



Meeting Business Demands *Face to Face*

WHAT MAKES FOR AN
EXCELLENT UNDERGRADUATE
BUSINESS SCHOOL?

MARCH 2007

Wake Forest University

Published by the Wayne Calloway School of Business and Accountancy

Kirby Hall, Room 204
P.O. Box 7285
Winston-Salem, NC 27109-7285

Jack Wilkerson, Dean
336.758.5027
jwilker@wfu.edu

Kline Harrison, Associate Dean
336.758.4907
harrisjk@wfu.edu

www.calloway.wfu.edu

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A summary of three research studies

Preface

Beginning in 2000, the Calloway School of Business and Accountancy at Wake Forest University began a series of three research studies designed to provide an understanding of what different constituencies believe is most important in undergraduate business education. The constituencies were:

- deans of undergraduate business schools,
- recruiters of undergraduate business school students, and
- alumni of undergraduate business schools.

The study among deans was conducted in 2000. The recruiter study was conducted in 2003 with 22 National Undergraduate Business Symposium (NUBS) schools participating. The alumni study was conducted in 2005 with 20 NUBS participants. All studies were conducted online. Responses were confidential and the higher education consulting firm The Planning Edge worked with the Calloway School for each study. Over 100 deans from AACSB accredited business schools participated in the first study, over 100 recruiters who recruited at more than 150 schools participated in the second study, and almost 1,000 alumni split approximately by thirds (between 2000-2004, between 1996-99, and pre-1996) completed the third study. The assistance from over 20 NUBS institutions was critical for the recruiter and alumni studies as these institutions provided names and e-mail addresses of recruiters and alumni to participate. Because of their help, these studies represent a cross-section of the United States, from Seattle to Miami, from Arizona to New England.

Each study was designed for the particular audience that was participating, so questions varied from study to study. However, there were some similarities. The 2000 deans' study focused on determining the most important factors in undergraduate business programs. The 2003 recruiters' study assessed the importance of aspects of student competencies and other factors that impact a company's decision to recruit at specific institutions or to offer jobs. The 2005 study questioned alumni about how well prepared they were in a range of knowledge and skills areas, how important those areas were, and how effective their institution was in providing instruction, facilities, and services.

OVERALL FINDINGS

Each of the three individual studies is summarized in this report. Additionally, some themes that cross studies are of interest and are worth consideration as undergraduate business schools work to ensure their programs are as effective as possible. We provide these thoughts in the interest of discussion and acknowledge that these points include our opinions from the research.

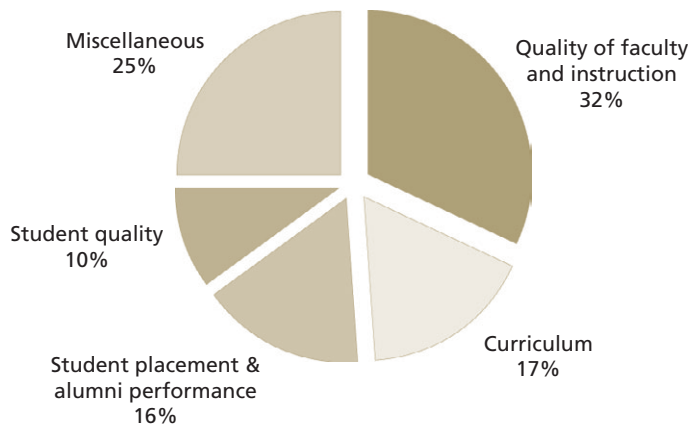
1. Applied skills (such as critical thinking, communications, analytical skills, working together effectively), as opposed to functional expertise (see exception in point 5), are generally viewed as most important by both recruiters and alumni. This is consistent with the 2006 study, *Are They Really Ready to Work?* from the Conference Board.
2. While the need for a global perspective and the growth of diversity have been subjects of substantial focus in the past several years, recruiters and alumni place little value on international experience and diversity. Recruiters rate “strong international perspective” very low (5 percent said it was very important) and alumni rate “multicultural and diversity understanding” and “domestic and global economic environments of organizations” as having the lowest levels of importance of all attributes except one.
3. While deans expect research from faculty, teaching is the primary focus. Deans most often believe a 60 percent teaching/40 percent research split is appropriate, followed by 80 percent teaching/30 percent research, then 50 percent/50 percent. Alumni rate quality of instruction as the most important attribute of a school and their top reason for recommending their school to prospective students.
4. There appears to be a lack of appreciation for what a general liberal arts foundation may do to enhance a student’s critical thinking, analytical, and communications skills. Only one in six believe that being admitted to their business school after two years of liberal arts is very important. Only 7 percent of recruiters believe a broad foundation in the liberal arts is very important. A 2002 Wake Forest University study among provosts and deans also indicated the belief that employers do not appreciate the benefits of the liberal arts foundation. A recently published AAC&U report, *College Learning for the New Global Century* (January 2007), challenged the view that a liberal education foundation is “nonvocational.” It further defined liberal education as “a comprehensive set of aims and outcomes that are essential for all students because they are important to all fields.”
5. Recruiters appear to select schools to recruit at in terms of overall value and minimizing risk. Their most important considerations are “overall value” and “student adaptability” (including relocating)—both related to not wasting effort. They also place importance on “positive internship/co-op experiences” (i.e.: a “proven” quantity) and “functional expertise” (i.e.: “hit the ground running”). Attributes that are less important to recruiters include alumni, diversity, accreditation, rankings, competition, other business programs, and the liberal arts.
6. Alumni in general are satisfied with their undergraduate business school education. The most important reasons for their overall satisfaction are the faculty, the business foundation they received, and the resources, courses, and facilities afforded by the institution. Alumni believed they were better prepared for “general skills” compared to “management specific” skills. They were least satisfied with career services and academic advising and, in fact, career services is the most frequently mentioned area in terms of needing improvement. Alumni also would like more experience in enhancing their communications skills and in experiencing the real world.

