help Strategies Provided Student-Cohort and Graduates.

Academic Business Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internship programs - Job shadowing experiences - AMA; SIFE; other student organizations - Designing curricula & extracurricular activities to make program’s graduates more marketable
College Placement Offices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Career counseling, Job postings, Job search advising, mock interviews, speed interviews, walk-in coaching, resume workshops, etc. - Internship fairs; Job fairs
Industry-Specific Efforts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online specific employment information & association listings - Industry-related career opportunities - Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AgCareers.com (agricultural industry) • Aef.com (advertising industry); • Winetalent.blogspot.com (wine talent) • Oilcareers.com (oil and gas industry); • Youtube.com (fashion industry)
U.S. Government Efforts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Department of Labor (Occupational Outlook Handbook OOH) - Joining Forces (First Lady Michelle Obama & Dr. Jill Biden, http://www.whitehouse.gov/joiningforces)
Online Career Counselors and Recruiters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indeed.co - Gijobs.com - Militaryhire.com - Careerbuilder.com - Resumeedcge.com
‘Sharks’ .com <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ones that students need to be careful about using and educators need to warn against.

In regard to U.S. Government Efforts/Grant Programs the U.S. government offers a variety of help aids and publishes many industry-specific statistics useful by job seekers. For example, the Department of Labor's, Bureau of Labor Statistics' publishes the Career Guide to Industries - Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011) that is a valuable job search readiness reference. Another example is, as reported by Campbell (2011) in the USAA Magazine, the Joining Forces (2011) grant program that first lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden recently launched, accessible at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/joiningforces>. This grant program has the push objective of providing grant money to help educate employers on benefits of hiring veterans and their job seeking family members (Campbell, 2011). Campbell's (2011) also showed that civilian hiring managers may not understand a veterans' transferrable skills encoded in 'military speak' rather 'corporate speak.' Thus, many companies, as the following select ones, have initiated specific efforts to help veterans and hiring managers translate military skill language to civilian skill language: www.careerbuilder.com, www.resumeedge.com, www.militaryhire.com, www.resume.info, www.regis.edu, and www.gijobs.com. Translating military skills to private sector language is of utmost importance in a veteran's successful job search effort.

In regard to online career counselors and recruiters, today's online recruiting and career help industry is international in scope and is dedicated to matching hiring employer need and job seeking candidate skills and to providing career-related help and hiring advice to their clients. In terms of helping hiring employers, some of these online companies train hiring managers in advanced on-line recruiting techniques. At times specialized help is offered as well. For instance, one online company, Indeed.com (2011), accessible at <http://www.indeed.com>, has recently broadened its business scope to include a military veteran only link dedicated to helping veterans find jobs.

Many on-line career-oriented organizations are legitimate; others not. Mixed in with the legitimate, highly beneficial company offerings, there are, likewise, company offerings not so helpful. With the current tight job market, many online marketing shysters and/or scammers have popped up to help; albeit, 'help - at a huge price,' in the form of monies paid by job seekers or in private information elicited from them. These are to be guarded against as they exploit the fragility of the unemployed and underemployed. Educators can help by guiding students to critically screen 'career advice - at a price' or 'free' ones that may have a possible ulterior motive and do so before signing up for counseling engagements with any of them. Likewise, there are sham on-line job postings specifically designed to elicit personal information from the unemployed. These exploiters create a 'beware' situation for job seekers. Questionable practices by recruiters and career-assisting entities, on- or off-line and/or any suspect job or suspect resume posting noted by suspect job seekers can be reported to the job seeker's state's Office of the Attorney General.

Unanswered Questions

However, many questions remain unanswered. One question is in regard to marketing program efforts to make graduates more marketable. In the process of business programs implementing revised strategies for enhancing the marketability of their students, thus increasing the placement rate of their graduates, an unanswered question arises. Are these revised strategies, likewise, helping students to become more marketable from each student's own personal perspective? For instance, do any of these programs offer training for students in developing for themselves a personal life-mission oriented marketing plan? And, in doing so, are students being helped such that they become more confident that they are seeking employment in the right places, for them, whether in industry of intent, adjacent industries, or alternate industry venues?

