Business Class To Business Career: How Can We Help Students Successfully Make the Transition?

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Introduction

Business college faculty are dedicated to making sure graduates have the technical skills and discipline knowledge required for career success. However, recruiter and employer feedback, articles featured in popular press and on the Internet, and academic studies strongly suggest these skills and knowledge, while necessary, are not sufficient.

There is a common and pervasive consensus that newly hired college graduates do not have (or at least don't use) essential qualitative skills (often referred to as soft skills) and lack a fundamental understanding of appropriate workplace behavior (2012 Professionalism In The Workplace Study, 2012; AMA 2010 Critical Skills Survey, 2010; Hyman & Jacobs, 2009; Job Skills that Every College Student Needs, n.d.; NACE- Job Outlook: The Candidate Skills/Qualities Employers Want, 2011). It could be argued that a lack of understanding regarding the importance of soft skills and acceptable workplace behavior could be attributed to the young age (approximately 22 years old) and career inexperience of many college graduates. However, that argument does not change the fact that employers want newly hired graduates to have these skills and knowledge.

Newly hired graduates are assumed to be technically proficient; however, "they display limited self-awareness, leadership, interpersonal communication, and conflict management skills" (Bailey, Sass, Swiercz, Seal, & Kayes, 2005, p. 40). Possessing critical career skills such as effective communication and teamwork in addition to practicing behaviors such as meeting deadlines and exhibiting proper business etiquette are critical to being hired and promoted. Most business faculty agree with what both the empirical research and what employers and recruiters are reporting about new graduates: they are not prepared to be high-functioning employees.

Students' difficulty in transitioning from the classroom to the workplace is multi-faceted, but one cause could be the significant differences between successful school and career behaviors.

> The paradox is that although the knowledge acquired in college is critical to graduates' success, the process of succeeding in school is very different from the process of succeeding at work. Many of the skills students develop to be successful in education processes and the behaviors for which they were rewarded are not the ones they need to be successful at work (Holton, 1998, pp. 100-101).

Adapting the information presented by Holton, Hettich (2000) detailed these significant process differences by relating how they are perceived by college graduates (See Appendix A). While in college, students experience a high degree of structure, frequent feedback, flexibility in scheduling, and most importantly, the ability to choose performance level. These experiences and this reality abruptly end on

the first day of a new job.   Students who understood and thrived using college processes predictably have problems adapting to the very different work world.

While it would be a formidable, if not impossible, task to change the academic environment to more closely resemble the workplace, it is possible to enhance the career skills of business graduates.

<div align="center">**Career Skills**</div>

There are numerous articles in the popular press and on the Internet that discuss the career skills employers value in employees but often find lacking in newly hired college graduates (Hyman & Jacobs, 2009; Job Skills that Every College Student Needs, n.d.; NACE- Job Outlook: The Candidate Skills/Qualities Employers Want, 2011).   Additionally, an employer survey concluded that employers are frustrated by the "challenges of finding '360 degree people' who have both the specific job/technical skills *and* the broader skills (communication skills, teamwork skills, problem-solving skills, and work ethic) necessary to promise greater success for both the individual and their employer" (How Should Colleges Prepare Students to Succeed in Today's Global Economy?, 2006, p. 7).

Communication

It has been widely researched and reported that communication skills significantly contribute to obtaining and keeping a job and achieving promotions and career success (Elmuti, Minnis, & Abebe, 2005; Elmuti, 2004; Smith, 2005; Tuleja & Greenhalgh, 2008; Wardrope, 2002). Many discipline-specific journals feature articles regarding the need to enhance the communication skills of students, particularly those students who are seeking jobs in their chosen fields (Kelley & Bridges, 2005; Shuman, Besterfield-Sacre, & McGourty, 2005; Kermis & Kermis, 2010).

The ability to write clearly and concisely in order to convey information and present a positive, credible image to persons both external and internal to the organization is vital in obtaining and maintaining a position with the organization. A 2004 report by the National Commission on Writing presented research that found "writing is a 'threshold skill' for salaried employment and promotion" and that "individual opportunity in the United States depends critically on the ability to present one's thoughts coherently, cogently, and persuasively on paper" (Writing: A Ticket to Work…Or a Ticket Out, 2004, p. 5).

