

## ***UNC 2015 Employer Study: Focus Group Findings***

**Situation:** Presentation of findings from the UNC 2015 Employer Focus Groups.

### **Background:**

UNC GA strategic plan calls for UNC-GA to engage consultant to facilitate focus groups with North Carolina Employers to find out how UNC system schools can better prepare future graduates for the workforce.

The final report provides:

1. General information of how employers view some portion of UNC graduates in the following areas: written skills, oral communication skills, ability to work with others, problem-solving skills, ability to understand and use technical information, work ethic, and adaptability/flexibility.
2. General information on the skills most desired by employers in North Carolina.
3. Feedback on how the University (not a specific campus) could better prepare future graduates.

### **Assessment:**

- University system as a whole is found to be highly effective in training students for jobs in the global economy.
- Academics are excellent and students are well-prepared in their majors.
- Students are viewed as collaborative and team oriented, as well as good problem solvers and critical thinkers.
- Students need to be encouraged to utilize career services earlier and more often.
- The University system is viewed as generally responsive and proactive relating to employer needs.
- There is some concern that student expectations relating to compensation, advancement, and work ethic are somewhat inflated and naive.
- Employers expect students to have engaged in one or more active learning methods—specifically, internships and group projects.
- Employers increasingly place emphasis on soft skills such as oral and written communication skills, the ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings, ability to solve complex problems, and the ability to innovate and be creative.
- Hiring decisions are complex and based on many variables, including geography, industry specific-skill sets, salary expectations, and job availability
- There is a shortage of both STEM and education majors—with employers unable to satisfy demand with the current quantity of graduates coming from the North Carolina system.

- University system graduates are viewed as both highly qualified and highly prized.

**Action:** This item is for information only.

# UNC-GA Employer Focus Groups

Findings and Insights

July 7, 2015

Innovation Management



innovation Management, LLC

# Background

UNC GA strategic plan calls for UNC-GA to engage consultant to facilitate focus groups with North Carolina Employers to find out how UNC system schools can better prepare future graduates for the workforce.

This study:

1. Provides general information of how employers view some portion of UNC graduates in the following areas: written skills, oral communication skills, ability to work with others, problem-solving skills, ability to understand and use technical information, work ethic, and adaptability/flexibility.
2. Provides general information on the skills most desired by employers in North Carolina.
3. Provides feedback on how the University (not a specific campus) could better prepare future graduates.

# Methodology

- **Primary Investigation:** Extant research helped inform the development of a moderator's guide and a questionnaire.
- **Recruitment:** Focus group participants were recruited through a large-scale recruitment process with support from the 16 universities' campus career services, the University System board of Governors, and aggressive LinkedIn campaign, and recommendations from the Education Advisory Board's Market Snapshot of North Carolina 2014 report.
- **Size of Companies:** Employers represented a diverse group of industries and companies, large and small, nationwide, statewide and local—all who have recently hired graduating 4-year students from the University System

# Focus Groups: Employers of UNC System Graduates

- March 5 through April 1, 2015
- 7 Cities
- N = 63: Two focus groups each in Raleigh, Charlotte, Wilmington, and Asheville. One focus group in Greenville and Winston-Salem. One one-on-one interview in Hickory.

City	Date	Number of Total Participants
Raleigh	3/5/15	14
Charlotte	3/23/15	17
Wilmington	3/25/15	9
Greenville	3/26/15	4
Asheville	3/30/15	12
Hickory	3/31/15	1
Winston-Salem	4/1/15	6

# Overview of Findings

- University system as a whole is found to be highly effective in training students for jobs in the global economy.
- Academics are excellent and students are well-prepared in their majors.
- Students are viewed as collaborative and team oriented, as well as good problem solvers and critical thinkers.
- Students need to be encouraged to utilize career services earlier and more often.
- The University system is viewed as generally responsive and proactive relating to employer needs.
- There is some concern that student expectations relating to compensation, advancement, and work ethic are somewhat inflated and naive.
- Employers expect students to have engaged in one or more active learning methods—specifically, internships and group projects.
- Employers increasingly place emphasis on soft skills such as oral and written communication skills, the ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings, ability to solve complex problems, and the ability to innovate and be creative.
- Hiring decisions are complex and based on many variables, including geography, industry specific-skill sets, salary expectations, and job availability
- There is a shortage of both STEM and education majors—with employers unable to satisfy demand with the current quantity of graduates coming from the North Carolina system.
- University system graduates are viewed as both highly qualified and highly prized.

# Key Themes



# Students are learning the skills they need to succeed

*“Our (needs) match up pretty well. I mean, it’s interesting to see at the very beginning when you look at a resume and you see strong GPA and they’ve got...the right skills that we’re looking for”*

However, the ability to converse, write, and engage with confidence seems to be lacking.

*“I am impressed with students coming out, so I think they are well educated. I think that’s not the issue. It is more of just translating that education to the real world.”*

# Many students have “unreasonable” workplace expectations

*“There just seems to be this expectation that they’re going to just skyrocket along in a very quick time, and it’s tough because you don’t want to miss their expectations, where they then feel like, “Whoa, wait a minute, this is not what I thought it was going to be,” or, “I’m not moving along as quickly as I think I should be moving along.” I think that needs to be tempered a little bit, or maybe just a little more realism brought into what corporate life is really like.”*

# Career services is underutilized

*“They’re always more prepared (those who use career services). And that’s one thing that any time I talk in a class, I always end my presentation with “utilize career services,” because at every school you can tell, the people who come into the interview are more prepared, they’ve done their research, they know about your company, they’ve maybe done a mock interview or two, versus those students who come in and they’ve never done this in their life and they have no idea.”*

# Career services can better meet employer needs

- Need for centralized job postings and protocols
  - *“Hire a Niner is not the most intuitive system, and if there was a job aide that could be sent when you’re a new employer in the partnership, that would be helpful because we have a lot of challenges trying to get jobs posted on the site.”*
- Need for centralized information and scheduling portal
  - *“I have to go in and search each university’s webpage to find out when the career fair is going to be held, or wait for the emails from the schools that we have already established relationships with to get that information.”*
- Relationship building/employer relations
  - *“I think every university campus should have an employer relations team. Some campuses have two or three people that are working on it, reaching out to employers, letting them know when a new degree program is available, letting them know about the points of pride of the university and inviting them to come on campus and build that relationship. Some universities, unfortunately, don’t have it.”*

# Career Fairs can be improved

- **Positives:** Effective way to introduce students to brand, lots of students in attendance, efficient use of time and resources
  - *“Attending the career fair is still important because they are pushing the brand.”*
- **Negatives:** “Cattle call”, cost of attending seems high and arbitrary, scheduling is difficult, lack of focus/academic specificity, and a need for innovation
  - *“It’s really hard to [engage with students] when you have several hundred people coming up to you over the course of three hours.”*
- Greater collaboration between academics and career services
  - *“I would be very interested in—and maybe it exists and I haven’t experienced it yet—a stronger connection between the career office and the various departments at this school. For me, I’m interested in doing more class talks and I can hit on various aspects of whatever the class is.”*
- Technology
  - *“Whether you see something from Western Carolina or you see something from App State or you see something from UNC Chapel Hill, they’re all sort of doing different things from job postings boards, whatever technology. There is no centralized way to recruit from the system.”*

# Students would benefit from earlier career guidance

*“That’s so sad and I see that in my business. I see people that decide they want to get into real estate and then they literally go through the class; they get their license; they invest the time, the money, the energy, and then they get to me where I explain the job and what they’re going to do to be successful. Unfortunately, so often, you see people who go “Well, I’ve come this far. Might as well try it, or I might as well keep going.”*

# Career services as a work authorization filter

*“My understanding is that for North Carolina schools we are not allowed to filter out students that don’t have that work authorization whereas with Rutgers or with NJIT or University of Texas I’m easily able to just click on a button and be able to do that.”*

# Employer relations with the university: Some are Insiders, others Outsiders

- Insiders

- *“I’m deeply involved in the school. I’ve been on the advisory group there. I’ve actually taught. We’ve just felt that we have kind of an ongoing relationship with the school, meaning that beyond career fairs and that sort of thing we’re attending pin-ups and design reviews and that sort of thing because we actually feel that bringing people right in from school benefits us tremendously.”*

- Outsiders

- *“We’re not a corporate sponsor, we don’t have the opportunities to do certain things on campuses that corporate sponsors do, and what I question there is we’re providing career opportunities to your students, like that’s why they’re going to college so that they can find a career opportunity.”*



# Employers want to engage with students earlier to foster relationships

*“I remember meeting a freshman at the Career Fair, seeing her every year come back, and talking to her about her academic career path, and how that sets her up for opportunities within our company. And we did eventually hire her, but before she ever worked for us we were able to engage in that communication and have that conversation to help set her up for success as early as possible.”*

# Employers use a mix of HR professionals and line staff to recruit

*“Even leaders within each of the business units actually come and do some of the engagements. So, it’s not really HR driven necessarily. It’s much more business driven. We support it and getting the team and campus recruiting specific supports it 100% of the times as well, but it’s definitely a business and HR collaboration.”*

- HR professionals are more comfortable engaging with career services than functional employees.

*“I’m actually in the IT function. Our HR function spends most of their time not in IT...this is a company that in some of our facilities we are having a 50% turnover in employers within the next five years because we have so many baby boomers that are retiring. Our HR folks are pretty busy with other things.”*

# Employers want to engage with more system schools

*“Maybe there’s an onboarding process to introduce the depth of the university system so that you understand maybe what the strengths of each of the universities are, right, the different components and then maybe from there you go to the schools that are best for you, for that student for you. So maybe an onboarding process for employers.”*

# Employers seek to influence academics

*“We’re working hard to push a Salesforce course and curriculum into core UNCW curriculum. Everybody said, “That sounds great,” and then kind of went off, and then a year later we said, you know what, we’re going to do it.”*

Because of perceived difficulty of affecting academic change, some employers have engaged with community colleges to satisfy their unmet needs.