When initiating the following discussed project three years ago, in this educator's principles of marketing course, most on-line and off-line career-related, job-search advice was well meant and helpful but was, in this educator's opinion, 'surface' in nature. Today there is a plethora of websites advising introspective assessment of skills and help for veterans, but none, as could be determined by this educator/author that directly advised job seekers to develop a personal marketing plan applying the principles and practices of marketing as a way of keeping job seekers out of a potential existential job search vacuum (Schultz and Miller, 2004).

Experiential Survey Design

Approximately 390 junior level business students, enrolled in various sections of the principles of marketing course taught by the educator at a large university in the southwestern part of the United States, over a three-year period, 2008-2011, was the population studied in this research. Two different surveys were conducted. A current year conducted focus group survey involved sixty-five upper-level business students. A three-year study including approximately 390 business students who completed the Suit'em Up... project was conducted. Students participating in the focus group did so before the project was introduced to them. The project has not been implemented in a short-term summer principles of marketing course. The original project assignment three years ago was based on a marketing career advice-oriented project in a principles of marketing textbook by Kerin et al., (2009). The project has been modified over time to fit the needs of contemporary students, seeking jobs in the contemporary workplace.

The project required students to apply the principles and practices of marketing in personal job search readiness efforts. Project assignments completed helped students gain an understanding of the 'whys' of needing to go above and beyond the typically-learned ABCs of job search readiness before developing their resume or cover letter, not afterwards. Students, too, learned the importance of starting job searches early and getting related experience, whether volunteer- or pay-based. In today's tight job market, with many job seekers and few job openings, many academic business programs, college placement offices, professional career consultant organizations, and government entities have enhanced their strategies to help as explained above. Individual educators, likewise, have planned helpful course projects, such as the one discussed in the section just after the Survey Findings section that follows.

Survey Findings

In essence, the principles of marketing students as job seekers surveyed appear to be seeking help in their job searches that will move them above and beyond the ABCs of job search training typically receive in school. This seeking of help is evidenced by the following specific findings. These past semesters' findings are discussed here, before the project is presented, because the updated form of the project was based on past semesters' learning curve.

Focus Group Findings

Focus group findings indicated that many business students in their third-year level of academic study, for the large part, are unacquainted with the following:

1. The value of the Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) and the OOH's usefulness as a resource for broadening one's knowledge of industries and skills required.
2. The many industry-specific help Websites such as the agricultural industry at AgCareers.com; the advertising industry at aef.com; the wine industry at winetalent.blogspot.com; the oil and gas industry at oilcareers.com; and the fashion industry at youtube.com, and others.
3. The many general on-line help Websites such as americanhires360.com, topUSAJobs.com, JobsDirectUSA.com, monster.com, and others.
4. The introspective assessments and due-diligence research needed prior to resume writing.
5. The deep concern of their greatest fear (as discussed below).

Focus Group Job Search 'Fear' Finding

It was a surprising finding that, given the tight job market of the past few years, students appeared not so much worried about getting a job per se, but worried at a deeper level. The large majority of focus group participants, 53/65 or 81.5%, when asked what their greatest fear or apprehension was in applying an after graduation job. They stated that their greatest concern was not about finding a job per se, but rather finding life satisfying work. If not successful, they felt that they would think their time and money spent earning a degree in their major area of study would have been a total waste. The few, 3/65 or 4.6%,

veteran as student participants indicated that they, likewise, were confident, given their prior military experience, that a post-graduation job would be there for them. Although, they, likewise, sought more than just a job, they wanted meaningful, life-satisfying employment. These findings further revealed that surveyed students also feared knowing what they wanted to do, that they wouldn't get a job they liked, and they would hate their jobs, and feared the inability of attempting to show their true self on a piece of paper. Surveyed students' expression of fears can be interpreted as their calls for help in eliminating these deep down job search fears.

Post-Project Completion Survey Findings

Post-project completion survey findings indicated that many business students in their third year level of academic study found the 'Suit'em up...' project to aid them in the following positive ways. They felt the project experience helped them by increasing their job search readiness in the following ways:

1. Increase job search skills beyond the ABCs of resume, cover letter, and interview.
2. Increased awareness needed and the ability to apply for meaningful, life-satisfying work.
3. Increased awareness of many job opportunities in many industries previously not considered.