However, faculty often hear students say they [students] can't write well and as such, avoid classes that require them to write. When forced to take such classes, students will do the minimum amount of work necessary to get a passing grade or will seek help in completing written assignments by having someone edit or actually write the assignment.   When students avoid improving their writing, they become less desirable as potential or promotable employees.

Equally important as writing skills is the ability to orally communicate ideas and information.   Verbal skills are necessary to effectively make presentations, perform public relations, and participate in meetings and as such, are vital to a successful business career. In its CPA Vision 2011 Project, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants asserted that a core competency of all accountants should be the ability to "give and exchange information within a meaningful context and with appropriate delivery and interpersonal skills" (American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, 2010, p. 1).

Most people, students included, are uncomfortable about public speaking and thus avoid any situation in which they need to speak in front of others. When they absolutely must make a presentation, students will often not rehearse or practice; that way they only have to experience "presentation anxiety" once: during the actual presentation. Needless to say, circumventing all opportunities to enhance their verbal skills is not a proactive career strategy for students.

Time Management

The inability of newly hired college graduates to manage their time is the behavior that most pointedly and perhaps painfully reflects the difference between the classroom and the workplace discussed earlier in this paper. Proficient time management in the workplace is primarily assessed by the ability to adequately complete projects and tasks by a specific deadline. The National Association of College and Employers (NACE) listed time management as the number one career skill desired by employers (NACE-Job Outlook: The Candidate Skills/Qualities Employers Want, 2012).

> However, many college students appear to define time management as the ability to get a project done (not necessarily well-done or even complete) with a minimal amount of effort and as close to the deadline as possible. Unfortunately, faculty will often extend deadlines or offer options to make up missed points as a result of a late assignment submission to students who do not meet deadlines. This behavior by faculty results in students being surprised when employers do not respond in the same way to missed deadlines or the unacceptable quality of work that is a result of poor time management.

Teamwork

Teams are an integral part of the workplace and as such, many employers report the ability to work effectively on a team (as a leader and as a contributing team member) is a necessary career skill (Kelley & Bridges, 2005; Shuman, Besterfield-Sacre, & McGourty, 2005; Kermis & Kermis, 2010).

A report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise titled *College Learning for the New Global Century* (2007) stated that essential learning outcomes for college students should include written and oral communication, critical thinking, and teamwork.

In an effort to enhance students' ability to work in teams, much of the business curriculum requires projects, papers, presentations, and/or study groups that must be done in teams.

So while business schools often promote the use of teams, most teamwork done in college is focused on the outcome but not the process of teamwork. Students are put on teams but not really instructed on how to perform team functions, and oftentimes there is little or no faculty facilitation or monitoring of the team as it works on an assignment. The consequence is while students do team projects, they don't necessarily learn to work effectively or productively on a team.

Problem Solving

Problem solving is often mentioned as a career skill (Job Skills that Every College Student Needs, n.d.; How Should Colleges Prepare Students to Succeed in Today's Global Economy?, 2006; Kermis & Kermis, 2010). Problem solving is considered a career skill because it so broadly defines an employee's ability to identify a current or potential problem, collect and organize data relevant to the problem, use the data

to formulate viable solutions, and finally select the most efficacious solution. As such, problem solving actually requires a combination of individual skills any of which could be considered a specific skill. It can be presumed that employers want employees to not only be able to recognize organizational and/or operational issues but to be both logical and creative in order to generate solutions and be able to decide on the best solution and support that decision.

In the academic environment, students are usually given enough information and often a specific template which they can use to solve a problem. Having all the necessary data and a method for which to analyze that data is not common practice in the workplace.

While the four career skills listed above (communication, time management, teamwork, and problem solving) are the skills most often presented as those desired by employers, this list is certainly not all-encompassing. These career skills in combination with discipline-specific proficiencies result in a technically competent employee.