*“I’ll tell you where we’ve had a lot of success is at the community college level. We have a great relationship with UNCA. They’ve been fantastic, but in terms of the flexibility and just being able to come up with a training program like that, A-B Tech has been phenomenal; very responsive, very supportive.”*

# Internships lead to full-time jobs

*“Internships are a great way for us to hire; we have had interns in the past. We hire about three quarters of our interns after they graduate, because they’re able to come in, we give them a great experience, hands-on experience in the industry, in our company, and they’re able to showcase their skillsets.”*

- Internship as the single most important student engagement activity
- But, internships are costly and require a significant time commitment by employers

# The Curriculum is appropriate

- **STEM/Engineering:** Excellent, but high demand and lack of capacity
  - *“The STEM programs are top-notch -- NC State and NC A&T have excellent programs. I wish there were more students to pick from.”*
- **Liberal Arts:** Flexibility and openness is important—strong focus on communication skills
  - *“We like the green person so we can train them and teach them what they need to know in our industry. Not everybody grows up saying they’re going to be a logistician. It’s not one of those fields of study they think of when they’re five years old.”*
- **Education/Teaching:** Great students, but very high demand and little available talent
  - *“We see a real decline in the people that are graduating with those types of degrees. Three years ago, I went to UNC Chapel Hill’s elementary education seminar and there were 150 students in it. Last year, there were 35.”*

# To many employers, soft skills are as important as hard skills

- Interpersonal skills, oral and written communication skills, ability to think critically
  - *“I am much more willing to take someone who can have a conversation with me and might not have the skills that I need, I’d much rather have that person than someone who doesn’t have the interpersonal skills and the soft skills.”*
- Collaboration and teamwork
  - *“What I think is going right is young people do seem to be oriented to collaboration, so it seems like whether it’s in their classes (or otherwise) there’s a lot of project work and I think that’s good.”*

Employers think there is a need to manage student expectations for advancement

*“I think that the issues we’re seeing are probably pretty consistent with the ones that anybody is seeing with new grads coming out. And for me it’s more of a commitment thing, like they’re one foot out of the door from day one, it’s like “Oh, but there’s probably something better.” And I’ve been seeing that for years.”*



# Employers see a need for more student diversity

- Need for more diversity in job candidates
  - *We don't want carbon copies in classrooms. We want people with unique visions and ideas so we do a much broader recruitment than a single university."*
- Need for more diversity in academic programming
  - *"This is so specific for CPA firms so I apologize, but because we go to schools that have master's degrees, none of the historically black schools in North Carolina have a master's program in accounting and that makes me really sad because we also would love to have more diversity than we see. There's none because I've looked up every single [school] wanting to add to where we go."*

# Geography affects hiring decisions

- Fewer opportunities in Western and Eastern areas of the state
  - *“I see at these other schools, like Charlotte, and NCA&T, and NC State that...they have a lot of internships and a lot of relevant experience that they can add to their resume. And I see that lacking a lot with Western students. And it makes me sad. And I know that they’re smart, I know that the program, the engineering program is really good. I know that they’re getting a good education, and when they have a 3.8 or a 3.5 GPA that they worked really hard to get there.”*
- Difficult to find talent
  - *“We are based in Franklin, North Carolina. So we are a very small, rural area, and we can’t get other students to move to Western North Carolina or move to a rural area from that standpoint.”*

# Accolades

- *“I'd just like to pay a compliment. I think UNC Charlotte is fantastic. They give us [indiscernible] support from the career services staff in particular.”*
- *“Even though ECU is a good four hour drive from here, their Career Development Center, they have somebody on staff that does employer relations and he does a very good job at it. He keeps us plugged in to campus and encourages us to be on campus.”*
- *“As far as the general career fair from Western Carolina University, I've seen major strides over the last couple of years.”*
- *“I am impressed with students coming out, so I think they are well educated. I think that's not the issue. It is more of just translating that education to the real world. I think, I do, I think overall they are encouraged to pursue their careers and seek out opportunities...I look at people from all over the country, and actually all over the globe, and I would say even if we were located in another state we would be picking people from the UNC system.”*
- *“I go to UNC Charlotte, NCA&T, NC State, the engineers, I'm very impressed with those three schools. I think their students are the most prepared, dress professionally, poised, and they have done their homework.”*
- *“I know at Central their Career Center is amazing, we've been to a few different focus groups, I've been to some resume building workshops there. The students seem really engaged with the Career Center that it's like a partnership.”*
- *“We love ECU students because they are just as smart but they're humble.”*

# Reaction and Input from Career Services

- Increase Faculty engagement with Career Services
- Increase University-wide leadership engagement with job development
- Consider mandatory use of career services by students
- Integrate Internship into career services
- Assess need for incremental resources based on increased student utilization
- Create single technology platform for employer use
- Review needs and resources relating to compliance
- Benchmark career services function
- Redefine the goals and role of Career Services within the system
  - Measurable Objectives
    - Identify expectations
    - Identify what should be measured
    - Utilize the National Association of Colleges and Employers standards
- Set a timetable and strategy for change



# UNC General Administration Employer Study

## Final Report

Prepared for:  
The University of North Carolina  
General Administration

By:



innovation Management, LLC

July 7, 2015

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# UNC General Administration Employer Study

## Background

The University of North Carolina General Administration (UNCGA) strategic plan stipulates that by fall 2015, a biennial employer satisfaction survey be conducted with the following objectives:

- a. Using the response categories excellent, good, fair, needs improvement, and poor, the survey must include the following items: written skills, oral communication skills, ability to work with others, problem-solving skills, ability to understand and use technical information, work ethic, and adaptability/flexibility.
- b. Institutions should consider asking employers an open-ended question about how they could better prepare future graduates.
- c. General Administration will work with campuses to develop an approved employer sampling procedure that will generate valid results.

In order to satisfy the objectives above, The UNCGA engaged innovation Management, LLC to conduct qualitative research (focus groups) across the eight prosperity zones of North Carolina to understand employers' wants, needs, and perspectives of the university system and its graduates.

The study:

1. Provides general information of how employers view some portion of UNC graduates in the following areas: written skills, oral communication skills, ability to work with others, problem-solving skills, ability to understand and use technical information, work ethic, and adaptability/flexibility.
2. Provides general information on the skills most desired by employers in North Carolina.
3. Provides feedback on how the University (not a specific campus) could better prepare future graduates.
4. In addition, IM met with the career services directors from the 16 campuses on June 11, 2015 to discuss study findings and solicit feedback relating to the role of career services in employer satisfaction.



## Evidence Review

Innovation Management conducted an evidence review to understand the current landscape within the world of undergraduate employment and how it relates to the hiring challenges North Carolina employers face, as well as the issues facing the University of North Carolina General Administration and its campuses.

In studied reports, employers note that students are academically well prepared for the workforce. But, in addition to academic preparedness, employers want graduates to have experience with internships and to have participated in a range of extracurricular activities. Further, employers expect student to know how to communicate effectively, dress appropriately and demonstrate leadership abilities (Chegg 2013).

In a 2014 report from Accenture, it was found that graduates believe they would benefit from additional work-related training and skills upon graduation. These include specialized software instruction, technical skills, and hands-on industry-specific training. Many students note that employers often do not provide these trainings. Further, Accenture suggests that employers need to investigate their hiring and retention practices, and hire on potential, rather than immediate skills.

A report by McKinsey (2013) notes that “employers, education providers, and youth live in parallel universes”, and have different understandings of the on-the-job situation. New graduates do not believe they are fully prepared for jobs in the workforce and employers are skeptical as well. On the other hand, faculty and staff at schools do think that students are prepared. This apparent disconnect seems to suggest that hard, academic skills are successfully taught, while soft, life skills are less programmed in the curriculum.

In addition to the evidence review, innovation Management attended “Recruiting Trends 2014: Hiring, Developing and Retaining Today’s College Graduates,” a national recruiting trends survey conducted annually by the Collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State University and locally sponsored by the UNC Chapel Hill Career Services on November 14, 2014.

At this meeting, innovation Management learned that employers are concerned about increasing job turnover rates, think student expectations for advancement are unreasonable, that well-rounded students—those that take courses beyond their majors—are an asset to the organization, and that multiculturalism and empathy are growing interests to employers. It was further reported that many graduates lacked the soft skills and competencies necessary for workplace, such as accurate expectations, social behaviors, and the ability to effectively communicate both written and orally. Lastly, the importance of active learning including internships and co-ops was reiterated and cited as important tools for students to gain workforce skills that they might not receive in the classroom setting.

Please see attached annotated bibliography for source materials and additional information.

## Primary Investigation

Extant research helped inform the development of a moderator's guide and a questionnaire which asked employers to rank 8 educational practices preparing graduates for success in the workplace, and to select the top five learning outcomes from a list of 18. The learning outcomes and educational practices were referenced in the 2013 report from Hart Research Associates, *It takes more than a major: Employer priorities for college learning and student success*.

The semi-structured guide was used by the moderator to lead each focus group discussion. Each focus group was recorded and sent for transcripts. Notes from each focus group and transcripts are contained in a separate document, which is available upon request.

### Recruitment

Focus group participants were recruited through a large-scale recruitment process with support from the 16 universities' campus career services, the University System Board of Governors, an aggressive LinkedIn campaign, and through recommendations from the Education Advisory Board's Market Snapshot of North Carolina 2014 report. Recruitment began in November 2014 and continued through March 2015. Over 500 email invitations were sent to prospective participants on behalf of the University System president, Tom Ross. Invited participants included recruiters and hiring managers at top businesses in North Carolina, as well as to individuals whom had relationships with, and were recommended by the Universities themselves.

A full list of participants and invitees is included in a separate document.

### Size of Companies

Focus groups were comprised of employers representing a diverse group of industries and companies, large and small, nationwide, statewide and local entities—all who have recently hired graduating 4-year students from the UNC University system.

### Companies/Industries Represented

Industries represented in the focus groups included private healthcare companies, banking and financial firms, public school systems, commercial, consulting, insurance companies, technological and engineering firms, as well as non-profit businesses. These mirror the industries of the top posted jobs in North Carolina as per the Education Advisory Board's Market Snapshot, although they are not always identical to the companies cited in their report.

### Focus Groups

A total of 11 focus groups, each lasting approximately 90 minutes, were conducted in seven North Carolina cities (Raleigh, Charlotte, Wilmington, Greenville, Asheville, Hickory, and Winston-Salem) from March 5, 2015 through April 1, 2015. Two focus group were held in Raleigh, Charlotte, Wilmington, and Asheville and one focus group each were held in Greenville and Winston-Salem. A one-on-one interview was conducted in Hickory.

A total of 63 employers from 57 companies participated in the groups, hosting on average 9 attendees per group.

Members of the UNC Board of Governors attended all focus group sessions, with the exception of Greenville and Hickory.

Members of University Career Services from hosting locations were invited to attend the focus group sessions.