MAJOR FINDINGS

DEANS' STUDY

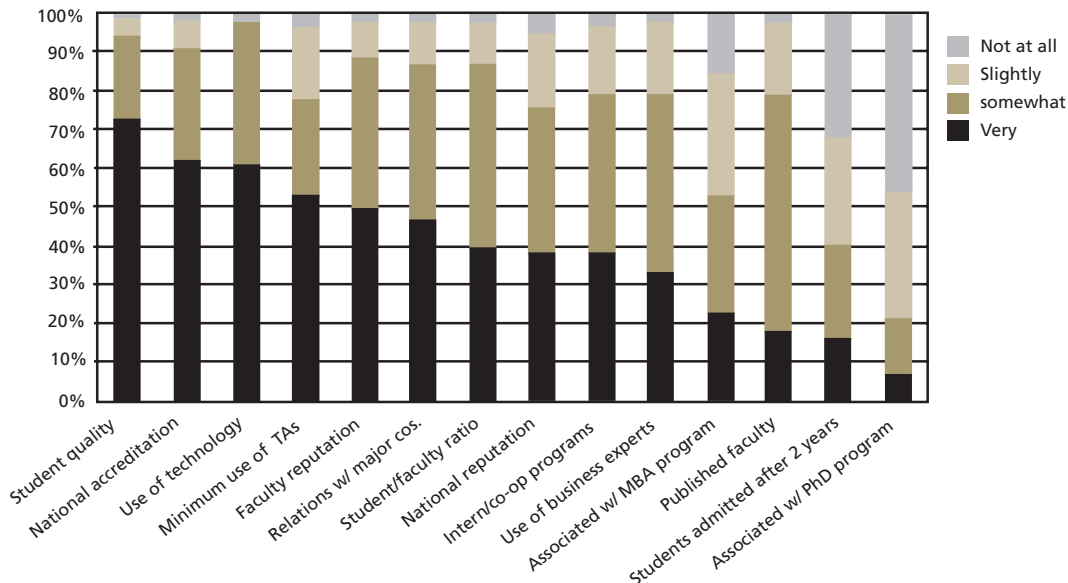
The most important quality factor

In response to an open-ended question to name the one factor that was most important to the overall quality of an undergraduate business program, four factors were most often mentioned.



Importance of specific quality factors

Deans were also asked to rate how important they believed specific quality factors were to an undergraduate business program's quality. In terms of specific quality factors, student quality was viewed as "very important" most often, followed by national accreditation, state of the art use of technology, minimal use of TAs, and faculty reputation. The least important quality factors were whether there were PhD programs (and MBA programs to a lesser extent) associated with the school, and whether students were admitted after two years of liberal arts education. At least three-quarters of deans believed all factors except these three were very or somewhat important.