However, a significant factor in career success is behavior that goes beyond technical competence; it is learned and practiced behavior that contributes to academic success which then translates into career success. Hettich (1998) refers to this behavior as the covert curriculum which "…consists of those numerous, routine, skill-related activities, behaviors, and attitudes that are transacted inside and outside of classrooms. Collectively, they reflect a student's overall work orientation and habits" (Hettich, 1998, pp. 52-53).   Students learn to effectively manage their learning by practicing proactive, mindful behaviors (being interpersonally aware, listening attentively, setting goals, having a strong work ethic, and taking responsibility) which in turn strongly contributes to a sense of professionalism. And professionalism is the basic, overarching quality that transforms a technically competent employee into a valuable, highly sought-after employee.

Professionalism

Discussions of professionalism are ubiquitous, which reflects its importance not just for business students but for other business school stakeholders as well. There is a tremendous interest in professionalism as indicated by the number and scope of books about professionalism such as *True Professionalism: The Courage to Care About Your People, Your Clients, and Your Career*; *The Power of Professionalism: The Seven Mind-Sets that Drive Performance and Build Trust*; and *Professionalism: Skills for Workplace Success.* Despite its strong presence, professionalism is not easily defined and often seems to be open to interpretation.

While there is a wide body of research and literature on professionalism, there is a definitive, current, and highly credible study on professionalism that could be helpful in formulating an approach to providing students with tangible career skills. This significant research comes from The York College of Pennsylvania Center for Professional Excellence which recently released its 2012 Professionalism Study that surveyed HR professionals, managers, and supervisors (2012 Professionalism in the Workplace Study, 2012).

Based on respondents' input, the study presents a definition of professionalism that highlights the qualities which characterize professionalism and those qualities which are considered unprofessional. Given that these are the qualities reported by people responsible for hiring and supervising (managers and HR personnel) and who have firsthand knowledge regarding desirable employee behaviors, the report's findings are highly valid and relevant to student career skills development. As such, it makes

sense to develop a college-to-career program that enhances the positive professional qualities reported in this study while diminishing/eliminating the negative qualities.

Positive qualities of professionalism include interpersonal skills, appearance, being ethical, and having a work ethic in addition to the previously discussed career skills of communication and time management. More specifically, interpersonal skills consist of etiquette, courtesy, respect, and situation-appropriate behavior (2012 Professionalism In The Workplace Study, 2012).

Unprofessional qualities indicated most often by both HR and managers/supervisors include inappropriate appearance, poor work ethic, sense of entitlement, disrespect, lack of focus, and a poor attitude. As reported in the study, several of the unprofessional qualities were listed as reasons for firing an employee: poor work ethic, unethical behavior, and poor attitude. Poor attendance, inability to do the job, not being a team player, and most interestingly, IT abuses were also listed as reasons for firing. In addition to IT abuses, there are two unprofessional qualities reported that warrant further consideration: sense of entitlement and lack of focus (2012 Professionalism in the Workplace Study, 2012).

In the study, IT abuse is defined as "excessive twittering/Facebook, inappropriate use of the Internet, text messaging at inappropriate times, and excessive cell phone usage for personal calls" (2012 Professionalism in the Workplace Study, 2012, p.12). According to both HR and manager respondents, IT abuse by employees has increased dramatically over the last three years. Not surprisingly, this abuse is perceived as being more often committed by younger employees (2012 Professionalism in the Workplace Study, 2012).

While a specific definition of sense of entitlement is not included in this study, generally speaking a sense of entitlement is manifested in the workplace by employees who have unrealistic input/outcome expectations and generally exhibit a strong resistance to feedback that is not positive and does not involve praise and rewards.   The unprofessional quality of a sense of entitlement has appeared in every survey done since 2009 and in the 2012 study, 50.5% of HR respondents and 33.7% of managers reported that a sense of entitlement has increased among employees over the last five years (2012 Professionalism in the Workplace Study, 2012).

