

Summary of Employer Focus Group

3 Committee members attending: Tina Hogan, David Humphrey, and Greg Rhoads

Employers from the following companies were present:

- Newell Rubbermaid
- Centex Homes
- Disability Determination Services (2)
- Three Springs of North Carolina, Inc. (residential treatment for disadvantaged youth)
- BB&T
- The Vanguard Group
- Enterprise Rent-A-Car

Responses to Questions (in no particular order):

1) What qualities or skills do you look for in a new college graduate to employ?

a) **Interpersonal skills**

- i) Must have an ability to interact well and communicate with customers in a service-oriented society – liberal arts majors have better interpersonal skills

b) **Understanding of technology**

- i) Should have computer skills and the ability to learn a new technology on the job

c) **Communication**

- i) Must be able to communicate verbally and nonverbally with different audiences – e.g. both surgeons and non-educated citizens – no matter how intelligent or articulate, need to write well
- ii) Basic communication skills are essential – good grammar and email etiquette is very important – some employees were sent to grammar classes – low-level employees are not allowed to send company email

d) **Critical thinking**

- i) Students need the ability to make arguments and support conclusions – must make decisions on Social Security claims within the confines of the law
- ii) Need to be able to learn new technology

e) **Leadership and Confidence**

- i) Students must have leadership opportunities and abilities – companies can train on product knowledge but employees must have leadership qualities on entering – when interviewing, asks the question “When did you convince someone to do something they didn’t want to do?”
- ii) #1 characteristic in the business world is confidence – everything requires salesmanship, from selling ideas to convincing people to act in your favor
- iii) Grades narrow down the candidates, but the ones who show leadership and confidence get hired

f) **Cultural understanding**

- i) Students who study abroad are more interesting – wishes they would have done it when they were in school

- ii) As companies expand internationally, students who have international business and experience working with people from other cultures will be more valued
 - iii) As the Latino population increases, need students who can understand and market to their culture
- g) **Fluency in a foreign language**
- i) Students will definitely use it, especially Spanish but need to be as fluent as possible
 - ii) The US is bilingual now – workers were hired because they were bilingual, a less-qualified worker was hired because they could speak Spanish, employees are paid more if they can speak another language
 - iii) Using a foreign language as a hiring criterion will be more important in the future, but not sure if it's realistic to expect the university to produce enough bilingual students
- 2) **How have ASU students fell short/met/exceeded your expectations concerning those qualities or skills? In what areas where ASU students fell short/met/exceeded other new college graduates in any of those areas?**
- a) **Preparedness**
- i) ASU students have a realistic expectation of the work world – they are ready for a 55-60 hour work week and know you don't climb the corporate ladder in 6 months
 - ii) Noticed an overall “dumbing down” of all students, but ASU students have a good work ethic and good computer skills – continue to be interested in learning
 - iii) Students seem to be working more hours (20-25) while they are in school – rarely see a student without work experience
- b) **Interpersonal skills**
- i) ASU students are humble, unassuming, and seem to pick up on the generational differences that other college graduates do not – they know how to deal with older people
- c) **Lack of study abroad and foreign language**
- i) ASU students don't have the cultural experience that UNCA does and doesn't require a foreign language
- 3) **What kinds of qualities or skills do you expect to be most important in the next 10 years?**
- a) **Interpersonal skills – foreign language – understanding of technology**
- 4) **Are there any courses or experiences that you consider most important for a student to have while in college?**
- a) **Internships**
- i) Stress internships early in a college career and more than just one summer so the student has a better idea of what's available and in time to change their major if desired
- b) **Work experience**
- i) Provides leadership and interpersonal experience
 - ii) University should do whatever it takes to recruit ex-military – they have the work ethic and leadership needed on the job, just need to learn specific skills
- c) **Volunteer experience**
- i) They need empathetic employees who can relate to the situations of other people
- d) **Rounded skill set**
- i) Regardless of major, students need a rounded set of skills – a good liberal arts, general education background