When asked what the ideal mix of teaching and research for undergraduate business school faculty was, the majority of deans believed the focus should be skewed towards teaching. Fifty percent chose a 60 percent teaching/40 percent research mix and 25 percent chose an 80 percent teaching/20 percent research mix.

Mix of Teaching and Research				
25%	50%	22%	3%	0%
80%T/ 20%R	60%T/ 40%R	50%T/ 50%R	40%T/ 60%R	20%T/ 80%R

Several themes emerge from the study:

Quality of Faculty and Instruction: Over 30 percent of the deans considered this area to be the single most important quality factor for undergraduate business programs. A common thread of the responses is that a strong faculty, focused primarily, though not necessarily exclusively, on teaching and students, contributes significantly to the quality of an undergraduate business program.

Curriculum: Among the more widely cited curriculum factors were competency and skill development (particularly oral and written communication and critical thinking skills), currency and relevance, and, to a lesser extent, breadth of offerings and a willingness to innovate and take risks. Almost half the programs noted for recent improvements in perceived overall quality were cited on the basis of curriculum innovation. Also, the availability and use of technology by both faculty and students was considered to be an important quality factor.

Admissions Selectivity and Student Quality: More than 90 percent of the deans rated student quality as either very or somewhat important to overall program quality. Further, for five of the six schools receiving multiple mentions as top undergraduate business programs, quality of students was identified as a primary contributing factor.

Student Placement and Alumni Performance: For a number of deans, undergraduate business program success boils down to the successful placement and performance of a program’s graduates. This is evidenced, for example, by the fact that 16 percent of the deans identified student placement and alumni performance as the single most important factor.

RECRUITERS’ STUDY

Most important undergraduate business student competencies

Recruiters believe the most important competencies are “general management skills” such as communication and interpersonal skills, leadership, teamwork, analytical and critical thinking skills, and adaptability.

The next most important competencies included the ability to fit in the company’s culture, to drive results and think strategically, and to work in a culturally diverse environment.

The least important competencies are foreign language, having a strong international perspective, and having a broad foundation in the liberal arts. This supports a 2002 study conducted by Wake Forest University, *A National Perspective on the Liberal Arts*, in which deans and provosts indicated that they believed employers do not appreciate the benefits of a liberal arts education. A January 2007 report published by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), *College Learning for the New Global Century*, may be trying to address this by defining liberal education for the 21st century as “a comprehensive set of aims and outcomes that are essential for all students because they are important to all fields of endeavor.”

Entrepreneurial skills and a general management perspective were also less important competencies.

Competencies	Very	Somewhat	Very + Some	Slightly	Not at all
	%	%	%	%	%
Communication and interpersonal skills	99	1	100	0	0
Leadership skills and potential	94	6	100	0	0
Ability to work effectively within teams	90	10	100	0	0
People and task management skills	85	13	98	2	0
Analytical and critical thinking skills	83	16	99	1	0
Adaptability, including the ability to deal with ambiguity	80	19	99	1	0
Self-management skills	79	18	97	3	0
Fit with corporate culture	76	20	96	4	0
Ability to drive results	73	22	95	5	0
Ability to think strategically	60	36	96	4	0
Ability to work effectively in a culturally diverse work environment	58	32	90	11	0
Integrative understanding of the functional areas of business	52	42	94	5	1
Original and visionary thinking	47	48	95	4	0
Specific functional expertise	38	48	86	13	1
Proficiency with information technology	37	41	78	19	4
General management perspective	29	54	83	17	0
Entrepreneurial skills	25	48	73	24	4
Broad foundation in the liberal arts	7	40	47	38	15
Strong international perspective	5	27	32	42	27
Facility with a foreign language	1	19	20	43	37

Most important attributes of a college or university

Recruiters indicate the most important attributes that they consider when deciding where to recruit for undergraduate business students are the value they receive from their recruiting efforts, adaptability of students, intern or co-op experiences available to students, functional expertise, and the length of the relationship the firm has had with the business school.

Recruiters indicate that student quality, previous success on campus, and the curriculum and reputation of the business school are also important in their selection of where to recruit.

