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Marketing U: Preparing Students to Succeed in the Job Search Process

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Marketing U: Preparing Students to Succeed in the Job Search Process

Emily Guyon

Submitted in Partial Completion of
the Requirements for Commonwealth Honors in Management

Bridgewater State University

April 29th, 2019

Dr. Kathleen Ferris-Costa, Thesis Advisor

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ABSTRACT

Despite the extensive careers services programs offered at secondary education institutions across the United States, students continue to underutilize the programs offered for career preparedness. The purpose of this research was to investigate what skills students were interested in learning more about related to the job search process and how they preferred to receive such information. It also examined if the graduate students in the Ricciardi College of Business at Bridgewater State University utilized Career Services, what resources they were interested in learning more about, and how they preferred these resources to be offered. The findings were consistent with previous research studies and showed Career Service resources are greatly underutilized by graduate students. In this study, 46 percent of students have never utilized Career Service resources compared to 34% noted in previous research findings (Fadulu 2018). Based on the study's findings, several recommendations were given as to how the RCOB can offer Career Service resources to graduate students to improve the likelihood students will utilize the resources and benefit from their experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Statistics regarding what employers look for in their employees during the job interview process proves to be eye-opening. Typically, only 2 percent of applicants for a job will be called for an interview (Gladstone 2017). Applicants to a specific job need to master the pre-interview skills for a job in order to actually land an interview, as well as the actual interview if they want to land the job. According to research by Deloitte, Inc., "75 percent of the global workforce will be made up of millennials by 2025" (Gladstone 2017). Graduating college students will continue to make up the ever-growing workforce, but will they feel confident to succeed in it? It is the responsibility of higher education to fill the gaps in their students' professional skills and experience to produce the most prepared students. How can Bridgewater State University and the

RCOB best prepare their students for success with the job search process? The purpose of this survey, as explained in the abstract, was to determine the needs of graduate students here at Bridgewater State University in order to provide these resources in a useful manner to prepare students for the job search process and how they can best market themselves to employers.

In a preliminary study conducted in Fall 2017, students in Dr. Ferris-Costa's two Marketing Research classes designed a qualitative study to investigate undergraduate students' perceptions of their preparedness for the job search process. Eight focus groups were conducted, with six undergraduate business students in each group, resulting in a total of 48 undergraduate student participants. The students were asked 20 open-ended questions by various moderators using a pre-approved, focus group moderator guide for consistency. A total of 25 males and 23 females were surveyed, representing 10 sophomores, 21 juniors, and 17 seniors. Overall, 90 percent of the students reported feeling unprepared for the job search process. The students recommended Bridgewater State University offer a credited course focusing on the following skills: Cover letter writing, interviewing, job etiquette, networking, resume writing, and social media presence. The purpose of the preliminary study was to analyze how confident and prepared undergraduate students felt prior to graduation, what skills they wanted to learn more about and the preferred modality to receive such information. This study extended that research to the business graduate students at Bridgewater State University.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students across the country, including here at Bridgewater State University, do not actively utilize the career services departments at their schools. Only 34 percent of students across the

nation feel confident enough to participate in the job market, and 36 percent feel confident to participate in the workforce according to a study conducted by Gallup and the Strada Education Network (Fadulu 2018). The same study conducted found “fewer than 20 percent of undergraduate students [across 43 randomly selected public and private universities in the United States] reach out to their school’s career centers for advice on finding jobs or finding and applying to graduate programs” (Fadulu 2018). Students feel more comfortable consulting family, peers, and friends on important issues regarding their education and career, assuming those closest to them know what is best for their success. Christine Cruzvergara, the director of Wellesley College’s career-education office, says that “students will go to their trusted network to get information—that may be a faculty member—before they develop a relationship with someone in student affairs or the career office,” (Fadulu 2018). The Gallup study found that “almost 50 percent of current students speak often or very often with faculty or staff about their future careers” (Fadulu 2018). A strong disconnect lies between students and their school’s career services programs – however, the bond between students and faculty remains clear.