According to the survey, unfocused employees are a growing problem. Lack of employee focus appeared in the 2011 survey results and as such, a question regarding the perceived increase in this behavior was asked in the 2012 survey.   Almost 22% of managers indicated the lack of employee focus has increased over the past five years.   Respondents reported the main reasons why employees are not focused at work include the Internet and social media, personal problems related to the economy, and less ownership of one's work (2012 Professionalism in the Workplace Study, 2012).

Response of Colleges to the Need for Stronger Career Skills Training

Colleges and universities have responded to employers' expressed need to better prepare students for a smooth transition from the classroom to the boardroom in many different ways: from offering optional courses in professional etiquette, career development, and business savvy to mandating courses or workshops on these topics, to combining such courses with workshops and other experiential learning experiences, to initiating programs that recognize students' professional behavior both in and out of the classroom. These programs may be offered to all students at an institution, to those within a particular college or major, or simply to students in a particular course. Individual instructors may also provide

learning and feedback on students' career skills or professionalism in any course by various methods. Some useful models for such programs are discussed below. Because career skills programs tend to be housed in business colleges, those are discussed specifically. However, similar programs could be implemented in colleges in any discipline or any career center serving an entire institution.

Institution-Wide Career Skills Programs

Although most colleges provide some career skills training to any student through a central career services office, few provide a formal program that is not tailored to a particular discipline. One institution-wide program that is multidisciplinary is The University of Arizona's Blue Chip Program. It is a voluntary four-year program with a focus on leadership but includes many activities with learning outcomes that include problem solving, oral communication, non-verbal communication, writing, listening, collaboration, time management, appropriate interaction, and a positive attitude (The University of Arizona, 2011). Interestingly, these outcomes closely track the career skills valued by employers discussed earlier as well as the attributes of professionalism discussed in the York College 2012 Professionalism Study.

During the second semester students must take a three credit leadership course with others in the program. Required activities that overlap with many other career skills programs include an etiquette dinner and training in networking and interviewing. In addition, students maintain a leadership portfolio during the program to document their learning and present to employers to give them an edge in the hiring process (The University of Arizona, 2011).

The University of Arizona also offers an Etiquette Certificate to students completing its "Go Pro" program which consists of three workshops: Business Etiquette, Interview and Feedback Etiquette, and Dining Etiquette (includes a four course meal). A small fee is charged, and the program has corporate sponsors. The certificate is marketed as "An impressive addition to your Resume!" (The University of Arizona, n.d.).

Mandatory Business College Career Skills Programs

The Business Profession Program at Xavier's Williams College of Business, launched in 2000, has been mirrored in part by other schools that wish to adopt an aggressive approach to preparing students to effectively transition to the workforce and to differentiate their students' skill sets to employers. It is a comprehensive program. All new business students are given a "passport" that lists all mandatory and optional activities; five to six specific activities must be completed each year, so it is assured that students participate in key activities all four years and experience them in a meaningful order. For example, during freshman year all students must meet with an executive-in-residence to discuss their career direction, during sophomore year students work on resumes and networking and interviewing skills, during junior year students learn job search skills, and during senior year students learn about financial planning strategies and how to prepare for the transition from college to the workplace. When their passports are fully stamped (evidence they have completed the program requirements), program completion will be reflected on their transcripts as pass/fail. Students must pass in order to graduate. There is a fee of $500 per year to fund the program, but accessing the resources of the college's Professional Development Center is free (Grossman, 2012).

 One distinctive optional aspect of the program is the networking experience and coaching students receive through the Executive Mentor Program. Mentors in the business community select students to

mentor after reading students' self-written profiles. Mentoring covers "everything (students) need to know professionally, socially, and ethically . . . ." (Grossman, 2012, p. 44).

Although this program is comprehensive in terms of the variety of passport activities, at its core it seems to focus more on preparing students to choose a career path and to get a job than on the skills needed to transition to and succeed in a job. That focus is reflected in the make-up of the required activities. It is also reflected in that success of the program can be measured in terms of graduates' job placement. By this standard the program has been extremely successful as "in 2008, 95 percent of Williams students had found jobs within three months of graduation" (Grossman, 2012, p. 44).