The least important attributes included availability of non-business degree programs, the core liberal arts curriculum, request of the business school or a company manager to recruit at the school, and whether an MBA program also is available.

Colleges and Universities Characteristics	Very	Somewhat	Very + Some	Slightly	Not at all
	%	%	%	%	%
Overall value for resources invested in the recruiting effort	65	30	95	4	2
Overall adaptability of the business school's students, including willingness to locate to job locations	64	28	92	6	2
Favorable intern or co-op experiences	61	25	86	9	4
Availability of specific functional expertise (e.g., accounting or marketing)	59	31	90	11	0
Long-standing recruiting relationship with the college or university	58	34	92	5	3
Overall experience of recruiters with the college or university	54	33	87	11	2
Critical mass of graduates available for hiring by your organization	52	31	83	15	3
Number, success and influence of alumni within your organization	51	37	88	11	1
Core business curriculum	48	41	89	8	3
Diversity of graduates	46	43	89	8	3
Accreditation of the undergraduate business program	44	43	87	12	1
Quality of career services administration	32	55	87	9	4

Chart continued on the next page

Colleges and Universities Characteristics	Very	Somewhat	Very + Some	Slightly	Not at all
Quality of the undergraduate business program, as measured by publicly available information (e.g., rankings)	30	51	81	15	4
Physical proximity to your organization	29	39	68	17	16
Quality of the college or university, as measured by publicly available information (e.g., rankings)	25	50	75	18	6
Recruiting by primary competitors	23	33	56	25	19
Request from manager in your organization	16	30	46	37	18
Availability of an MBA program	11	11	22	24	55
Request by college or university	4	27	31	36	33
Core liberal arts curriculum	3	23	26	44	31
Availability of specific non-business undergraduate degree	1	21	22	30	48

Other considerations

Over half of the recruiters indicated they had stopped recruiting at a particular business school, primarily because they had unsatisfactory results in hiring enough qualified students because the caliber of the students was low, few attended interviews, or few accepted offers. Geography was also a factor, indicating the reluctance of students to relocate. Budget cuts and less hiring were not as common reasons for ceasing to recruit at a specific business school.

The interview is by far the most important way recruiters assess students, with 94 percent indicating this is “very important.” Recruiters also indicated that they use internships and work experience in their assessment of students.

Assessing student quality	Very	Somewhat	Slightly	Not at all
	%	%	%	%
Interview performance	94	6	0	0
Extracurricular activities	51	42	6	0
Grade point averages	50	42	5	2
Standardized test scores	12	40	20	27
Long-standing recruiting relationship with the college or university	58	34	5	3

These recruiters value an undergraduate business degree with almost half saying the business degree is “very important” and another third saying it is “somewhat important.”

Value of undergraduate business degree	Very	Somewhat	Slightly	Not at all
	%	%	%	%
When recruiting, how important is it for the student to have an undergraduate business degree?	46	35	10	9

While recruiting plans for undergraduate business students are positive, the number of schools recruiters will recruit at is not anticipated to grow substantially.

Recruiting plans: Next five years	Far more	Some more	Same	Some fewer	Far fewer
	%	%	%	%	%
Plans to hire UG business students	11	35	36	6	1
Number of colleges where you will actively recruit UG business majors	4	13	62	17	4

ALUMNI STUDY

Was it a good choice?

Alumni believe that their specific undergraduate business school did a good job of satisfying their needs to prepare them for the work world. The vast majority of alumni was pleased with their choice of business school and would recommend the school, particularly because of the faculty, the business foundation they received, the overall quality of education, resources, and facilities.

Satisfaction with their undergraduate business school	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
	(5)	(4)	(3)	(2)	(1)
	%	%	%	%	%
“My choice to attend my undergraduate business school was a wise one.”	72	22	5	1	0
“I would recommend my undergraduate business school to students interested in a business career.”	67	24	7	2	0

Reasons for recommending their undergraduate business school (most frequent comments) (#)			
Good professors/faculty	183	School's reputation	93
Provides good foundation for business	165	The degree and skills are good to have	61
Courses, resources, facilities	138	Quality of the students	28
Overall quality of education	110	Rigor of program	25

Most important benefits and skills, and how well prepared were alumni

Alumni felt the most important benefits from their education were the general knowledge and personal skills they developed, the business background they received, and career services support.