The average job opening draws in over 250 applications (Gladstone 2017). How can Bridgewater State University ensure their students feel prepared and confident when entering the job search process? Fostering a motivational environment is critical to ensuring students engage in preparing themselves fully to enter the job market. It was found that “first-generation and transfer graduates [are] the least likely to use career services while in college” (New 2016). Bringing education directly to students through a class rather than a service they have to seek out and make time for in an already limited schedule would benefit a multitude of students at Bridgewater State University. Many local universities, including Bentley University and the

University of Rhode Island, offer similar courses a business elective or part of their required curriculum. A class focusing on the skills necessary to successfully begin and work through the job search process is a way to provide easy access to students and help motivate and encourage them to take charge of their careers before graduation. As with the changing trend of college career service focusing on creating “connected communities...its new iteration offers a stronger emphasis on building connections through partnerships with employers from a variety of sectors, experiential learning, mentoring, and developing career communities of learners and networkers that will engage students and alumni for a lifetime” (Dey 2014). Career services are transitioning to include a wider range of services, but if students do not utilize the services provided, what use will the program provide?

One emerging trend in career services is “establishing stronger coordinated campus partnerships” (Dey 2014). With the development of relationships between career services and various other departments across an institution’s campus, it is possible and likely that a connection between career services here at Bridgewater State University and professors of the Ricciardi College of Business is possible in helping to develop a course that offers the same or similar programs available through Career Services. In order for the continued success of Career Services, “the need for career services to meet students in their space across campus and virtually” (Dey 2014) is equally important as connecting to key stakeholders. The “existence of effective online career services may help students with the difficult task of balancing life and work” (Venable 2010) by delivering services through different times and methods online. Connecting to different areas on campus can help to “[leverage] the entire campus ecosystem through partnerships and collaboration” (Venable 2010). However, our qualitative study findings indicate the majority of

the BSU's student population work outside of school and their time is limited. Therefore, unless they are earning credit or getting paid, it is unlikely they will visit Career Services. Creating a class that focuses on job search preparedness by incorporating the resources from Career Services, would benefit both the students of the Ricciardi College of Business and Career Services. A collaboration between professors and Career Services would allow information to be shared and communicated with students in a timely and beneficial manner.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was created using Qualtrics, an online survey software. There were a total of 28 questions organized into 11 blocks, by topics, with corresponding questions under each. Many of these topics were identified in the first qualitative study as the areas of most importance to the students (excluding demographics). The blocks are as follows:

- Working a Career Fair
- Networking
- Mentor
- Job Shadowing
- Internship
- Cover Letter
- Resume
- Interviewing
- Student to Professional Transition
- Conclusion
- Demographics

The demographic results from the survey are as follows:

GENDER (n=46)		AGE (in years)	
Female	22	Average	28
Male	24	Minimum	21
Other	0	Maximum	51

The survey consisted of various types of questions including multiple choice, rank-order, and Likert-type scale questions that allowed for a variety of ways for participants to answer honestly and accurately. The completed survey was administered to 46 graduate students at Bridgewater State University in the Ricciardi College of Business, equal to a 57 percent response rate. Responses were solicited via class visits and Blackboard announcements which included the survey link. Candy bar incentives were provided to students during class room visits. The average age of the respondents was 28 years old, with 24 males and 22 females completing the survey.

SURVEY QUESTION 1

Participation	Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.
Benefits	You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study.
Risks	There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.
Confidentiality	Your survey answers will be sent to a link at Qualtrics.com where data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. Qualtrics does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain confidential. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study.
Contact	If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the research supervisor, Dr. Kathleen Ferris-Costa at kferriscosta@bridgew.edu .
Electronic Consent	If you would like to proceed with the survey, click on the "Agree" button below indicating that <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have read the above information • You voluntarily agree to participate • You are 18 years of age or older If you don't want to proceed, exit out of the survey at this time. Thank you for your participation.

Students viewed the above survey terms of agreement. If they agreed to participate, the survey continued to second question. If they did not agree, they were exited out of the survey.