The Professional Development Program at the University of San Diego School of Business Administration, implemented in 2009, is modeled on the Williams College program but is not as comprehensive. Students receive a passport and must complete three required activities (meeting with Career Services, attending a networking event, and completing an online senior exit survey) and nine "professional-related activities" approved by the advising center to complete the passport and meet degree requirements (University of San Diego School of Business Administration, n.d.). The program has been a successful promotional tool for the school, appealing to both students and parents (Grossman, 2012 p. 44).

The Professional Development Program at the University of Missouri's Robert J. Trulaske, Sr. College of Business, which became effective in 2008, does not involve a passport, although the format is somewhat similar to the Williams College program. Students must earn at least 200 Professional Development Points (PDP points) in order to graduate. Seventy points (ten are earned for each PDP event) must be earned at the "lower level" before proceeding to the "upper level." Students must attend three specific workshops in the lower level—PDP 101, Professional Expectations, and Resume Writing. In the upper level, students must attend four specific workshops—Networking 101, Personal and Financial Planning, Professional Communication, and Interviewing Skills (Robert J. Trulaske, Sr. College of Business Administration, n.d.).

In addition to earning the required number of PDP points, students admitted to the upper level must take two 3-credit hour courses: a professional development course devoted to developing skills employers want such as communication and teamwork and a course tied to an internship, which students must obtain for themselves with assistance from the PDP office. The program is pass/fail, and there is no additional fee to participate; however, students pay for the coursework (Robert J. Trulaske Sr. College of Business Administration, n.d.).

The Student Professional Development Program at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire College of Business is mandatory but is less comprehensive than other programs in part because it focuses only on freshmen and sophomores. Freshmen must attend non-credit workshops on "Becoming a Business Professional" and "Professional Appearance," while sophomores must attend workshops on "Developing a Professional Profile" and "Professional Etiquette." Fees for each workshop vary and range from $18.75 to $38.75 (includes a five course meal). No courses or additional workshops affiliated with the program are provided for juniors or seniors (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire College of Business, n.d.).

The mandatory Leadership and Professional Development Program at the East Carolina University College of Business, implemented in 2009, stands out because it does not require students to attend any workshops. Instead, students are required to complete four courses: Strategy First, Leadership I:

Interpersonal and Teamwork Skills, Leadership II: Professional Development Skills, and Leadership III: Leadership Capstone. In addition, similar to the Blue Chip program, students create a Leadership Portfolio containing their best work which they can use to market themselves to employers (East Carolina University College of Business, n.d.).

Optional Business College Career Skills Programs

The Northern Michigan University College of Business implemented its Business Profession Program in 2011. Although it is similar to Williams College's program in terms of its comprehensiveness, it's optional. It is a passport program; students who sign up for the program get their passports stamped when they attend career-related events. Students must attend four events each year, three of which are required and one is optional. As in the Williams Business Profession Program, required events are scheduled in a meaningful order. Freshmen learn about time management, sophomores are introduced to resume writing and behavioral interviewing skills, juniors focus on job search strategies, and seniors work on financial planning, evaluating job offers, and transitioning effectively to a career (Sha, 2011-2012).

Also, similar to Williams College's program, Northern Michigan offers an Executive Mentorship Program that pairs juniors and seniors with alumni from around the country who provide students with advice on, both their career and personal lives (Northern Michigan University College of Business, 2012).

The W.A. Franke College of Business's Professionalism Recognition Program, launched in 2010, stands out from the other programs discussed because instead of focusing on teaching and developing specific professional behaviors, it aims to reward students by formally recognizing them for displaying professional qualities in the classroom and in extracurricular activities.

It is an optional program open to all business majors. Students sign up online and begin earning professional points or "props." Props are earned through ratings by professors and extracurricular activities such as involvement in student clubs, internships, or volunteer work. In-class props are weighted more heavily than extracurricular props, but because participation by professors is also optional, students may not be rated often or even once. Also, because each professor values different aspects of professionalism, students are "graded" on different criteria in different classes a situation similar to when they interact with different people in the workplace.