The Project - 'Suit'em Up,' Inside & Out, and 'Brand' Them

The comprehensive "Suit'em Up..." project was carried out in three parts; (1) introductory mini-lectures on topics related to job search readiness, (2) conducting introspective assessments of skills and experiences; creating a brand position and brand catch phrase, (3) creating a personal marketing plan, and creating a professional job search networking plan as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Suit'em Up,' Inside & Out, and 'Brand' Them Project

<p>Part 1: Introductory Pre-Project Mini-lectures (the 'why')</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lecture 1: Overcoming workplace 'fear.' - Lecture 2: Step back and take a different approach. - Lecture 3: Value of Introspective, individually-based project (vs. team project). - Lecture 4: Essentials of an extended Job Search. - Lecture 5: Success with personal branding (and brand tags). - Lecture 6: Need for networking & personal Networking plan. - Lecture 7: Need or relevant internship experience. - Lecture 8: Marketing mix/introspective assessment job search relationship. - Lecture 9: Need for company, industry & cross-industry analyses
<p>Part 2: Project Logistics (the 'how')- Introspective and Experiential Due Diligence Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introspective assessment of interests, preferences & skills - Industry research of preferred industry and alternate(s) - Develop personal marketing plan with self as product, price, place and promotion. - Development of a brand catch phrase - Development of a professional networking plan - Develop of resume with 'up front' elements - Development of cover letters - Development of personal interview skills - Personal reflective statement of experience and complete a post-project survey.
<p>Part 3: The Personal Strategic Marketing "YOU" Marketing Plan (the 'show')</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Determine target market (i.e., employers to target) - Development of Personal Marketing Mix, "you" as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Product - Place - Promotion - Price

Student project packets on the next page were developed and provided to all students including mini-lectures and specific project guidelines.

Student Project Packets

When project was introduced early each semester, students were provided a packet with the associated mini-lectures and detailed project guidelines. The mini-lectures were orally to students and also included in writing in project packet. This organization, with project part completion interim due dates assigned, was chosen to cut down on students being overwhelmed with project comprehensiveness the assessments and due diligence research necessitated. Due to space limitations, only the main parts of Suit'em Up... project are provided above. Further project details can be obtained from the author.

Part 1: Introductory Pre-Project Mini Lectures

The following nine mini-lectures were embedded with past-semester student survey findings, current focus group findings, and related literature review findings as a means to increase the 'realness' of the project in a student's job search processes. Job search topics included in the mini-lectures were directly related to issues of concern that go beyond resume, cover letter and interview skill readiness.

Mini-Lecture 1 - Overcoming Workplace 'FEAR'. The easiest way for employers to cut operating costs immediately is to downsize their labor force causing the unemployed and those threatened with unemployment, 'FEAR.' It is generally accepted that one of the best weapon against fear is 'information.' For all job seekers, information co-joined with preparation and purposeful action will lead, in time, to meaningful and life-satisfying job landings. Invalid assumptions, based on a lack of information about jobs, companies, industries, skills requirements, and so on, might lead, at times, to job seeker uncertainty and lack of motivation. And, unfortunately, at times, leads to a jobseeker's exodus from the labor force (deemed no longer actively seeking employment). Thus, information is one of the job seeker's best assets.

Mini-Lecture 2 - Step Back and Take a Different Approach. When things are not going right in one's job search, it might be time to step back and approach it from a different direction (MSI, 2011). A re-approach might require a break from tradition; creating the new; crossing industry lines, and in some cases crossing industry lines two or three times; and developing different job search strategies in different workplace environments to better accomplish planned mission. A stepping-back re-approach may require using creative and analytical approaches to re-direct job search efforts by analyzing past job seeking efforts and those of others, and staying motivated. Unemployment is stressful. However, with the right introspective assessments and due diligent experiential industry-centric research; with the right approach, attitude and job search tools; and with the right strategic career plan, dedicated and motivated job seekers will eventually land meaningful and life-satisfying jobs.

In this educator's/author's opinion, all educators and academic program planners have a responsibility to not only design program curricula in such a way that it helps students to become more marketable, thus increasing academic program's graduate job placement rates, but likewise to ensure that these curricula help students to become more marketable in meaningful and life-satisfying ways.