Most important benefits from undergraduate business school (#)			
Developed general knowledge or personal skills (critical thinking, communications, analytical)	168	Developed teamwork skills	69
Provided strong business education and background	129	Networking opportunities (including alumni)	63
Job placement, career services, advising	118	School had a good reputation	51
Strong school, good faculty	93	Specific subject areas	47
Balanced education	77		

The most important general knowledge skills they needed to develop were communications abilities and analytical skills, and this is where business schools were most effective.

General knowledge skills: Importance of and preparation for	Importance (%)		Effectiveness of preparation (%)	
	Very	Somewhat	Excellent	Good
Communications abilities	95	4	44	46
Analytic skills	78	21	43	46
Ethical understanding and reasoning abilities	62	32	45	43
Use of information technology	61	34	33	44
Reflective thinking skills	47	44	31	51
Multicultural and diversity understanding	30	46	27	44

The most important management specific knowledge and skills they needed to develop related to developing strategic processes to gain competitive advantage, customer relationship processes, and understanding group and individual dynamics in organizations. In general, undergraduate business schools were not rated as high in preparing students for more specific skills.

Management specific skills: Importance of and preparation for	Importance (%)		Effectiveness of preparation (%)	
	Very	Somewhat	Excellent	Good
Strategic processes to create value and gain competitive advantage	71	24	32	44
Processes for creating, maintaining, and improving customer relationships	70	24	23	40
Group and individual dynamics in organizations	66	28	42	41
Ethical and legal responsibilities in organizations and society	56	36	31	47
Financial theories, analysis, reporting, and markets	51	38	31	47
Information technologies as they influence organizations, economics, and management	44	43	21	46
Creation of value through integrated production and operations	38	45	18	48
Processes for gathering and reporting accounting information	35	45	27	44
Domestic and global economic environments of organizations	31	47	20	48
Statistical data analysis and management science	28	52	24	48

Effectiveness and importance of specific areas of the undergraduate business school

In terms of particular aspects of an undergraduate business school's structure and support, the three most important attributes were the overall quality of instruction, career services, and student-faculty interaction. Alumni rated their schools best in terms of facilities and overall quality of instruction and least effective in academic advising and career services.

Specific areas of the school: Importance of and preparation for	Importance (%)		Effectiveness of preparation (%)	
	Very	Somewhat	Excellent	Good
Overall quality of instruction	91	8	52	41
Career services	79	17	30	37
Overall quality of student-faculty interaction	69	28	39	44
Computer services and facilities	60	35	46	39
Academic advising	50	38	19	40
Library and other information resources	44	45	48	41
Classroom facilities	34	55	54	36

Recommendations for improvements

The most frequent recommendations alumni had in terms of how undergraduate business schools could improve related to developing communications skills, providing more of a real world context, more offerings in finance and accounting, and better career services support. Recommendations relating to faculty improvements were relatively rare.

Improvement recommendations	#		Improvement recommendations	#
Communications skills—net	(94)		Career services (net)	(104)
General	36		General	56
Presentations	23		More companies, interviews, recruiting, placement	42
Public speaking	13		Other	6
Other	3		Networking	30
Real world (net)	(88)		Advising/counseling (academic)	18
Real world practical experience	46			
Real world class environment	31		Faculty	
Other	11		More interaction with	10
			More real world experience	11
			Better, more knowledgeable	21
Specific areas				
Finance and accounting	76			
Internships	69			
General management (including people, change mgmt)	58			
Case studies (including more real world)	49			
Technology	42			
More hands-on experience	31			
Entrepreneurship	22			
Computer skills/labs	28			
International	19			

National Undergraduate Business Symposium Schools

University of Arizona	Michigan State University
Bentley College	University of Minnesota
Boston College	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Brigham Young University	Ohio State University
Case Western Reserve University	University of Pennsylvania
University of California (Berkeley)	Pennsylvania State University
University of Connecticut	Purdue University
Emory University	Syracuse University
University of Florida	University of Utah
Indiana University—Bloomington	University of Virginia
University of Iowa	Wake Forest University
Lehigh University	University of Washington
Miami University	University of Wisconsin—Madison

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