Once they begin earning props, students are ranked each semester by the number of props they earn relative to their peers; the top third are rated "highly professional," the middle third "professional," and the bottom third "participating." Upon graduation, the top two-thirds of participants receive a letter from the dean documenting the rating they earned. This documentation can be used to enhance students' resumes and to differentiate themselves in interviews.

The program has been well received by students as reflected in a steady increase in student participation, and by employers as evidenced by the responses to an online questionnaire given to employers who attended The W. A. Franke College of Business's Career Exploration Day in 2010. Employers were asked, "If the FCB awarded 'professional recognition' to certain students who consistently demonstrated such qualities in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities, please comment on whether or how this might be useful to recruiters." Some representational quotes are: "It would always look good on a resume and should benefit the student with marketing themselves," "I think this would be an attractive certification," "Very interested in this," and "Quality candidates known

up front." Several recruiters commented that the dean's letter would be useful to them if they understood the criteria.

The program is currently undergoing a redesign primarily due to an interest in developing professional behaviors in addition to recognizing them.

Stand-Alone Business Skills Programs/Etiquette Courses

Many colleges offer courses centered entirely on career development or business etiquette and are not an element of a larger professionalism program. The content of these stand-alone courses often overlaps with frequent coverage of job search skills, resume writing, interviewing, networking, and business etiquette. It is important to remember that in addition to such courses, the named topics are also regularly taught in business communication courses along with teamwork, interpersonal skills, and oral presentations. Coverage of all these topics can be found in most of the popular textbooks on the subject (Guffey & Loewy, 2013; Locker & Kienzler, 2013; Newman & Ober, 2013; Thill & Bovee, 2011). Stand-alone career skills or etiquette courses range from .5 units to six credit hours and may take place over a traditional 15 week semester or a weekend. Many of these courses seem to be housed in a business college, and some are specifically targeted to non-business majors. For example, the University of Vermont offers an intensive two week, six credit hour course for upper division non-business majors and recent graduates entitled "Business Savvy" which covers topics such as team building, interpersonal skills, job search methods, and business writing in addition to hard business topics (University of Vermont Summer University, n.d.).

Athens Technical College offers a three credit hour course titled "Business Etiquette and Communication" that covers professional conduct, professional image, telephone etiquette, and oral and written communication skills. In addition to a grade, students are assigned a work ethics grade on a scale of 1 to 3 which appears on transcripts next to the numerical grade. Elements included in the work ethics evaluation are "attendance, teamwork, appearance, attitude, productivity, organizational skills, communication, cooperation, and respect" (Athens Technical College, n.d., p.4).

The core curriculum of The W. A. Franke College of Business MBA Program includes a course titled "Professional Development." It is a one credit hour course that is intended to allow the students to plan and exercise a comprehensive career strategy including building and using their personal network. The class generally meets once a week for fifty minutes; however, it meets for six hours during the three-day summer orientation session for workshops on presentation skills, business writing skills, and resume writing skills. After the presentation workshop, student teams begin developing their collaboration skills by doing volunteer work with different local non-profits. The next day the teams give a formal presentation about their volunteer experience to the MBA faculty.

Other topics covered are business etiquette, ethics, interviewing, evaluating job offers, negotiating salary, preparing for a career fair, and networking. Activities include participating in a mock interview with businesspeople, attending the college's career fair, attending two career advising appointments prepared with evidence of an active job search, and participating in two networking events.

Integration of Professionalism in Stand-Alone Classes

Several activities to promote student professionalism and teach self-management skills that can be used in any course are proposed by Ward (n.d.). The first step is to introduce the concept that the classroom

environment is similar to a professional work environment, and students should think of themselves as professionals. Students are then given a homework assignment: write a paper on "Defining Professionalism" for the next class period. Some research is required for students to answer five specific questions about professional behavior. At the next class, students discuss their papers in small groups and one member of the group presents their findings to the class. Next, students are provided with information about what personal qualities and workplace competencies employers expect and value and are asked to identify five professional behaviors and attitudes to work on during the semester. Students track their progress weekly and rate themselves as excellent, acceptable, or unprofessional. At the end of the semester students use this material to write a short reflective paper describing what they learned and behaviors they changed (Ward, n.d.).