Mini-Lecture 3 - Value of Introspective, Individual-Based Projects. Although a good many required Principles of Marketing projects are group- and team-based experiential projects, some incorporate a plethora of innovative technologies, such as, tablet computers (iPads and others); smartphones, wireless clicker systems; social media (such as LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and others (Granitz and Pitts, 2011), individually-assigned projects have intrinsic value as related to personal growth and development. The Suit'em Up... project is individually assigned, and can be done with or without the use of innovative technologies, was designed to help each student plan for and find employment opportunities that fits the student's soul. The project was required students to 'drill down' getting at his or her psych level, helping individual students to know themselves better and have a holistic understanding of the comprehensive job search readiness process. The assigned Suit'em Up... project was designed to teach students the principles and practices of marketing and how to apply them to a level of learning most

relevant to students - the job search process. A major aspect of this applied project required students to apply the universally-applicable marketing mix to themselves, making the completed project a job search applicable.

Mini-Lecture 4 - Extended Job Search Process Essentials. Introspective and experiential information, preparation, motivated action, and good communication skills (along with well-honed cover letters, resumes, and interview skills), are the essentials of the extended job search preparation process. Multi-armed with these job-landing essentials, job seekers stand a better chance, in a tight job market, and otherwise, at landing a meaningful job, than job applicants armed only with the ABCs of typical job search preparation.

Mini-Lecture 5 - Success with Personal Branding. A personal branding strategy includes the development of and use of a brand tag or brand catch phrase. Brand tags or brand catch phrases have successfully been used in many industries, including the on-gaming industry; and the use of brand tags is showing up in creative job search processes. To promote understanding, an analogous example of the value of a brand catch phrase, or 'brand tag,' in marketing oneself, as used in the on-line gaming industry by individual on-line gamers, will now be given.

In the gaming industry (large market of on-line video game players), branding and brand tags strategies are used by individual gamers (marketers) seeking contact with other like-minded gamers (market segmentation and target marketing), albeit, highly-experienced ones (niche marketing) in the army video game sector of the gaming industry (market segmentation). To attract high level gamers of a particular video game, for example, high-skilled at playing Call of Duty: Black Ops, accessible at <http://www.activision.com/atvihub/home.do> (Activision, 2011), the first gamer who is a high-level Call to Duty: Black Ops, gamer, being highly-skilled his or herself, (a marketer) develops and uses a brand tag (i.e., brand catch phrase) always written just under the gamer's own name on each electronic send-out, of any form, sent to other gamers with the aim of them, if likewise highly skilled, contacting the originating game player (a sale made). The highly-skilled gamer interested in being contacted, then identify themselves to the original high level gamer and a match is made (a sale made). Personal branding and the use of brand tag are becoming very important and widely used in the gaming industry, and in other industries.

Personal branding and the use of brand tags is becoming widely used personal marketing strategy and has direct applicability to individual job seekers wanting to emulate the success of the gaming industry's use of brand tags. Personal branding, as defined in the literature, is interpreted as a job-seeker's identification of his or her unique promise of value to employers (Brown, 2011). With the use of personal branding becoming popular, Brown (2011) advised job seekers to use a well-written, introspective-based brand catch phrase, or brand tag, by typing it just below the job seeker's name in on-line and traditional communication efforts, job postings, and personal and professional profile postings. It likewise can be used in all face-out communication efforts such as at networking events and when speaking with or interviewing with potential employers. For example, a graphic designer could use the brand tag of, 'Creator of Futuristic Designs,' assuming of course, that he/she is a creator of futuristic designs who can deliver what is promised by his or her brand tag. Brand tags, appear to be a 'hot' job seeking technique with the benefit of giving a job seeker's personal contacts a 'handle' useful in remembering the job seeker and differentiating him or her from competitive job seekers.

However, not all uses of brand tags, especially 'false front' ones, are put to good use, creating a 'hiring manager beware' situation. If a job seeker can't deliver what a brand tag promises, the job seeker is using a 'false front' brand tag. Well-designed personal brand catch phrases or brand tags need to be individual job seeker-centric, based on introspective assessment of job seeker self-awareness, strength of skill-set, and long-term career goals; as well as it should indicate the job seekers' industry of preference or alternate industry of interest. If 'false-front' brand tags are used before or after a hiring, it creates a 'job seeker beware' situation as it doesn't take rocket science to ferret out a fake.