SURVEY QUESTIONS (2-28)

Question 2	<p>What BSU Career Service resources have you taken advantage of (check all that apply):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Attended BSU Career Fair(s) b) Attended Career Service workshop(s) c) Attended BSU Etiquette Dinner(s) d) Visited the Career Services' office for information e) Visited the Career Services' website f) Received help from a BSU Career Service professional g) None of the above
Question 3	<p>A career fair, also referred commonly as a job fair or career expo, is an event in which employers, recruiters, and schools give information to potential employees. Have you ever been to a career fair (BSU or other)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Yes b) No
Question 4	<p>Would you be interested in learning how to get the most out of a career fair?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Yes b) No
Question 5	<p>Do you have a LinkedIn account?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Yes, but it needs to be updated b) Yes, and it is up-to-date c) No
Question 6	<p>Would you be interested in learning how to improve/create your LinkedIn account?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Yes b) No
Question 7	<p>Professional Networking involves connecting with others for career or business-related reasons. How confident are you with your professional networking skills?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Very confident b) Somewhat confident c) Not confident
Question 8	<p>Would you be interested in learning how to improve your professional networking skills?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Yes b) No
Question 9	<p>A mentor is someone willing to share their professional knowledge and expertise in the field. Have you ever had a professional mentor?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Yes b) No
Question 10	<p>Would you be interested in meeting a BSU Alumni mentor in your chosen field of study?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Yes b) No
Question 11	<p>Job shadowing is a career exploration activity that offers an opportunity to spend time with a professional currently working in your career field of interest. Job shadowing offers a chance to see what it's actually like working in a specific job.</p>

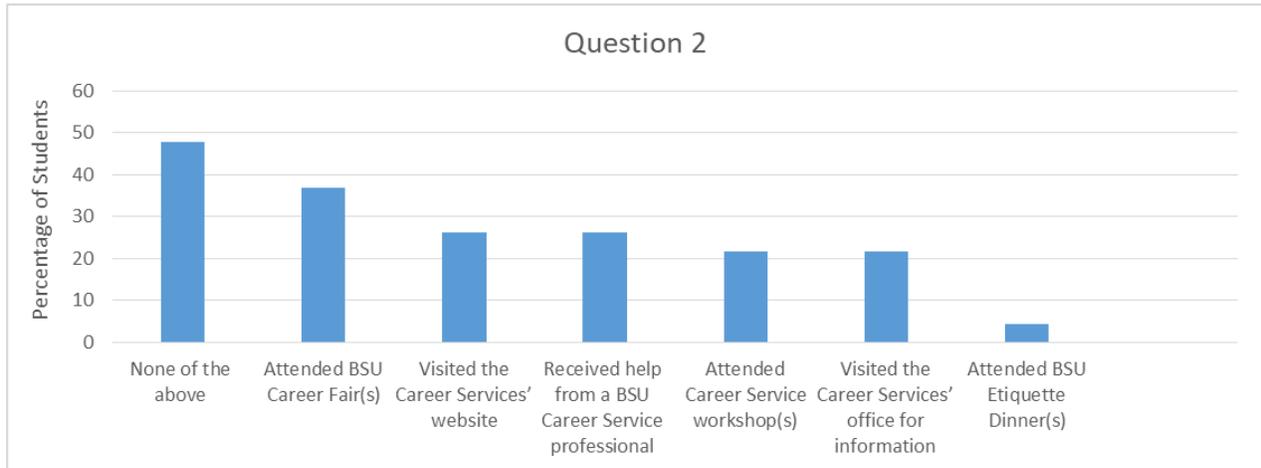
	<p>Would you be interested in job shadowing a professional in your chosen field of study?</p> <p>a) Yes b) No</p>
Question 12	<p>An internship is a period of work experience offered by an employer to give students exposure to the working environment, often within a specific industry. They allow students to gain practical work experience, develop new skills, network, and apply classroom theory in a professional setting. Have you ever done a college internship?</p> <p>a) Yes, and I DID earn college credit for my work. b) Yes, but I DID NOT earn college credit for my work. c) No, I have not done a college internship.</p>
Question 13	<p>Would you be interested in doing an internship?</p> <p>a) Yes, in my current field of study b) Yes, but in a field different than the one I am currently studying – I want to try something new c) No I am not interested</p>
Question 14	<p>A cover letter is a document sent with your resume to provide additional information on your skills and experience. The letter provides detailed information on why you are qualified for the job you are applying for. Have you ever written a cover letter?</p> <p>a) Yes b) No</p>
Question 15	<p>Would you be interested in learning how to improve your cover letter writing skills?</p> <p>a) Yes b) No</p>
Question 16	<p>A professional resume is a formal document submitted to job recruiters which represents an applicant's work experience.</p> <p>a) Yes, but it needs to be updated b) Yes, and it is up to date c) No, I do not have a resume</p>
Question 17	<p>How would you rate YOUR resume writing skills?</p> <p>a) Poor b) Good c) Excellent</p>
Question 18	<p>Would you be interested in learning how to create/improve your resume?</p> <p>a) Yes b) No</p>
Question 19	<p>How confident are you with your professional interviewing skills?</p> <p>a) Very confident b) Somewhat confident c) Not confident</p>
Question 20	<p>A mock interview is an emulation of a job interview used for training purposes. The conversational exercise usually resembles a real interview as closely as possible, for the purpose of providing experience for a candidate. Have you ever done a mock interview?</p> <p>a) Yes b) No</p>