### **Sites visited**

<b>City</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Number of Total Participants</b>
Raleigh	3/5/15	14
Charlotte	3/23/15	17
Wilmington	3/25/15	9
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Several attempts were made to conduct focus group in Fayetteville; however, we did not receive sufficient response to run a session.

### **Limitations of qualitative research**

Please note that this is qualitative research and should be used as directional versus definitive information. While focus groups allow us to ask expansive questions that cannot be answered by a simple yes or no response, focus groups cannot provide information that can be applied to general groups of people. Group perceptions and views cannot be assumed to represent those of other groups that may have different characteristics. For example, if one employer may not be able to find a specific technical skill they are recruiting, this does not mean that all programs are deficient in this area. On occasion, groups can be subverted by poor recruitment, disengaged responses, and even bad weather.

### **A special thank you**

Special thanks to Carol McLaurin from North Carolina's Small Business and Technology Center (SBTDC) for her help identifying and arranging focus group locations in each of the cities visited.

## **An overview of the questions asked**

**1. How effective are University of North Carolina constituent institutions in preparing students for the challenges of today's global economy?** The University system as a whole was found to be highly effective in training students for jobs in the global economy. All employers find students to be academically well-prepared and sufficiently proficient in various tools and practices related to their majors.

**2. How effective are University of North Carolina constituent institutions in preparing students in the following areas?**

- a. Written communication skills. There are some concerns that some students from less selective campuses are not capable of writing business memos or creating well-written reports.
- b. Oral communication skills. There are some concerns that some students from less selective campuses are not capable of confidently engaging in businesses conversations and creating effective oral arguments.
- c. Ability to work with others. Students are viewed as collaborative and team oriented with many students involved with group projects relating to their academic fields and extra-curricular activities.
- d. Problem-solving skills. Students are viewed as good problem solvers and critical thinkers.
- e. Ability to understand and use technical information. Students in STEM programs are viewed as highly competent, and strong academic achievers.
- f. Strong work ethic. There is some concern that student expectations relating to compensation, advancement and work ethic are somewhat inflated and naïve.
- g. Enthusiasm. Students are seen as enthusiastic and engaged.

**3. How helpful do you believe the following educational practices at University of North Carolina institutions are in preparing graduates for success?**

- a. Expecting students to complete a significant project before graduation that demonstrates their depth of knowledge in their major AND their acquisition of analytical, problem-solving, and communication skills.
- b. Expecting students to complete an internship or community-based field project to connect classroom learning with real-world experiences.
- c. Ensuring that students develop the skills to research questions in their field and develop evidence-based analyses.
- d. Expecting students to work through ethical issues and debates to form their own judgments about the issues at stake.
- e. Expecting students to acquire hands-on or direct experience with the methods of science so they will understand how scientific judgments are reached.
- f. Expecting students to learn about cultural and ethnic diversity in the context of the United States.

- g. Expecting students to learn about the point of view of societies other than those of Western Europe or North America.
- h. Expecting students to take courses that explore big challenges facing society, such as environmental sustainability, public health, or human rights.

In general, employers view the first three educational (A, B, C) practices as most important. Employers expect students to have engaged in one or more active learning methods—including internships and group projects. Internships help prepare students for the real-world and expose them to situations that cannot be replicated in the class room environment via direct experience. Group projects help students learn to cooperate and collaborate and help students demonstrate critical thinking, good judgment and inter-personal skills.

Educational practices (D, E, F, G and H) are seen as somewhat less important as a taught academic behavior, and viewed as subjects that should be learned through life experience—not necessarily a classroom activity.

**4. On which learning outcomes should University of North Carolina institutions place more emphasis?**

- a. The ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing
- b. Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills
- c. The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings through internships or other hands-on experiences
- d. The ability to analyze and solve complex problems
- e. The ability to connect choices and actions to ethical decisions
- f. Teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings
- g. The ability to innovate and be creative
- h. Concepts and new developments in science and technology
- i. The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources
- j. The ability to understand the global context of situations and decisions
- k. Global issues and developments and their implications for the future
- l. The ability to work with numbers and understand statistics
- m. The role of the United States in the world
- n. Cultural diversity in America and other countries
- o. Civic knowledge, civic participation, and community engagement
- p. Proficiency in a foreign language
- q. Democratic institutions and values

In general, employers are most interested and place most emphasis on soft skills such as oral and written communication skills, the ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings, ability to solve complex problems, and the ability to innovate and be creative. Employers who are more globally-oriented emphasized language proficiency and matters relating to global awareness and sensitivity.

Items (M, N, O and Q) were considered much less important as a learning outcome, with many employers believing that these skills develop via life experience rather than the classroom environment.

**5. How willing are you to hire University of North Carolina graduates?** North Carolina employers view graduates of the system as both highly qualified and highly prized. Hiring decisions are often complex and based on many variables including geography, industry specific skill-sets, salary expectations, and job availability. Note that there is a shortage of both STEM and education students (science, math, languages and special education)—with employers unable to satisfy demand with the current quantity of graduates coming from the North Carolina system.

**6. How can University of North Carolina constituent institutions better prepare their graduates for the workforce?** Employers are concerned that students are not well-prepared when it comes to soft skills including oral and written proficiency, empathy, leadership and engagement. One idea is to encourage students to utilize Career Services earlier and more often to ensure that resumes are well-written, students are prepared for interviews, and that workplace expectations are managed. A second area of improvement involves internships and co-op programs. Many employers are hoping to engage students earlier in their academic careers and believe that internships offer an opportunity to better expose and prepare students to the workplace. More effort needs to be placed in identifying, developing and implementing internship programs across all majors.

**7. What do UNC constituent institutions do especially well?** Employers believe that academics are top-notch and that faculty and staff work hard to provide students and employers the resources necessary to be successful. The academic institutions are viewed to be responsive and engaged with the business community. Many employers note that they have good campus-wide relationships with faculty, department heads, student clubs and career services. Several employers note that they participate on various boards and advisory panels and have access to university leadership.

**8. In your association with the University over the years, how would you rate its response to your needs?** The University is viewed as generally responsive and proactive relating to employer needs. Some employers view themselves as “insiders” with access to almost every aspect of campus life. Generally, these are larger employers who hire more graduates, have long-term relationships with faculty, university leadership and career service personnel, and have a geographic commitment to the institution. Other employers view themselves as “outsiders” with less ability to access or influence the system. These employers are relatively small, hire fewer graduates, and usually have no sustained relationship with any campus personnel. It will be important for the system to identify ways to engage these small but growing employers as they represent the majority of the jobs in the State and will continue to be the engine of economic growth for North Carolina.

## Key Themes

Employers were asked questions about their company structure, which universities they primarily work with, and their needs, desires, and satisfactions relating to graduates entering the workforce. In general, the groups were more alike than different. In this report, we will characterize them as a whole—a unified group—and will make distinctions as appropriate.

### Students are learning the skills they need to succeed

**Not a single employer thinks that the skills students are learning in their classes are substandard. Employers think that students' technical and hard skills are up to par, if not exceeding, the standards that they are seeking. Overall, there is a high degree of satisfaction with new hires.**

*"Our (needs) match up pretty well. I mean, it's interesting to see at the very beginning when you look at a resume and you see strong GPA and they've got...the right skills that we're looking for"*

**However,**

**The ability to converse, write, and engage with confidence seems to be lacking among many of the system students. Employers think there is a need to place greater emphasis on soft skills, specifically oral and written communication skills.**

*"I am impressed with students coming out, so I think they are well educated. I think that's not the issue. It is more of just translating that education to the real world."*

*"Maybe it's a generational thing that we're all finding that young people aren't as capable of communicating effectively...and so...it's like the ability to communicate against different settings, or in different settings and to recognize the need to communicate in a different way depending upon the audience. It's a little bit nuanced, but young people don't seem to have that skill."*

*"Some of the new hires...everything with them is via email. If you try to call them back on the phone, they won't answer. They'll text you...so that is definitely something that I've noticed as far as communication."*

### Unreasonable workplace expectations

**Employers want students to have reasonable workplace expectations relating to job responsibility and advancement. They think that too many students come out of school with expectations that they will "be Vice President in the next year." While employers expect students to have confidence and to do well on the job, employers want students to understand that "they will need to seek out opportunities, do work that is not the most interesting, and that it may take several years to advance through the company."**

*"There just seems to be this expectation that they're going to just skyrocket along in a very quick time, and it's tough because you don't want to miss their expectations, where they then feel like, "Whoa, wait a minute, this is not what I thought it was going to be," or, "I'm not moving along as quickly as I think I should be moving along." I think that needs to be tempered a little bit, or maybe just a little more realism brought into what corporate life is really like."*

## **Career Services is underutilized**

**Many employers wanted to know why career services was not mandatory for students. Employers can tell a difference in the quality of students who have used career services versus those who have not. Graduates who use career services are described as better prepared, more polished, and have better resumes and cover letters than those who do not. For the most part, employers prefer engaging with students who have been prepared by career services.**

*“As we get to the interviews you can clearly see who’s been using career services. Going there and really practicing and looking the interviewer in the eye and making sure that they’ve got the right handshake and that they are focused on the answers to the questions we’re asking.”*

*“They’re always more prepared. And that’s one thing that any time I talk in a class, I always end my presentation with “utilize career services,” because at every school you can tell, the people who come into the interview are more prepared, they’ve done their research, they know about your company, they’ve maybe done a mock interview or two, versus those students who come in and they’ve never done this in their life and they have no idea.”*

*“It frustrates me when you see someone coming from a UNCW or an ECU, where you know those resources are available to them, versus if you come from a smaller school that has a department of one person that, okay, maybe you didn’t get to visit. But absolutely the preparation is 100%. It’s night and day. Because when you go to career services, they tell you what to do.”*

*“It would be great if it was built into the curriculum early on, maybe sophomore year. As a requirement, whether it’s a true class or admission into their major. They have to do a mock interview, have a resume put together and reviewed, and understand a career timeline. It doesn’t have to be a full class, but something to keep them on track.”*

## **Career Services can better meet employer needs**

### **1. Need for centralized job posting and protocols**

**Employers are dissatisfied with the current job posting system and process saying it is unintuitive and difficult to use. Many encounter variations when using the multiple job portal systems across the 16 different campuses and think there is a steep learning curve.**

*“I would like to have a consistent framework for postings. As it goes right now, there’s 16 different systems I have to use for posting at various universities.”*

*“Hire a Niner is not the most intuitive system, and if there was a job aide that could be sent when you’re a new employer in the partnership, that would be helpful because we have a lot of challenges trying to get jobs posted on the site.”*

