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A Survey of Employer Needs and Expectations from Business Programs at Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The recent economic slowdown and changing nature of business environments have made it increasingly challenging and competitive for recent graduates to qualify for higher level positions. Higher education institutions continuously ask what employers are looking for in a newly graduated candidate. However, most do not exactly know the answers. Understanding the changing needs and expectations of employers has become a priority for higher education institutions to remain competitive in their markets. Academics also have to respond to these changes by understanding whether they prepare their students to meet the needs and expectations of employers.

This exploratory study aims to understand employers' needs and expectations of those newly graduated from 4-year business programs at higher education institutions. Through a literature review and interviews with faculty, employers, and alumni, the authors developed measurement items that gauge the importance of certain knowledge and skill sets for the needs and expectations of employers. After pre-testing the measurement items, an online survey built in Qualtrics was used to collect the data from over 800 employers listed in a local Chamber of Commerce member roster. The results reveal not only which skill sets and knowledge areas that are most important to employers' needs but also explore how well a 4-year business degree program at a campus of a large university located in a state of the mid-Atlantic region prepares its employed graduates to meet the needs of their employers based on the opinions of the managers. Additionally, survey results report the new and emerging trends in business, and how important it is that business education address new and emerging trends in technological innovation and interpersonal skills. The demographic data of the employers of the 4-year business program graduates were also captured for classification purposes. The results are compared to the findings of prior research and suggestions for future research are offered.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tulay Girard (Ph.D., Florida Atlantic University) is an Associate Professor of Marketing at Penn State Altoona. Her research focuses on product classes, retailer attributes, perceived risk, Internet security/privacy, brand equity in banking, higher education, and private-label branding. Her publications can be found at www.tulaygirard.com. She received several best paper awards and grants.

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