Many instructors include professionalism in course grades; however, fewer specify what behaviors they expect and how professionalism is rated. One way to increase learning and professional behavior in the classroom is to use a rubric to grade professionalism. Ford (n.d.) has published a useful rubric for this purpose that measures student professionalism using the following criteria: engagement, respect, persistence, teamwork, and reliability. Although different instructors will value different aspects of professionalism more highly than others, it may be productive to encourage professors within a college to work from a basic rubric that incorporates the college's values and/or behaviors specified in an official code of conduct. The W. A. Franke College of Business's Professionalism Recognition Program discussed earlier is another way to integrate professional behavior in the classroom. Professional behavior may occur since participating students are motivated to achieve positive faculty recognition in order to receive a letter from the dean recognizing the student's positive professionalism rating.

The W.A. Franke College of Business also promotes professional behavior in an undergraduate course called BizBlock. BizBlock is an integrated, interdisciplinary undergraduate course that is part of the business curriculum in The W.A. Franke College of Business. This course consists of three undergraduate core courses (must be completed to earn a degree in business administration or accountancy) in management, marketing, and business communications and is delivered in a single nine credit hour course block. One of the key goals of BizBlock is to integrate the three core courses, not just deliver the content of the three courses sequentially. This approach allows students to more fully understand that business functions aren't performed independently but rather interdependently. In addition, for students to gain an even greater insight into how business is conducted in the "real-world," the major course deliverable is done in teams.

BizBlock offers students the opportunity to experience workplace dynamics by emphasizing appropriate workplace behavior and creating consequences to unacceptable workplace behavior. The course syllabus contains an addendum which is similar to an abbreviated company policy manual.   Much of what is found in this addendum was derived from the Professionalism Policy used in the MBA program at the University of Texas McCombs School of Business (McCombs Classroom Professionalism Policy, n.d.).

Attendance is one of the fundamental positive employee behaviors and lack of attendance was listed as one of the primary reasons for firing an employee (2012 Professionalism In The Workplace Study, 2012). Strongly tied to attendance is participation. It is not enough to be present every day if that presence is passive and inactive. One of the objectives when developing BizBlock was based on the assumption that students who learn to actively and positively participate in class will continue such behavior in their careers. These desired workplace behaviors (attendance and participation) are reinforced in BizBlock as shown in the course syllabus (See Appendix B).

BizBlock also has points allotted for the completion of five peer evaluations which are submitted by individuals on each student team throughout the semester. There is a grade adjustment for students who do not address performance deficiencies indicated on the evaluations they receive from their peers. Giving and using evaluation feedback is a significant component of effective teamwork, the importance of which was discussed earlier in this paper.

Additionally, BizBlock students receive points for the writing of a 40+ page business plan and for making two professional presentations of that plan. The plan and the presentations compromise the majority of points in the class and there is a great deal of faculty focus and feedback on these major course requirements. As such, completing these assignments strongly enhance BizBlock students' communication skill set.

Conclusion

As presented earlier in this paper, there is substantial and convincing attention from the academic community and popular press that confirms there is a strong demand for (but not a large supply of) business graduates who possess employer-desired career skills such as communication, time management, teamwork, and problem solving. In addition to these specific skills, employers also want employees who not only understand but exhibit professionalism.

This paper also described various delivery methods used by universities, colleges, and academic departments to provide opportunities for students to acquire these skills. These methods include institution-wide career skills programs, mandatory or optional business college programs, required stand-alone classes in career topics such as business etiquette or career skills, and the integration of professionalism into individual classes. However, there are several significant factors that impact the selection of an appropriate and effective delivery method: lack of institutional resources, lack of faculty buy-in, and student demand.

Except for some private, highly endowed institutions, most colleges and universities are faced with limited and dwindling state funding and some with decreased enrollment. As such, the ability to develop and implement any new program or course offering is highly constrained. It is relatively easy to make a convincing argument for spending money on enhancing the career skills of graduates, particularly in an attempt to help students find gainful employment after graduation in difficult economic times. However, the paradox is that it is in difficult economic times that institutional resources are the most stretched. Recognizing the lack of institutional resources (to pay faculty to teach an additional course or the classroom in which to teach an additional course) the most cost-effective delivery method would be integration of career skills and professionalism into individual classes. Given that the class is already being taught, there would be little or no additional resources needed to implement the integration.