*“They have their individual or separate systems—you have to have separate passwords to get into ECU, and certainly to get into State.”*

### **2. Need for centralized information and scheduling portal**

**Employers complain that there is no centralized system that allows them to learn about career fairs and upcoming campus events. Currently, they have to reach out to each individual campus for**



**information and scheduling. This lack of collaboration increases employer workload, leads to frustration, escalates costs, and often results in missed opportunities for student engagement.**

*"I have to go in and search each university's webpage to find out when the career fair is going to be held, or wait for the emails from the schools that we have already established relationships with to get that information."*

*"We almost see a competition with each other school rather than coming in to us as a system. It doesn't look like the North Carolina system is coming to us; it looks more like each individual university and you have to forge a separate relationship with each one."*

### **3. Relationship building/employer relations**

**Employers want to foster closer relationships with career services. Employers want a point person to connect them with and introduce them to the 16 campuses so that academic engagement and recruiting is easier and more successful. Employers cited UNCC's College of Computing and Informatics, ECU, and ASU specifically as having easily accessible and supportive point persons connecting them to campuses and students.**

*"I think every university campus should have an employer relations team. Some campuses have two or three people that are working on it, reaching out to employers, letting them know when a new degree program is available, letting them know about the points of pride of the university and inviting them to come on campus and build that relationship. Some universities, unfortunately, don't have it."*

*"I think if you were to have an employer relations person for each of the different departments on campus or each of the different schools on campus, that could be value added for the student and also the employer so that we know who to directly go to if we're looking for a specialized candidate for the position we're trying to fill."*

### **4. Career Fairs**

**Employers discussed the use of career fairs to attract students to their companies, and cited both positives and negatives of the career fair. Employers were also interested in exploring alternative options to career fairs, such as social media and virtual career fairs.**

#### **Positives**

- Effective way to introduce students to brand
- Lot of students in attendance
- Efficient use of time and resources

**For the positives, employers appreciate career fairs because they provide an effective and easy way to introduce their company to students, as well as reach a large number of students at one time. Employers who were well known to students are more likely to find career fairs useful than those who represented smaller, lesser-known entities.**

*"I've always felt like the career fair is more of a company PR exercise than it is an effective hiring tool. There's got to be a way to maintain a presence with the students or on the campus in some way, shape, or form. I think it serves that purpose."*

*“Attending the career fair is still important because they are pushing the brand.”*

### **Negatives**

- A cattle call with few well prepared students
- Cost of attending seems high and arbitrary
- Scheduling is difficult
- Lack of focus/academic specificity
- Need for innovation

**Employers think that career fairs are not always the best place to find quality students. Many times, employers see students that are unprepared, lack resumes nor knowledge of the businesses attending, and that students appear overwhelmed by the experience. Within this whirlwind environment, employers often find it difficult to form relationships with students and identify students that best fit their needs.**

*“A Company can get lost in a job fair, especially when they’re very different. [Students] would take 60 flyers from everybody and at this point it’s just a bag of flyers that they’re getting ready to take back home.”*

*“It’s really hard to [engage with students] when you have several hundred people coming up to you over the course of three hours.”*

*“They’re not prepared. Last week, we were at a career fair at Western Carolina, and the location for the career fair hurt them, I think. It was in their student union. They had students walking through...just coming through to pick up the freebies”*

**Employers are also curious how the fees for attending career fairs are determined. Fees differ widely from campus to campus, and many employers are unsure why fees are charged, where the fees are going and how they are being utilized.**

*“I would like to better understand why there’s so much difference in the cost of one career fair to another because it kind of boggles my mind.”*

*“If we’re going to be paying \$300, \$400, \$500 a pop we want to get as much out of it as the students are getting out of it. And standing there for four hours talking to 700 people, 13 of which know what we do, who we are, and have a degree that matches with us, is not a useful benefit to our time and it’s not a benefit to the student.”*

**Some employers think the timing of career fairs does not benefit their hiring schedules. Some choose to opt out when career fairs are scheduled too frequently or when they are in conflict with another system school. Some request that a centralized schedule be published. Others wonder if an on-line career fair or other technology enabled methodology might be beneficial or provide an option for smaller, less prosperous companies. Lastly, many employers prefer fairs that focus on a specialty or subject—like computer sciences, engineering, business, etc.**

*“To do a generalized career fair doesn’t necessarily work for us because our jobs are cyclical, they’re different times of the year, but also because we’re a little more specific. We are (leaning) toward not to do the career fairs.”*

**Many employers prefer industry or major-specific career fairs rather than the generalized career fair. Employer think departmental and major-specific career fairs broaden student's expectations and better expose students to the specifics of an industry.**

*"I appreciate the opportunity to go to a career fair or a job fair, but as a person when I was in college going to a job fair you walk into a room with 500 booths...and there's so much to look at, you don't know what it is...if you have those targeted career fairs where you go to, for example, a scientific career fair, you understand that...here are all the other opportunities that you have with that biology degree...in some places where we've been able to go to a targeted career fair we can really open the minds of folks and say there are other opportunities that you have."*

**Employers want the university system to explore innovative ways of helping employers engage with students. Some ideas include utilizing social media platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook, building virtual career fair platforms, and organizing major-specific events in conjunction with industry shows. In general employers want more effective methods that lead to better student engagement and greater efficiencies.**

*"I had decided after this last round of career fairs that in a lot of cases we are wasting our time. Students now are finding jobs online. They're not going in person. And so, we've got to change the way students are finding jobs. We need to do virtual career fairs or something different."*

*"I was going to say one of the things that I've encountered, what I'm really curious about is the role of social media and doing some webinars with LinkedIn to try to figure out what do you do with that. There are several conferences about talent management, acquisition, and the role of social media so really kind of investigating that and then trying to figure out what is the role. I recently got an e-mail, a flyer about a virtual career fair with SEC and ACC schools."*

## **5. Greater collaboration between academics and career services**

**Employers want greater collaboration between career services and academic departments. Employers often find it difficult to navigate the complexities of a University that includes multiple colleges, academic departments and disciplines. Employers note that it is often difficult to determine the correct point of entry into the system, how to connect with the appropriate faculty or department, where are the best and most important relationships formed?**

*"I would be very interested in—and maybe it exists and I haven't experienced it yet—a stronger connection between the career office and the various departments at this school. For me, I'm interested in doing more class talks and I can hit on various aspects of whatever the class is."*

*"I don't see that there's a lot of conversation between the professors and the career center."*

## **6. Technology**

**Employers note the need for career services to upgrade technology. This includes the areas previously identified including updated posting portals and virtualized job fairs. Additional important areas include University and system-wide web sites and information portals for employers. Many note that there is a disparity across the system with some schools offering robust state-of-the-art tools (ECU) while others are sorely deficient (Elizabeth City State.) Employers would appreciate consistently excellent tools and engagement roadmaps.**

*“Whether you see something from Western Carolina or you see something from App State or you see something from UNC Chapel Hill, they’re all sort of doing different things from job postings boards, whatever technology. There is no centralized way to recruit from the system.”*

## **7. Earlier career guidance**

**Some employers shared stories of students who chose a major too late, or chose a field that was inappropriate to their interests, and hoped that career services would intervene earlier with advice, guidance and control.**

*“That’s so sad and I see that in my business. I see people that decide they want to get into real estate and then they literally go through the class; they get their license; they invest the time, the money, the energy, and then they get to me where I explain the job and what they’re going to do to be successful. Unfortunately, so often, you see people who go “Well, I’ve come this far. Might as well try it, or I might as well keep going.”*

*“I want to figure out where we’re focusing on the university level, but then where are those that are falling through the cracks and drop out and have \$100,000 of student debt. How do we avoid that if there’s a better track for them?”*

## **8. Career services as a filter**

**Many North Carolina employers have a difficult time sponsoring foreign graduates, and want career services to filter out students who require sponsorship or other work authorizations.**

*“My understanding is that for North Carolina schools we are not allowed to filter out students that don’t have that work authorization whereas with Rutgers or with NJIT or University of Texas I’m easily able to just click on a button and be able to do that.”*

*“It is very difficult to ask a project team to pay for a sponsorship, when there’s another student that looks exactly the same on paper and they don’t need sponsorship.”*

## Insiders and Outsiders: Employer Relationships with the University

### Insiders

**Employers self-classify into two groups. Some view themselves as “insiders” with access to almost every aspect of campus life. Generally, these are larger employers who hire more graduates, have long-term relationships with faculty, university leadership and career service personnel, and have a geographic commitment to the institution.**

*“I’m deeply involved in the school. I’ve been on the advisory group there. I’ve actually taught. We’ve just felt that we have kind of an ongoing relationship with the school, meaning that beyond career fairs and that sort of thing we’re attending pin-ups and design reviews and that sort of thing because we actually feel that bringing people right in from school benefits us tremendously.”*

*“One of the things we do is, and probably—I don’t know if I should say this or not, but we actually give our software to teach their tax classes so that their students now know that it looks like, what it feels like. So, when they hopefully come to work for us, they already have some experience using our software.”*

*“Our immediate relationships are in Greensboro...we deal a lot with UNCG and A&T, but we have a much tighter relationship with UNCG because we have a professor there that we work with his class.”*

*“I have some things that are somewhat good, that are very good, I think, because I think to me the university has done a very nice job managing the relationship with our company over the years.”*

*“One of the things I’ve always appreciated with UNC, because they do a really nice jobs with this, as does NC State, is finding different ways to stay engaged with the company beyond just direct hires for undergrads or interns.”*

*“NC State always asks me, “Can I bring you in? Can you do an info session? Can you do mock interviews? Do you want to come and give a presentation?” They take me out to lunch. They develop relationships with me.”*

*“We write pretty big checks every year to Chapel Hill to develop part of their Mac curriculum. So we have a distinct group that meets with professors to develop part of their curriculums.”*

*“The advantage that being an insider allows us is we are having the opportunity to help guide some of the curriculum, some of the work with the leadership about what we need.”*

### Outsiders

**Others view themselves as “outsiders” with less ability to access or influence the system. These employers are relatively small, hire fewer graduates, and usually have no sustained relationship with any campus personnel. Often times, these employers feel lost or locked out of recruitment and student engagement opportunities.**

*“We’re not a corporate sponsor, we don’t have the opportunities to do certain things on campuses that corporate sponsors do, and what I question there is we’re providing career opportunities to your students, like that’s why they’re going to college so that they can find a career opportunity.”*