Mini-Lecture 6 - Need for Networking. Networking pays off. Survey findings show that 50% of the employers surveyed (MSI, 2011) stated that the large majority of their new-hires were a result of a networking contact, on the part of the employee, or on the part of the employer. Network early and

creatively, and expanding one's networking circles, can go far in helping secure employment and contributing to professional development. Matt Youngquist, president of Career Horizons, stated that at least 70%, if not more, of jobs are not published, yet the majority of job seekers spend at least the same percent of their time surfing the Web, when a better use of their time would be spent networking as the vast majority of new-hires is as a result of recommendations from trusted friends and acquaintances (MSI, 2011). Networking advisers encourage the following job seeker actions: (1) network early and often; (2) expand knowledge of employment opportunities by crossing industry lines and researching alternate industries of interest; and (3) emphasize to all networking contacts the job seekers' transferable skills in understandable language regardless of prior specialization or experience used jargon.

Mini-Lecture 7 - Need for Relevant Internship Experience. The value of both a successful and not so successful educational internship experience cannot be overstated. All internships have value (<http://www.About.com>, 2009), as they teach the inside of a company and its industry helping students to determine their own industry of preference; alternative industries of interest; and determine industries they are not interested in. Relevant hands on internship experience gained with pay or for experience only is the job seeker's best asset (Hoffman, 2008). All internship experiences, whatever the outcome, should be treated as experience on one's resume.

Student internships lower employment risks for both student and employer and lessens employer training time and costs if the employer hires from within its internship pool. Internships offer students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience; to build professional networks; to explore career options, and to do without long-term commitment. Internship experiences help students develop industry-specific abilities and skills that and increase the likelihood that an intern will land a permanent job offering with the internship-sponsoring company or elsewhere. Survey findings of recruiters show that more than 50% or more of their newly-hired employees come from their internship pool (Students Veterans of America, 2011).

Educational internships can be with pay or without, i.e., for experience only. Either type brings the student the experience he or she seeks for resume building purposes. However, national attention is being given to unpaid internships by the U.S. Department of Labor. A new document recently released by the U.S. Department of Labor (Lipka, 2011) is being used in regard to student internships in that it applies a six-part litmus test from the Fair Labor and Standards Act and applies other conditions that must be met for unpaid student internships at for-profit companies to be considered legal. Unpaid internships not meeting the Department of Labor litmus test may be deemed as taking advantage of the intern as 'free labor' - an illegal action. With changing internship rules and laws, most companies will comply, and students will continue to gain the true value of internships.

Mini-Lecture 8 - Marketing Mix/ Introspective Assessment/Job Search Relationship. Job hunting is about marketing one's self. Job seekers need to spend time taking stock of him or herself as introspective assessment is a critical foundation of any job search, or job change (Career and Work Place, 2008). Taking introspective stock should result having a clear picture of one's self, what one enjoys; what competencies one does well; a clear picture of one's skills set and other abilities; and of one's personality traits. By answering the introspective-based questions in the Suit'em Up... project these questions helped each student to determine what matters to him or her, where the his or her work passion is; and then helps the student to create a personal resume, custom made for each job application if necessary, and cover letters that let his or her spirit and skills shine forth to potential hiring managers - up front, not burying away in other resume matter.

When seeking a job, in a tight job market, or otherwise, it is important for soon-to-be college graduates (typically entry-level job candidates), military veterans and other job seekers, to acquire for well-honed skills that are transferable to on-the-job performance: (1) introspective research skills; (2) search engine and database navigational skills, and (3) creative and critical thinking search skills; and (4) well-refined written and oral communication skills. Completion of the Suit'em Up... project will help students develop in each of these skill areas; as well as help each learn how to apply marketing principles and practices of marketing as learned in the classroom.

Exploratory focus group findings indicated that there is a chance that many college juniors and seniors nationwide do not know ‘where’ to start their Web searches, where to go to start identifying ‘open’ (unfilled) industry-specific employment positions and industry-specific information. This Suit’em Up... project will help student’s build their repertoire of workplace and job force information resources.