However, how many faculty would voluntarily and without any incentive agree to put a career skill/professionalism component into their course(s)? In addition, while relatively few faculty would state publicly they do not think career skills are important, it can be speculated that there are a number of faculty who do not believe this is should be a focus or even part of a college or departmental curriculum. They would argue, with a certain degree of validity, that providing career development opportunities is the purview of career development offices and staff. If this is the widely-accepted

institutional perspective, the best career skills delivery method might be one that utilizes a university or college career center.

While in college, most students are focused on completing the classes necessary for graduation and maintaining an acceptable grade point average.   It is reasonably safe to assume that business students probably don't see the need for a strong career skill set until after they begin their job hunt, get their first job, or receive their first performance evaluation. As such, they are not going to be highly motivated to take another class or participate in a program which takes time and effort away from their studies. While countering this student resistance would be difficult, it is necessary that students acquire career and professional skills. That said, a mandatory career skills program or at least a mandatory class would give students the opportunity to learn the skills they don't yet realize they need.

It is the opinion of these authors that the best overall delivery method would be a mandatory pass/fail career skills/professionalism course that must be taken during the student's senior year. This course would reinforce and elaborate on what was taught in the business communication course taken by the student in the junior year. An even more effective approach would be a college-wide integration of professionalism into each class, primarily by using some assessment of students' professional behavior in the classroom (a professional recognition program, for example).   And of course, the most powerful way to promote professionalism in a student would be for faculty to model professional behavior.

Appendix A – Graduates' Perceptions of Differences Between College and Work

College	First Year of Work
Highly structured curriculum and programs with lots of direction	Highly unstructured environment and tasks with few directions
Frequent, quick, concrete feedback	Infrequent and less precise
Personally supportive environment	Less personal support
Few significant changes	Frequent and unexpected changes
Flexible schedule	Structured schedule
Frequent breaks and time off	Limited time off
Personal control over time, classes and interests	Responding to others' directions and interests
Intellectual challenge	Organizational and people challenges
Choose performance level (A, B ,C)	A-level work required all the time
Focus on personal development and growth	Focus on getting results of the organization
Create and explore knowledge	Get results using knowledge
Individual effort	Team effort
"Right" answers	Few "right" answers
Independence of ideas and thinking	Do it the organization's way
Less initiative required	Lots of initiative required
Professors	Bosses

Adapted from E. Holton in Gardner et al (1998, p. 102). *The Senior Year Experience: Facilitating Integration, Reflection, Closure, and Transition.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Appendix B – BizBlock Attendance and Participation Policy

In BizBlock, as in life, it is not possible to be an effective contributor and participant if you aren't there to do so. As such, the BizBlock attendance policy reflects and supports the importance of "being there."

To effectively reinforce the importance of attendance, there are consequences for non-attendance. Given that attendance and participation are strongly connected, attendance in BizBlock is tied to participation points. There are 90 total participation points available, 30 in each five week section. Generally, participation points for each section are allocated as follows:

Attended every class session and contributed in every class session
within the five week section   30/30 points

Attended every class session and contributed at least two times within
the five week section   25/30 points

Attended every class session but never contributed or only contributed
once   20/30 points

Tardy more than 3 times   20/30 points

Absent without submitting a make-up paper   0/30 points

Tardiness is defined as being absent from the classroom for a total of 15 – 30 minutes during the scheduled class time. This time includes arriving late and leaving early. Absence is defined as being out of the classroom for more than 30 minutes during the scheduled class time for **ANY REASON.**

A student absence will require the submission of a make-up paper. A make-up paper will be two pages in length and will cover what was missed during the absence (not just a summary of the PowerPoint slides). This information is to be obtained from teammates and other students in the class, not the faculty. The paper must be typed, not hand-written.

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