*“We are challenged a little bit with getting the instructors engaged with us, especially considering we hire so many students every year. And I think part of it is early childhood and it’s one of the majors that I think falls off the radar a little bit.”*

*“There were no formal lines of communication ever established, that I’m aware of...this is all new for us.”*

*“Western is so nice to us, and UNCA is so welcoming, but it would be nice to be able to go to the other UNC Schools.”*

## **Employers want to engage with students earlier to foster closer relationships**

**Employers note they want engagement to begin earlier—in the freshmen and sophomore years, so they can develop relationships which can lead to internships in junior and senior years—and turn into jobs offers after graduation. Employers note that it is difficult to identify students who meet their needs and interests early in the recruitment process.**

*“I remember meeting a freshman at the Career Fair, seeing her every year come back, and talking to her about her academic career path, and how that sets her up for opportunities within our company. And we did eventually hire her, but before she ever worked for us we were able to engage in that communication and have that conversation to help set her up for success as early as possible.”*

*“I think our biggest challenge, and I don’t know that it’s something that the university should be doing, but as far as connecting with the student groups, that’s challenging. Even just from year-to-year. You get in with these groups and then all of the sudden all the contacts that you have graduate and you kind of have to go back to square one.”*

*“A strategy that we’ve been doing lately is these pre-identification programs. So, even before the internship, we’re trying to identify a demographic of freshmen or sophomores that could matriculate into majors that we would definitely hire from, and there’s just no really easy way, and maybe there shouldn’t be an easy way.”*

*“I like to try to catch the attention of freshmen all the way through seniors just so that way the freshmen—it’s a branding thing for us. If they remember the name, Transportation Insight, throughout their four years, most likely they’re going to come to our table when we’re at a career fair to talk to us because they’ve seen us on campus. They’ve seen us investing time and our resources on their campus.”*

## **Employers use a mix of HR professionals and line staff to recruit**

**Group attendees were comprised of both industry HR professionals and functional employees who recruited for their departments. A further segmentation included HR professionals who were focused on a specific sub-specialty—most often technology or computer sciences.**

*“Even leaders within each of the business units actually come and do some of the engagements. So, it’s not really HR driven necessarily. It’s much more business driven. We support it and getting the team and campus recruiting specific supports it 100% of the times as well, but it’s definitely a business and HR collaboration.”*

*“I’m always a little jealous of the people that are just recruiting because they have a lot more time to spend on campus than I do, but you know, again, when I interview I know exactly is there someone that I*

*want working for me? Could they do the job? Because I'm out with those people every day, so I think there are benefits to both."*

**HR professionals appear most able to navigate the current system of engagement with career services while functional employees appear to be less comfortable and require additional guidance and resources to be successful.**

*"Our HR people tap us once in a while and say, "Do you want to do something with this group?" but it isn't very focused...it looks almost like it's a scattered approach rather than it's concentrated on either of us as an employer or as the disciplines that we need."*

*"I'm actually in the IT function. Our HR function spends most of their time not in IT...this is a company that in some of our facilities we are having a 50% turnover in employers within the next five years because we have so many baby boomers that are retiring. Our HR folks are pretty busy with other things."*

## **Employers want to engage with more system schools**

**Most employers have focused relationships with just a few of the 16 campuses. Many are curious about the entire UNC system and require better methods to learn about the systems schools, their similarities and their differences, and the academic programs that meet best match the particular needs of an employer. Specifically, employers want fact sheets, guides, campus profiles, etc., to know who to reach out to, which departments to connect with, and with whom to build relationships.**

*"Maybe there's an onboarding process to introduce the depth of the university system so that you understand maybe what the strengths of each of the universities are, right, the different components and then maybe from there you go to the schools that are best for you, for that student for you. So maybe an onboarding process for employers."*

## **Employers seek to influence academics**

**Employers want to build relationships with academic departments, but think there is a great deal of red tape and regulations which prevent them from effectively working with professors. Some say it takes months or even years to have their advice and feedback heard.**

*"There are so many regulatory guidelines for when you want to work with the university, and if you have a creative or innovative idea about the way you could work with a school, whether it's a school of business, or nursing, or whatever, it takes forever to set up a program and get it through red tape."*

*"We're working hard to push a Salesforce course and curriculum into core UNCW curriculum. Everybody said, "That sounds great," and then kind of went off, and then a year later we said, you know what, we're going to do it [ourselves]."*

**Because of the perceived difficulty of affecting academic change, some employers have engaged with community colleges to satisfy their unmet needs relating to the curriculum and modern skill-sets. Employers say working with community colleges is easier, because they are more flexible, and more supportive in creating and managing programs that employers have identified as important.**

*"I'm working on a project with the Community College System, a training project. Basically, they're funding quite a bit of training with Community College, NC State Community College dollars for our employees. They're basically business development dollars to keep our company running smoothly in North Carolina. "*

*"I'll tell you where we've had a lot of success is at the community college level. We have a great relationship with UNCA. They've been fantastic, but in terms of the flexibility and just being able to come up with a training program like that, A-B Tech has been phenomenal; very responsive, very supportive."*

*"We waited a year, and then we realized we were going to hire 70 people this year and didn't want to wait any longer."*

## **The importance of internships**

**Employers note that internship is the single most important student engagement activity, that students who have completed internships are better prepared, more engaged, and make better employees. In some instances, particularly programs that require licensure, internships are an integrated part of graduation requirements.**

*"The BSWs are required to work with us for a semester, but they need something like 410 hours which is amazing because it's almost like having an unpaid employee. But not only that, we were able to provide quality experiences for them and they're very rigorous internships, so that when they leave us, they have some real tangible skills"*

*"If students don't have at least two internships I would say, sometimes I don't even look at their resume because I'm hiring from a small pool, I'm mainly looking for people who have internships and I have a larger pool to select from even though we're hiring a smaller amount of people."*

## **Employers rely on internships to help hire for permanent positions**

*"Internships are a great way for us to hire; we have had interns in the past. We hire about three quarters of our interns after they graduate, because they're able to come in, we give them a great experience, hands-on experience in the industry, in our company, and they're able to showcase their skillsets."*

*"In the past, I worked with Georgia Southern a lot, and they had a whole class that was based around sales. And they would have to do these sales projects, and that was my main class...I would probably hire six to ten students directly from that class every graduation. "*

## **But internships are costly and require a significant time commitment by employers**

**Although employers know that internships are valuable and an effective way to hire, many do not offer internships due to budget considerations, lack of manpower, and lack of knowledge.**

*"We've worked with Ken Flint over at Western Carolina for that, and when we ended one internship because of cost, and Ken said, "Well, what about a freebie." And our thought was, gosh, I don't know if we like the idea of working someone without paying for them. And then also competition for top talent is going to go to those paid internships."*

*"It depends on the budget year. We have had interns in the past; this summer we're unable to host interns."*



*"I think historically a lot of companies have approached internships as free labor instead of how can we have a meaningful experience here with a student."*

## **Curriculum**

### **STEM/Engineering**

**Employers give university system schools excellent reviews when it comes to STEM academics and programs.**

*"The STEM programs are top-notch -- NC State and NC A&T have excellent programs. I wish there were more students to pick from."*

*"I think NC State is probably more of the premier; NC State has a much larger [computer science] program and more successful for us due in part to geographical situation as well as the types of students that they're generating."*

*"NC State for sure just because of the volume, but UNC, the one in Chapel Hill, their computer science students are excellent, same with UNC Wilmington. ECU is awesome. They're all great."*

**However, STEM and computer science jobs are in high demand and employers are frustrated by the lack of capacity. Many go outside the North Carolina markets to recruit as they are unable to satisfy all their needs within the State.**

*"We do recruit in the New England, Texas, North Carolina markets, but we struggle to find enough of the computer science students in North Carolina to fulfill the need."*

*"We need to get more people into these technical STEM careers, and if we could do that earlier, that would be beneficial to the students and us."*

**Employers want students to better understand the career paths and job opportunities associated with STEM studies. Employers report that STEM careers are rapidly changing and that faculty need to keep current.**

*"I think just talking about different career paths and the whole STEM community would be very helpful for students and it would help kind of define where they want to be and help actually supplement the curriculum with the topics or the technology that they're working on."*

*"We actually tend to work more with the departments because we are technology specific...So, when UNC added the computer science technology fair, we were just thrilled."*

### **Liberal Arts**

**Employers want liberal arts students to be more flexible/agile and open to new experiences and opportunities. Many liberal arts students are traditionally less focused on career and often do not have a defined career path. Employers want students to consider jobs in sales, customer service, education and other areas where there are shortages of qualified candidates.**

*"I like hiring students who have liberal arts degrees and who haven't quite figured it out just yet, because then they come in and they are more appreciative of that opportunity. When you put the time in to build and train and develop those people, they're way more bought."*

*"We like the green person so we can train them and teach them what they need to know in our industry. Not everybody grows up saying they're going to be a logistician. It's not one of those fields of study they think of when they're five years old."*

*"A lot of people at our organization come with just a general business background; we have environmental science majors that have worked for us, economics majors. We hire pretty much all majors. It's just a certain type of person we're looking for."*

**Employers want liberal arts students to have stronger communication skills.**

*"I think it's great that there's been so much emphasis on improving, but they're forgetting that English and basic grammar skills are crucial in getting ahead in life."*

*"We always tend to look for those [students] that have the right know-how on the soft skills side."*

## **Education/Teaching**

**Employers who work in the education field report that system students are excellent and have superior work ethic, skill sets and hands-on experience.**

*"They're great quality candidates and many of them have done student teaching with us and they're a dream fit and we do hire lots and lots of students from UNC Chapel Hill every year."*

*"The top two [schools we hire from] would be UNC Chapel Hill and Appalachian because the quality [of their programs] is fabulous."*

**Education employers in the sciences, math, early childhood, special education and foreign language areas, are struggling to find and recruit talent—relatively few students are enrolled or interested in these education and teaching programs.**

*"Several years ago in North Carolina, they kept saying we're going to be 10,000 teacher short coming up, and everybody went into education. And then when they got out of college there were zero jobs. And I think that scared students to death because they went into it saying we're begging for students, and then suddenly all the school systems started laying off and I think that really impacted people thinking there's jobs out there."*

*"All across the United States, school systems are trying to teach kindergarteners Spanish. And so, you've got to have native Spanish speakers or proficient Spanish speakers who can teach elementary content. Where I get a little bit frustrated is when I go to the University and there are so many dance majors and music majors and art majors."*