Mini-Lecture 9 - Need for Company, Industry and Cross-Industry Analyses. Job seekers may go on online using netnographic content-analysis research (the intense study of on-line data and web sites) to determine organizations and positions where industry of preference and alternate industry of interest activities are being carried out and the places carried out; to determine how these industry activities align with job seeker interests and skills and long-term plans; and determine job opportunities. Career advisors at large heartedly endorse a job seekers’ research of and learning of everything about any company the job seeker might want to work for with the goal of articulating in writing in his or her cover letter and embedding in his or her resume and cover letters how he/she will be a good fit within the hiring company. According to Saunders (2009), this is the easiest step of all, however, often the most neglected. Experience shows that, that for the large part, job seekers who have researched thoroughly the company associated with their interview usually increase their chances of getting hired. Also, with netnographic research, job seekers can determine “ahead of the curve” careers (MSI, 2011), e.g., cutting edge careers, where particular skills will be of future demand in growth industries. Cutting edge jobs and cutting edge career paths can be identified in US News and World Report’s annual publication, for example, ‘Best Careers in 2011,’ with the selection of the ‘best’ based on criteria of job outlook, job satisfaction, difficulty of the required training, prestige, and pay (Grant, 2011).

Cross-analysis of industry of preference and alternative industry of interest is of importance the learning of cross-industry application of one’s skills and talents. Many students majoring in one academic field have no idea how their skills might apply in different industries. And, sometimes they don’t know much about the job opportunities in an industry directly applicable to their major. For instance, one agriculture major student was personally interviewed. The student had not heard of the AgCareers.com and none of the business majors participating in the exploratory research focus group had heard of the website. Yet, job opportunities abound in the agricultural industry for both students of agriculture major, business major, and other academic majors. For example, Echaore-McDavid and McDavid, (2011) argue that career opportunities abound in the agriculture, food, and natural resource industry and in other agriculture industry sectors of which many students are unaware: aquaculture and commercial fishing; forest production and management; agribusiness; food and beverage natural resource management and conservations; and travel, tourism and recreation, and others. Job opportunities in agriculture are not limited just to food production, distribution, and marketing as many students think. In reality, the scope of job opportunities in the agriculture industry is very broad and deep, yet many times the agricultural industry is not considered as a career option by business students.

Part 2: Project Logistics (The ‘How’) - Introspective and Experiential Due Diligence Research

Part two of the ‘Suit’em Up...’ project included the requirement for students to conduct introspective and experiential research about the following issues:

- Introspective assessment of interests, preferences & skills.
- Industry research of preferred industry and alternate(s).
- Develop personal marketing plan with self as product, price, place and promotion.
- Development of a brand catch phrase.
- Development of a professional networking plan.
- Develop of resume with ‘up front’ elements.
- Development of cover letters.
- Development of personal interview skills.
- Personal reflective statement of experience and complete a post-project survey.

Part 3: The Personal Marketing Plan

Project Part 3, the personal marketing plan, that included two sub-parts, will be further discussed here:

1. Determination of Target Market - Industry and employer type desired based on introspective analyses related to industry of preference and alternate industry of interest.
2. Development of a Personal Marketing Mix - i.e., a Marketing 'You' Marketing Mix, consisting of the following subsections:
 - Product Strategy - the jobseeker treated as a product with benefits to contribute to a hiring employer as capsulized into a written product statement.
 - Promotion Strategy - the job seeker's self-promotion plan to be used by the job seeker in promoting him or herself in the work place, that included: a personal brand catch phrase or brand tag, a two-month networking improvement plan, an introspective-based resume and cover letter that highlighted the 'shine' of the job seeker.
 - Place Strategy - a statement of job seeker's willingness to be flexible regarding place(s) where he or she is content in delivering his or her skills to the hiring employer; as well as a statement regarding any relocation limitations and hesitations.
 - Price strategy - a statement of the salary range and benefit package the job seeker expects (not to be openly discussed until invited to do so by the hiring employer).

Project Logistics

Looking deeply and introspectively, via the project requirements, students were asked to identify of their competitive points of difference in terms of benefits they could offer potential employers and to research industry of preference and alternative industries of interest. Then the project required students to develop their personal marketing plan, a brand catch phrase, and a personal networking plan. In the last part of the project students were asked to highlight their introspective job/career, interest/skills set discoveries 'up front' in their resumes and cover letters. Individual post-project surveys and large group discussions of project benefits were conducted on the day of project submission.

