

Strategic Goal #4: Improve Student Career Preparation December 21, 2012

Summary of Advisory Board Interview Trend Analysis

Provided below is a list of the top ten trends from advisory board member interviews, which designate areas of improvement in terms of career preparation. Trends were ranked in order of importance, based on the combination of overall mentions in the interviews and the number of interviewees who cited the concern. (See Advisory Board Interview Data Trend Analysis Excel Spreadsheet on the Strategic Plan website)

Data Trend 1:

Professionalism – includes issues of attendance, promptness, dress code, overall attitude, self-presentation, reliability, trustworthiness, ability to accept constructive criticism, outgoing personality, people skills, confidence, etc. Advisory board members emphasized the need to spend more time coaching students on the transition from an academic environment to a professional one. This includes providing students with additional ways of understanding real-world realities such as dressing for success and balancing work-life expectations.

Data Trend 2:

Customer service skills – incorporate role playing of clinical and client interaction situations. Some advisory board members believe strongly that in certain industries, where students will be working heavily with the public, personality and customer services skills should be factored into the program's selection process.

Data Trends 3 (Tie):

Verbal and written communication – ability to write, read, listen, and communicate with others effectively, which is important for following up and communicating with co-workers and clients.

Lack of comfort and practice with interviews – includes coaching students to prepare for interviews. Advisory board members suggest coaching students on the appropriate questions to ask and the proper research to conduct before the interview. Hosting mock interviews is a great way to help students gain comfort with interviews. Advisory board members encourage the college to utilize them for help with interviewing and other job search skills.

Data Trend 4:

Ability to self-start and work independently – it is important that recent college graduates know how to tackle given tasks independently. Advisory board members want new employees to be able to start and work towards completing assigned tasks, without a great deal of “hand holding.” This issue ties in to Data Trend 7 (see below), which discusses critical thinking and problem solving.

Data Trend 5:

Focus on basic knowledge, technical skills, and computer skills – recent college graduates should come into the workplace possessing the basic skills and knowledge required to do a job. Advisory board members do not want to train new employees on how to do the job; they want to train them on how to do the job at their specific company. They suggest acquainting students with the necessary technical procedures required for entry level positions. Advisory board members also stress the importance of MS Excel and Word skills, data analysis, and other basic computer skills.

Data Trend 6:

Increased internships and experiential learning opportunities – internships are viewed very highly by advisory board members. In fact, any experience that a student brings with them is a plus; especially if it is within the company they are applying. Internships give students a competitive edge by allowing them to learn the job and to demonstrate their abilities. Internships are also excellent opportunities for both the employer and student to determine if the job and company culture are good fits. Advisory board members are concerned that although internship experiences are worthwhile, they are often too short and do not allow students the time to delve into their positions. Thus, it was suggested to place more emphasis on expanding the opportunities and the time requirements for practicums, internships, observations, and community service.

Data Trend 7:

Critical thinking skills, problem solving, and data analysis – recent college graduates must be able to take a set of data and to recognize how to understand it. It was often noted that recent college graduates lack attention to detail. This relates to the issues with Data Trend 5 (see above). Advisory board members suggested integrating the use of Excel, statistical analysis, and data presentation into the curriculum as much as possible. Recent college graduates therefore must develop analytical and critical thinking skills which facilitate in their problem solving capabilities.

Data Trend 8:

Importance of degree requirement and focus on transfer (Bachelors v. Associates) – a great deal of emphasis was placed on the need for either an Associates Degree or above, or a Bachelors Degree or above. This varied by advisory board member, company, and position available. Some advisory board members are happy to work with both levels of degrees, while others strictly require a Bachelors and above. Most advisory board members stress the need and importance of placing emphasis on informing and helping students transfer to four-year institutions.

Data Trends 9 (Tie):

Comfort with organizational culture and diversity – it has been noted that recent college graduates enter the workplace and find it difficult to relate to and work with diverse people and cultures. Suggestions for improvement involve offering more classes on diversity, hosting events that promote diversity, providing diversity workshops, and even inviting alumni to speak to students about their experience with diversity in the workplace.

Ability to make previous experiences relevant on resumes and ability to explain employment gaps – applicants often miss opportunities to demonstrate their skills because they fail to recognize the relevance of a past job, volunteer position, or experience, thus leaving it off their resumes. Students need to be coached on resume writing to help them understand the relevance of prior work and extracurricular experiences. Students should also be coached on explaining large gaps in employment on their resumes.

Data Trend 10:

Ability to be a team player – it is important to be able to not only work independently, but to also be able to work as part of a highly effective team. This involves the ability to compromise, to work collaboratively, and to understand how to manage differences in personalities in order to get the job done.

Provided below is a summary of advisory board member's commitment level to helping NECC with career preparation of its students:

- Most members are willing to present to students one or two times a year about their professions, their personal and professional experiences, their company, and other relevant topics
- Some members are open to reviewing resumes and performing mock interviews with students in the programs they advise
- Some members are comfortable with giving guest class lectures
- Most members are open to participating in panel discussions on relevant topics once a semester

Provided below are comments from interviewees on what NECC is doing well:

- **Human Services Advisory Board:**
 - Great overall experience in hiring students from NECC
- **Lab Sciences Advisory Board:**
 - Program has been incredibly receptive to suggestions especially about incorporating more data analysis into the program's curriculum
 - Working with various members of faculty has been an excellent experience across the board!
 - The program is a great way to meet the industry's need for entry-level technicians
- **Dental Assisting Advisory Board:**
 - Program at NECC does a fabulous job at developing the technical skills of its students!
- **Early Childhood Education Program:**
 - NECC students are very well prepared and have a deep understanding of childhood development
 - Strong supporter of the NECC education program and would choose NECC graduates over others
- **Criminal Justice Advisory Board**
 - NECC is an incredibly valuable resource to students if they take advantage of all that it has to offer.
 - Very positive experiences with NECC graduates of the program who are hired after they receive their Bachelors
- **Occupational Advisory Board (2 interviews):**
 - In general, students who graduate from community colleges are incredibly dedicated and hard working.
 - The success rate of NECC graduates passing the board for nursing is very high, often times better than those recent college graduates coming from four-year programs.
- **Radiography Program Advisory Board:**
 - Experiences hiring NECC students into per diem positions have been very positive.
 - NECC students are preferred in hiring because of their preparedness from the program
 - "NECC is great and they put a lot of effort into their program"
- **Deaf Studies Advisory Board:**
 - The presence of students in observational practicums has been very positive