**There is high demand for specialized teaching skills like mathematics, sciences, and special education.**

*"We see a real decline in the people that are graduating with those types of degrees. Three years ago, I went to UNC Chapel Hill's elementary education seminar and there were 150 students in it. Last year, there were 35."*

*"Somehow there's not communication going on because those students look so sad and dejected when we tell them, 'We don't have music jobs for you. Now, if you want to major in Special Education, we can put you to work.' And so, I have that conversation a lot."*

*"I'm not sure about the right way or whether this is in the ability of the University System to control. It seems to me that there are shortage areas. We need more math teachers. We need more science teachers. We need to be innovative and think about what's coming down the road."*

*"You can go to a school of education, there'll be lots of social studies teachers, lots of PE teachers. We don't need them; I don't mean that in a derogatory way, but there are a lot of them out there and very few jobs. We need early childhood, we need math, we need world languages, and you can just look and look and look and not find those people."*

### **Alternative paths to teacher licensure**

**There is a need for continuing education programs for teachers who may not be able to attend classes during the day.**

*"We would really like to do a [teacher's license] program with Western because [they] offer some program areas that UNCA doesn't."*

*"Some potential teachers just don't have the ability—time or money—to finish classes during the day. We'd like to be able to offer them some alternatives so they can get their license to teach."*

### **Skill sets**

**Interpersonal skills, oral and written communication skills, the ability to think critically**

**Employers are interested and place great emphasis on soft skills such as oral and written communication skills, the ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings, ability to solve complex problems, and the ability to innovate and be creative.**

*"Just because we often talk about how we can teach certain computer skills...it's the interpersonal skills that really have to come through in an interview."*

*"If the level of maturity and the aptitude is there...the technical part is teachable...someone can be brilliant but if they are not able to convey a simple idea or understand the problem it becomes very difficult to get them in the management roles."*

*"Soft skills catch our attention and then we'll take a look at their resume and start talking to them about the hard skill set that they have."*

*"I am much more willing to take someone who can have a conversation with me and might not have the skills that I need, I'd much rather have that person than someone who doesn't have the interpersonal skills and the soft skills."*

*"I've been mentoring students at UNCW for six years and some are better than others. Those that I would put in the better category tend to be people who have better communication skills, both oral and written."*

*"Those are the things that can get in the way of an employee's progress, and when I look at it and I pinpoint where they could have learned that, middle, high school, but the last buck stops in college, and then they get out in the real world and this is the thing that they end up getting penalized for because they did not bring that skillset to the business world."*

## **Collaboration and teamwork**

**Systems students are thought to possess good team skills and have the ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings**

*“What I think is going right is young people do seem to be oriented to collaboration, so it seems like whether it’s in their classes (or otherwise) there’s a lot of project work and I think that’s good.”*

*“I think that this is one of the good things about this generation, they do seem to be naturally collaborative, which is great.”*

## **Managing expectations**

**Employers note that many students graduate with unrealistic expectations of the real world, and that the university needs to better prepare graduates for the reality of the workplace.**

*“I think that the issues we’re seeing are probably pretty consistent with the ones that anybody is seeing with new grads coming out. And for me it’s more of a commitment thing, like they’re one foot out of the door from day one, it’s like “Oh, but there’s probably something better.” And I’ve been seeing that for years.”*

*“There seems to be a tendency where they might get into a role and within a year there’s a “What’s my next gig?””*

*“Look, we want top talent, we want bright minds, we want curiosity, and we want them to always be wanting to grow and to learn...that’s fantastic. But within any one role you can learn a lot and grow and expand it.”*

*“I think that may be an opportunity for improvement within the career services departments at the schools. Generally, our experience has been really good, but in terms of having a resource on campus that’s at the table to manage the expectations of the student maybe a little bit more realistically would be helpful.”*

*“I think it would be really helpful for students to have more real-world training ahead of time not only just business etiquette but having proper expectations for what their salary might be upon getting out of school, and I know it’s funny, but it’s true. I think a lot of the times they get out of school and say “I should be making \$75,000.” I’m like, good for you for being that confident, but I think that there needs to be a little—I think across the board there should be a little, I guess, more real-world training with that, just having expectations.”*

## **Diversity**

**Academic employers note the need for increased diversity of job candidates—including race and gender. Many hope that the university would provide more opportunities for underrepresented populations to attend the university.**

*“My number one wish is just more diversity in the [education] graduates that I see. I see so many white females. It’s a joyous happy occasion if I ever see a Latino graduate in school education. It’s almost unheard of, or an Asian candidate. There are significant numbers of African American females out there,*

*but it's very competitive for school districts trying to compete to get those people. We have to go out fast and hard...to win those people over, but Asian candidates and Latino candidates are almost unheard of and we need them. We need men, and the pool is just not diverse."*

*"We also need more diversity. We need more diversity because our students are very diverse, but the new teachers are not very diverse."*

*"We don't want carbon copies in classrooms. We want people with unique visions and ideas so we do a much broader recruitment than a single university."*

**Employers want to know how they can attract more diversity to their companies, in particular how to reach out to minorities. One employer noted that none of the historically black colleges have masters programs in accounting, so she cannot recruit there.**

*"This is so specific for CPA firms so I apologize, but because we go to schools that have master's degrees, none of the historically black schools in North Carolina have a master's program in accounting and that makes me really sad because we also would love to have more diversity than we see. There's none because I've looked up every single [school] wanting to add to where we go."*

**Employers note the difficulty of attracting women to STEM jobs**

*"We need more women in STEM, and again the T of STEM. So, we did a focus group last year a couple of times...one thing that kept popping up was the lack of diversity in the classroom, the lack of diversity in the professors. So, we're trying to get women to become computer scientists and they walk into a room full of 35 men and the professor is a man. So, now they're put in projects where guess what? They're the only women on the project. They get spoken to in a derogatory manner. They're treated differently. Their opinions are not asked for or wanted."*

## **Differences among the 16 Universities**

**Employers mention very few differences among the universities. These include fields of study, school selectivity, a student's preference to remain in the home geography, levels of preparedness, salary expectations, and programs offered.**

*"I think we do see some fundamental differences. For example, at UNCG, they place a pretty high value on their elementary education teachers also having another field of study, like special education or really focusing on a certain area. So, that may be different than some of the other schools that we visit."*

**Employers think that each of the universities within the system offer different opportunities to different students—and do not directly compare the schools or their student bodies.**

*"There's going to be a difference between the students regardless. You're going to have those students that are very outgoing and want to be involved in both places. But then you're also going to have the students who don't get that involved and are more laid back and things like that. So, I don't know that I would say it's so much of a difference of a school, but you're of course going to have the difference of students."*

## The effects of geography

**Employers in the far Western and Eastern areas of the state say it is difficult to attract talent, find new hires and convince outsiders to come to the area. Thus, employers frequently collaborate with the local universities and recruit students from the existing base.**

*"We are based in Franklin, North Carolina. So we are a very small, rural area, and we can't get other students to move to Western North Carolina or move to a rural area from that standpoint."*

*"It's a little isolated. And when people come over here they fall in love with it, but you have to get them here. It's hard to sell people over the phone on Wilmington."*

**Employers in these regions say that students are smart, but they do not have as much hands-on experience as the students from more urban parts of the state. Employers would like to see students from the Western and Eastern campuses get more opportunities to learn outside the classroom.**

*"I see at these other schools, like Charlotte, and NCA&T, and NC State that...they have a lot of internships and a lot of relevant experience that they can add to their resume. And I see that lacking a lot with Western students. And it makes me sad. And I know that they're smart, I know that the program, the engineering program is really good. I know that they're getting a good education, and when they have a 3.8 or a 3.5 GPA that they worked really hard to get there."*

**Employers in Western North Carolina say they are working hard to build internship capacity and provide options for students in the area but would appreciate more help from the system.**

*"We're not the Research Triangle, we're not Charlotte, we are always trying to find better ways to be able to do what we can do best here."*

*"That's a lot of what we're trying to do, Western, UNC Asheville...we're trying to build capacity here in the mountains. We don't have a lot of the capacity for those types of opportunities that the NC States and all have. And so we're really trying to build capacity. And I'm a firm believer that you're going to see a better employee with somebody that has had those internships."*

*"I think it goes back to that employer relations role at the universities of identifying not just full-time jobs but also have a focus on internships as well. And opening students' minds to maybe going outside their comfort zone as far as geographic location, because I think there are internships out there but sometimes students go, "Well, I don't want to go to XYZ location. I want to just go home so I have a free place to live."*

## Recommendations

- Review current teaching methods and practices relating to student communication skills and identify improvements to increase effectiveness specifically for the workplace.
- Increase awareness of the role of career services, encourage student to use career services earlier in their college careers, provide additional resources as necessary to ensure that all students have access to a career services officer.
- Consider coaching via career services to help students better understand the realities of the work environment.
- Make engagement of all employers a priority by assigning dedicated personnel to meet with employers, facilitate their familiarity and use of University resources, provide customer service and overall, make employer engagement easier and more effective.
- Identify ways to engage small but growing employers as they represent the majority of the jobs in the State and will likely continue to be the engine of economic growth for North Carolina.
- Provide “non-HR employer” recruiters with more tools and better guidance to help them navigate the University system.
- Direct potential employers to the “GA” website and provide a new section focused on employers, employer tools and recruitment. The current website does not sufficiently help or guide prospective employers through the University system.
- Study how academics and employers can collaborate to create state of the art curriculum. Identify best practices and update current methodologies to incorporate this key learning.
- Study internship acquisition and creation, identify best practices, and incorporate learning into the development of a new internship services department—to potentially reside within career services or in a TBD location within the University.
- Identify ways to increase the number of students in STEM majors—efforts are also required to encourage and support minority students to enter STEM programs.

## Career Services Reaction and Input

In addition to the focus groups IM met with the Career Services personnel from the 16 campuses on June 11, 2015 to discuss study findings and solicit feedback relating to the role of career services in employer satisfaction. A representative from each campus attended.

Based on the study results and subsequent discussions with Career Services, we have identified some additional opportunities to improve the effectiveness of Career Services.