Table 3: Suit'em Up' - Project Benefits for Students

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job readiness - 'they are now suited up.' • Know more about one's self. • Know more about many industries. • Applied principles of marketing to one's self. • Took responsibility for long-term & interim job-search efforts. • Got jump-start on their real job search. • Lessened job search 'fears.' • Developed ability to 'deeply' assess self. • Identified and navigated relevant on- and off-line industry/industry sector research sources. • Learned the importance of developing critical thinking skills. • Learned to scan research sources for workplace opportunities, trends and changes. • Cross industry lines in job search leading to ideas for new and different career paths. • Developed flexibility in job type and job location sought. • Practiced curiosity about other industries of interest other than academic major related ones. • Developed a strong, multi-faceted professional network. • Learned about and developed customized resumes. |
|--|

Project Benefits to Students

Post-project completion survey findings related to student perception of project worth to job search readiness, continuously indicated that students really enjoyed the Suit'em Up... project, although they found it intensive. After completing the project, students felt they knew more about themselves; knew

much more job search readiness process; and knew more about many jobs available in many industries of which they were previously unaware. Students completing the project benefited in a multitude of ways, including their awareness of, or development of, skills in the following ways as illustrated in Table 3 above. These life-skill learning encounters by students made teaching richly rewarding. Project benefits to educator were, likewise, many as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Suit'em Up' - Project Benefits for Educator

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involved students. • Students understood themselves better. • Stimulated students long-term career planning. • Witnessed principles and practices of marketing 'coming alive' in student applications. • Help students develop life skills. • Project grading was efficient as it was student-centered and required largely 'completion' grading - grades given were A, B, C, or -0-. • Richly rewarding experience. |
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Grading of the project was very efficient in that it centered largely on each student's introspectively completion of each project phase and professionalism of presentation - thus detailed grading was minimized. Most students that were part of the three-year study received a good grade (A or B) with some earning a C letter grade. Points were taken off if the project was submitted late, if a section was skipped or not quite finished, for lack of organization, and for grammar or spelling errors. Most students may have done well purposefully as they knew that they would receive a zero ('0') for gross non-commitment to the project, and gross non-compliance with guidelines. There were either good grades or average grades assigned, or zero credit was given to the project as D or F letter grades were not allowed.

Summary and Implications

In summary, completion of the 'Suit'em up inside and out, and brand them' project empowered students of all cohorts; no one group appeared to benefit more or less than another. Findings discussed in this paper have important implications for all academic, veteran and at-large career counselors, as well as the following groups of cohorts: (1) traditional college cohorts, (2) graduate cohorts, (3) unemployed cohorts, (4) underemployed cohorts and (5) veteran cohorts.

Furthermore this paper has alerted business educators to the need for them to likewise help by considering the embedding of introspective job search skill training into course content of courses taught. As the above described 'Suit'em Up,' inside and out, and 'brand' them project showed, job search readiness skills can be easily be incorporated into a principles of marketing course and done so efficiently and effectively while simultaneously teaching required academic course content.

The need for, strategy for, and importance of conducting introspective-based, job-seeking efforts that move all job seekers beyond the ABCs of the typical job search process were discussed in terms of helping them in their common mission to obtain meaningful, life-satisfying work careers. In a job seeker's mission of obtaining meaningful, life-satisfying work, and with him or her armed with: (1) well-honed introspective and experiential research and communication skills; (2) an introspectively built, industry-specific/company-specific ABCs of job search (resume, cover letter and personal interview skills; and with (3) patience and motivation, he or she will be able to accomplish what Thoreau advised (as paraphrased by this author) "go confidently in the direction of your dreams and you will usually hit what aimed at." (Quotationspage, 2011).

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Ruth Taylor is a professor of marketing and honorary professor of international studies at Texas State University - San Marcos. She received her Ph.D. in marketing from University of North Texas. Her current research interests include international marketing, branding, marketing education, and hand woven textile marketing. She has published in *Advances in Business Research*, *Journal of Brand Management*, *Journal of Marketing Education*, *Marketing Education Review*, *Journal for Advancement of Marketing*, *Competitiveness Review*, *Journal of Contemporary Business Issues*, *Journal of Global Competitiveness*, *Journal of Professional Services Marketing*, and others.