1. Increase Faculty Engagement with career services
  - a. Work/career related activities integrated into curriculum
    - i. Connection to the goal of students getting jobs
    - ii. Shared responsibility
    - iii. Accountability
2. Increase University-wide leadership engagement with job development
  - a. Provost, Vice Presidents, Chairs
3. Consider mandatory use of career services by students
4. Integrate Internship into career services
  - a. Importance of experiential learning

- b. Need for internships that have a strong educational core
  - c. Definition of “contemporary” internship
  - d. Contributing to quality of education
  - e. Measurable learning outcomes
- 5. Re-position from Career Services to Job Placement Services
  - a. Better matches student needs for job placement
  - b. Allows for an agreed performance metric to measure success
- 6. Assess need for incremental resources based on increased student utilization
- 7. Create single technology platform for employer use:
  - a. Benchmark University system best practices
  - b. System-wide access and integration
  - c. Calendar planning of job fairs, postings
- 8. Review needs and resources relating to compliance
- 9. Benchmark career services function
  - a. Best in class public, example: Michigan State
  - b. Best in class private, example: Wake Forest
- 10. Redefine the goals and role of Career Services within the system
  - a. Measurable objectives
    - i. Identify expectations
    - ii. Identify what should be measured
    - iii. Utilize the National Association of Colleges and Employers standards
- 11. Set a timetable and strategy for change



## Review of rankings from the worksheets

In the first activity, employers were asked to rank eight educational practices that they believed were helpful for the University System in preparing graduates for the success. Results are below:

Concept	Top Choice							Total
	Raleigh	Charlotte	Wilmington	Greenville	Asheville	Hickory	Winston-Salem	
A. Expecting students to complete a significant project before graduation that demonstrates their depth of knowledge in their major AND their acquisition of analytical, problem-solving, and communication skills	2	2	6	0	4	1	1	16
B. Expecting students to complete an internship or community-based field project to connect classroom learning with real-world experiences	7	10	2	1	4	0	5	29
C. Ensuring that students develop the skills to research questions in their field and develop evidence-based analyses	2	4	0	1	3	0	0	10
D. Expecting students to work through ethical issues and debates to form their own judgments about the issues at stake	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
E. Expecting students to acquire hands-on or direct experience with the methods of science so they will understand how scientific judgments are reached	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
F. Expecting students to learn about cultural and ethnic diversity in the context of the United States	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
G. Expecting students to learn about the point of view of societies other than those of Western Europe or North America	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
H. Expecting students to take courses that explore big challenges facing society, such as environmental sustainability, public health, or human rights	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Employers view the first three educational (A, B, C) practices as most important. Employers expect students to have engaged in one or more active learning methods—including internships and group projects. Internships help prepare students for the real-world and expose them to situations that cannot be replicated in the class room environment via direct experience. Group projects help students learn to cooperate and collaborate and help students demonstrate critical thinking, good judgment and inter-personal skills.

Educational practices (D, E, F, G and H) are seen as somewhat less important as a taught academic behavior, and viewed as subjects that should be learned through life experience—not necessarily a class room activity. Employers who represented public schools were more likely to rank these skills, especially learning about cultural and ethnic diversity, as most important as compared to employers from other industries.

**In the second activity, employers were asked to identify their top five choices out of eighteen learning outcomes that they thought the University System should place more emphasis on. Results are below:**

Concept	Top 5 Choices							Total
	Raleigh	Charlotte	Wilmington	Greenville	Asheville	Hickory	Winston-Salem	
A. The ability to effectively communicate in writing	8	7	5	1	7	0	4	32
B. Effective oral communication	8	11	8	1	8	0	4	40
C. Critical thinking skills	11	12	6	2	7	1	4	43
D. The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings through internships or other hands-on experiences	10	12	7	2	6	1	3	41
E. The ability to analyze and solve complex problems	6	6	3	4	8	0	1	28
F. The ability to connect choices and actions to ethical decisions	0	4	3	2	4	1	4	18
G. Teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings	9	12	4	3	10	0	6	44
H. The ability to innovate and be creative	7	7	3	1	3	1	0	22
I. Concepts and new developments in science and technology	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
J. The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources	6	4	2	0	6	0	1	19
K. The ability to understand the global context of situations and decisions	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	4
L. Global issues and developments and their implications for the future	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
M. The ability to work with numbers and understand statistics	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	5
N. The role of the United States in the world	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
O. Cultural diversity in America and other countries	1	2	0	1	1	0	1	6
P. Civic knowledge, civic participation, and community engagement	1	2	0	1	2	1	0	7
Q. Proficiency in a foreign language	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
R. Democratic institutions and values	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Employers are most interested and want more emphasis on soft skills such as oral and written communication skills, the ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings, ability to solve complex problems, and the ability to innovate and be creative. Other outcomes were considered much less important, with many employers believing that these skills develop via life experience rather than the classroom environment.**

**Areas of difference showed when talking with employers who were more global-centered—they suggested more emphasis on foreign language proficiency and understanding global issues.**

## Accolades

**Employers are extremely pleased with the University System schools. See below for a few of the many complements individual schools received throughout the focus groups:**

*"I'd just like to pay a compliment. I think UNC Charlotte is fantastic. They give us [indiscernible] support from the career services staff in particular."*

*"Even though ECU is a good four hour drive from here, their Career Development Center, they have somebody on staff that does employer relations and he does a very good job at it. He keeps us plugged in to campus and encourages us to be on campus."*

*"As far as the general career fair from Western Carolina University, I've seen major strides over the last couple of years."*

*"I am impressed with students coming out, so I think they are well educated. I think that's not the issue. It is more of just translating that education to the real world. I think, I do, I think overall they are encouraged to pursue their careers and seek out opportunities...I look at people from all over the country, and actually all over the globe, and I would say even if we were located in another state we would be picking people from the UNC system."*

*"I go to UNC Charlotte, NCA&T, NC State, the engineers, I'm very impressed with those three schools. I think their students are the most prepared, dress professionally, poised, and they have done their homework."*

*"I know at Central their Career Center is amazing, we've been to a few different focus groups, I've been to some resume building workshops there. The students seem really engaged with the Career Center that it's like a partnership."*

*"We love ECU students because they are just as smart but they're humble."*

## Appendix

### Annotated Bibliography

#### *North Carolina 2014 Employer Needs Survey*

- **“What reasons do employers give for hiring difficulties?”**
  - Employers cited a variety of reasons for hiring difficulties. Most frequently candidates **lacked work experience, education credentials, and technical skills**, according to over 40 percent of industry-wide employers.
  - Manufacturers were far more likely to cite a lack of technical skills as reason for difficulties, with 70 percent citing this factor. **Insufficient numbers of applicants** (1 in 3 employers) and **candidates’ unwillingness to accept the offered wages** (1 in 4 employers) were also mentioned, which may suggest issues with wage levels and/or expectations among jobseekers and employers. A **lack of soft skills**, which include skills like **communication, enthusiasm, and interpersonal skills**, was selected by roughly one in four employers. One in six employers identified **candidates’ criminal records as an issue**, and one in 10 employers identified the **inability to pass a drug test** as a reason for hiring difficulties. Commuting distance (13%) and unacceptable work conditions (9%) were less common factors.
- When asked about **specific skills**, employers frequently reported **technical skills** such as **machining, skilled trades, blueprint reading, electrical skills, engineering technologies, customer service, computer operation and business/accounting**. They also mentioned **soft skills** such as **communication, enthusiasm, interpersonal skills, critical/analytic thinking and problem solving, and attendance dependability”** (p. 3).
- 45% of employer cited hiring difficulties in at least one position in the past year
  - High diversity in industries and occupations with difficulties
  - Top needs include work experience, education credentials, and technical skills
    - 3 times longer to hire difficult-to-fill positions than regular positions
  - Many employers use workforce development and education to help meet employment and training needs

#### *Education Advisory Board: Market Snapshot of North Carolina (2014)*

- Analysis of regional employer demand for bachelor’s degrees
  - Reference specifically page 1 (top 25 baseline skills in NC)
  - P. 11 (Top 25 employers posting jobs in North Carolina)
  - And regional lists—important and used throughout recruitment process and company identification process.

#### *December 2013 North Carolina Jobs Plan*

- North Carolina Economic Development Board recommended strategies for economic growth from 2014 through 2024
- Specific for education
  - Innovation and entrepreneurship
    - Increasing incentives for companies and universities to convert research to jobs
    - Streamline entrepreneurial resources
  - Talent attraction

- North Carolina as destination for creative talent
    - Align University offerings to meet the skills need of the current market and of “next generation” businesses relevant to the state
  - Education and workforce development
    - Enhancing career and technical education
    - Invest in educators at all levels of education
- Economies are changing and workforce skills requirements are rising
  - Skills need to be upgraded continuously to be relevant

*2012 Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) Leadership Insights Survey*

- Secondary part—8 regional listening sessions carried out as part of UNC’s strategic planning process.
- Effective communication and self-motivation/discipline as very important skills in today’s workforce. NC businesses place a higher premium on integrity and trust and collaboration.
- In 20 years, NC businesses predict that adaptability and versatility will take on the top most important position in the workforce.
- Found that to grow NC businesses:
  - UNC schools need to do a better job communicating relevant information with organizations in the community while working to make its resources more accessible.
  - Consider different areas of social media
  - Push out relevant information related to University resources
  - Serve as a talent pipeline for businesses—need to promote internships and prepare their students.
  - Foster greater and deeper relationships with the businesses in the community
  - Continue to develop educational methods for experience and competency to transfer for a broader demographic—work with businesses to develop industry specific courses and certifications.
  - Transfer research into solutions for community and business needs
  - “One great idea”—deep expertise, expand and support key community resources, invest in strategic growth areas, promote more partnerships, create greater relationships.

*UNC GA 2015 Report: Notes on What Employers Value: “AACU: College Learning and Career Success” (relating to 2013 Hart Research Associates document)*

- Citing 2012 sessions—NC businesses think most important competency is to communicate effectively. Future important competencies include adaptability and versatility and learning agility.
- Hart Research Associates—3/5 of employers believe it takes both specific knowledge and broad knowledge to achieve long-term career success.
- Great value in students completing applied learning projects, but see room to improve.
  - Want all students to be prepared, need more to complete learning projects/internships
- Employers think college graduates are not as prepared as college graduates consider themselves prepared.

Other national studies/surveys of employers, suggested studies/reports:

*It Takes More than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success* April, 2013

- “Employers say the most emphasis should be placed on the following areas: **critical thinking & analytical reasoning; complex problem solving & analysis; written and oral communication; application of knowledge and skills in real-world setting; the location, organization, and evaluation of information from multiple sources; and innovation and creativity** (p. 8).
- Employers think that more college graduates have the skills and preparation needed for entry-level positions, but not for advancement and promotion
  - Employers think colleges are doing a satisfactory job preparing students for the workplace, but that there is room for improvement.
- Business reflect interest and are already partnering with universities to advance the success of students after graduation, and recommend more hands-on learning opportunities and trainings to help students successfully transition to the workplace.
- Priority to hiring graduates with intellectual and interpersonal skills that will help contribute to innovation in the workforce.
- p. 8: Employers say colleges should place varying degrees of emphasis on selected learning outcomes
- p. 10: degree to which various new approaches to learning have potential to help students succeed

*The Role of Higher Education in Career Development: Employer Perceptions* December 2012 (4 year institutions)

- “Employers place more weight on experience, particularly **internships and employment** during school vs. academic credentials including GPA and college major when evaluating a recent graduate for employment” (p. 11).
- “All industries and hiring levels place slightly more weight on **student work or internship experiences** than on academic credentials” (p. 11).
- “When it comes to the skills most needed by employers, job candidates are lacking most in **written and oral communication skills, adaptability and managing multiple priorities, and making decisions and problem solving**” (p. 12)
- “Employers place the responsibility on colleges to prepare graduates in **written and oral communications and decision-making skills**. Results indicate that colleges need to work harder to produce these traits in their graduates” (p. 12).
- 5 implications for colleges & universities in strengthening outcomes for recent graduates listed on p. 15.

*Bridge that Gap: Analyzing the Student Skill Index* Fall 2013 (2 and 4 year institutions)

- 93% want to see graduates have demonstrated the **initiative to lead**.
- 91% want to see graduates who have participated in **extracurricular activities related to their field of study**.
- 82% want to see graduates who have completed a **formal internship** before graduating from college.
- Fewer than two in five hiring managers say the recent college graduates they have interviewed in the past two years were completely or very prepared for a job in their field of study. This is in sharp contrast to the 50% of college students who rate themselves in the same terms

- Assessment of skill level is particularly disconnected in terms of prioritizing work, organizational skills and leading a group toward a common goal. Hiring managers rate applicants much lower on the level of preparedness to use these skills than the graduates rate themselves.
- The notion that college graduates exit universities and lack the ability to clearly organize and communicate information suggests institutions are failing to meet their mandate of forming critical thinkers.
- STEM students are slightly better prepared, though are still falling behind in explaining information and communicating ideas clearly through writing.
- Further steps:
  - Commercial and educational institutions need to continue to drive meaningful internship and co-op programs to mix classroom and on the job experiences.
  - Parents to emphasize importance of extra-curricular learning and project opportunities.

*Education to Employment: Designing a System that Works 2012 – Global analysis from McKinsey & Company*

- Young people are three times more likely than their parents to be out of work
- Report focuses on skill development, with special attention connecting education to employment
- Half of youth (worldwide) are not sure that their postsecondary education has improved their chances of finding a job.
- Almost 40% of employers say a lack of skills is the main reason for entry-level vacancies.
- Fewer than half of youth and employers believe new graduates are adequately prepared for entry-level positions, however 72% of educational providers believe new graduates are ready for work.
  - One third of employers say they never communicate with education providers, few who have think it is effective.
- Need for more:
  - Cost effective programs
  - Hands-on learning and on-the-job training
  - Greater transition and job search process
  - Greater collaboration and communication across employers and educators

*Great Expectations: Insights from the Accenture 2014 College Graduate Employment Survey*

- 69 percent of 2014 grads say more training or post-graduate education will be necessary if they are to get their desired job. Four out of five expect that their employer will provide the kind of formal training programs necessary for them to advance in their careers.
  - However, only 48 percent of 2013 graduates report receiving training in their jobs.
- Almost half of 2012/2013 graduates working today report that they are significantly underemployed—their jobs do not really depend on their college degrees.
- More than half of 2012/2013 graduates have already left their first job or expect to be gone within one or two years.
- Seventy-two percent of 2014 graduates agree or strongly agree that their education prepared them for a career.
- Advice to employers
  - Reassess your hiring and retention strategies

- Hire based on potential, not just immediate qualifications
- Use talent development as a hiring differentiator
- Remember that tangibles matter, even to millennial
- Cast your net more widely
- Use talent development and other benefits as part of your total rewards and attraction approach

### *Michigan State*

- In current work climate, turnover is high, which is good for college graduates
  - BA degrees are:
    - Swinging in favor of students—it's competitive
    - Skills competencies are necessities
    - Students need to work on their work attitudes and behaviors
    - Realize that work is not a free pass
- BA's need to realize that most of the jobs out there do not relate to specific college majors, so emphasis on other skills and talents are necessary.
  - Obstacles:
    - Lack of qualified candidates (either they are not prepared, lack the skills and competencies of the job, or do not meet expectations) as well as lack of empathy—how should we fix this?
    - Multicultural awareness is an important and huge asset
  - Employers are having a difficult time finding talent: there is a skills gap where students do not have the skills, credentials, and experience. So much so, that now skills and competencies are almost more important than degrees. Internships are another place where students can gain these workforce skills

### *Preparing students for the workforce—Education Advisory Board info graphic*

- Six Co-Curricular Opportunities for Experiential Learning
  - “Skills Seeker” Branding Campaign
    - Campus-wide branding campaign linking campus involvement opportunities to high-demand skills they provide
  - Peer Involvement Advisors
    - Student workers to serve as peer advisors
  - Skill-focused campus job opportunities
    - Incorporate learning outcomes and development of specific skills into the job descriptions of student employees
  - Embedded professional development conversations
    - Requirement for supervisors to have two conversations per semester with their employees
  - Market-your-experience guides
    - Series of flyers specific to various involvement opportunities highlighting the skills developed through the experience, and why they're best to communicate with employers
  - Co-curricular capstone
    - Workshops for graduating student leaders to help them prepare for the transition at graduation



## **UNC-GA Employer Survey Moderator's Guide**

### **I. Introduction**

Name and company.

What, if any, relationship do you have with the UNC system?

What is your role at your company as it relates to recruitment and hiring?

On average, how many new graduates do you hire each year? Is this growing?

What types of positions do you hire for? Is this changing? How?

How many of these come from the UNC system? Is this changing? How?

Within the UNC system, which school(s) do you primarily recruit and hire from? Why?

What are the overarching trends in your industry? Types of jobs, skills needed, numbers needed, etc.

### **II. Skills**

We are going to discuss the skills that are important for UNC graduates to have when entering the workforce:

**Lets' make a list of important skills for UNC graduates to have (ask group to create list)—then,**

1. Prioritize list and then probe for each. May include written and oral communication, ability to work with others, team work, problem solving, ability to understand and use technical information, work ethic, leadership, adaptability/flexibility, and creativity.

2. Probe for:

Importance, satisfaction, preparation, abilities, relative to other institutions—

### **Selection and discussion**

For each section, have respondents pick their top 3—we will rank and discuss the aggregated top 3--

How effective are University of North Carolina institutions in preparing students in the following areas?

- a. Written communication skills
- b. Oral communication skills
- c. Critical thinking
- d. Ability to work with others
- e. Problem-solving skills
- f. Ability to understand and use technical information
- g. Strong work ethic
- h. Enthusiasm
- i. Flexibility

### **III. UNC Institution**

How satisfied are you with University of North Carolina Institutions?

How can the institutions better prepare their graduates for the workforce?

What do UNC institutions do especially well? What is lacking or needs improvement?

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Is there any feedback you would like to offer about a particular University of North Carolina institution?

In your association with the University over the years, how would you rate its responsiveness to your needs?

What else can UNC schools do to better prepare their graduates for the workforce?

What additional information would you like to share that we did not discuss today?

Do you have any hiring difficulties? What types of hiring difficulties are you having currently? How can the University system help?

How helpful do you believe the following 8 (eight) educational practices at University of North Carolina institutions are in preparing graduates for success? Please sort in order of importance (1 most important)--

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Expecting students to complete a significant project before graduation that demonstrates their depth of knowledge in their major AND their acquisition of analytical, problem-solving, and communication skills
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Expecting students to complete an internship or community-based field project to connect classroom learning with real-world experiences
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Ensuring that students develop the skills to research questions in their field and develop evidence-based analyses
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Expecting students to work through ethical issues and debates to form their own judgments about the issues at stake
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Expecting students to acquire hands-on or direct experience with the methods of science so they will understand how scientific judgments are reached
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Expecting students to learn about cultural and ethnic diversity in the context of the United States
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Expecting students to learn about the point of view of societies other than those of Western Europe or North America
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Expecting students to take courses that explore big challenges facing society, such as environmental sustainability, public health, or human rights

On which of these 18 (eighteen) learning outcomes should University of North Carolina institutions place more emphasis? Please choose your top 5.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The ability to effectively communicate in writing
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Effective oral communication
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Critical thinking skills
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings through internships or other hands-on experiences
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The ability to analyze and solve complex problems
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The ability to connect choices and actions to ethical decisions
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The ability to innovate and be creative
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Concepts and new developments in science and technology
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. The ability to understand the global context of situations and decisions
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Global issues and developments and their implications for the future
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. The ability to work with numbers and understand statistics
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. The role of the United States in the world
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Cultural diversity in America and other countries
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Civic knowledge, civic participation, and community engagement
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Proficiency in a foreign language
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Democratic institutions and values

## Employer Focus Group Attendees by City and Date

Location	Date	Employer
Raleigh	March 5, 2015	ABB
		Bright Horizons
		Chapel Hill Carrboro City Schools
		CREE
		Eisai
		Fidelity
		Hughes, Pittman, and Gupton
		IBM
		Ignite Social Media
		LabCorp
		Quintiles
		Red Hat
		Skanska
Charlotte	March 23, 2015	Altria
		AREVA
		Autobell
		C5 Insight
		Domtar
		Ernst and Young
		Fastenal
		GE Capital
		Little
		MetLife
		Peace Corps
		Premier
		Target
		TATA
		TIAA-CREF
Wilmington	March 25, 2015	Tresata
		Century 21
		Coastal Horizons
		Corning
		Enterprise Holdings
		Live Oak Bank
		nCino
		New Hanover Regional Medical
Greenville	March 26, 2015	Wilmington Chamber of Commerce
		Pitt County Schools
		The East Group
		United Way
Asheville	March 30, 2015	WITN
		Asheville City Schools
		Biltmore Company

Asheville (cont.)

Buncombe County Schools  
City of Asheville  
Drake Enterprises  
Eaton  
Evergreen Packaging  
Home Trust Bank  
Mission Health  
NEMAC  
Northwestern Mutual

Hickory	March 31, 2015	Transportation Insight
Winston-Salem	April 1, 2015	Edward Jones FedEx Greensboro Police Zenergy Technologies