Question 21	<p>Would you be interested in learning how to improve your interviewing skills?</p> <p>a) Yes b) No</p>
Question 22	<p>How confident are you in your overall abilities* to successfully transition from a student to a professional? *skills include time management, etiquette, social norms, attire/professional dress, and handling different cultures, personalities, and backgrounds.</p> <p>a) Very confident b) Somewhat confident c) Not confident</p>
Question 23	<p>Would you be interested in learning skills that would assist you in successfully transitioning from a student to a professional?</p> <p>a) Yes b) No</p>
Question 24	<p>Rank your interest (1 being the most interested, 5 being the least interested) in the following ways to learn more about the career skills* mentioned in the survey. *career skills include career fairs, mentorship, networking, job shadowing, internship, writing a cover letter and resume, interviewing, and student to professional transition.</p> <p>a) Out-of-class WORKSHOPS and GUEST SPEAKERS b) A HYBRID (face2face and online) 1-3 credit course c) A fully ONLINE 1-3 credit course d) A fully ONLINE CERTIFICATION course e) Visit CAREER SERVICES</p>
Question 25	<p>Are you a(n)...</p> <p>a) Undergraduate student b) Graduate student</p>
Question 26	<p>Upon graduation I will be (check all that apply):</p> <p>a) CONTINUING in my current job b) STARTING a new job (accepted offer) c) LOOKING for a new job d) CONTINUING my education e) OTHER</p>
Question 27	<p>Gender</p> <p>a) Male b) Female c) Other</p>
Question 28	<p>Age (in years, for example 22) (fill in the blank)</p>

RESULTS

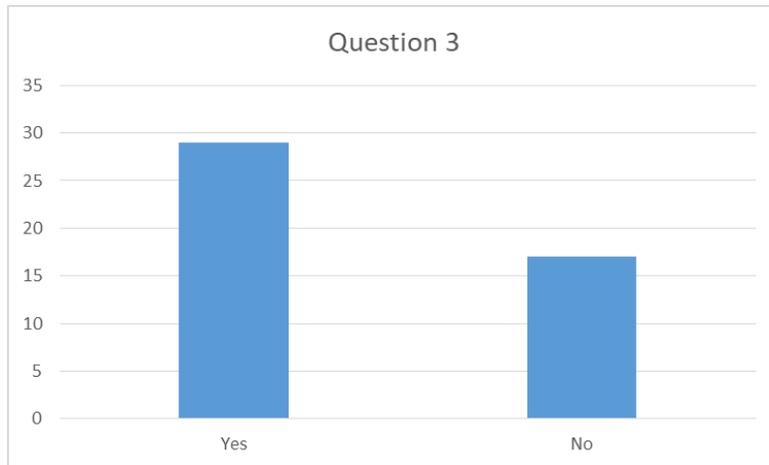
Below are the visual results and interpretations for each of the survey questions.

Question 2 - What BSU Career Service resources have you taken advantage of? (Check all that apply).



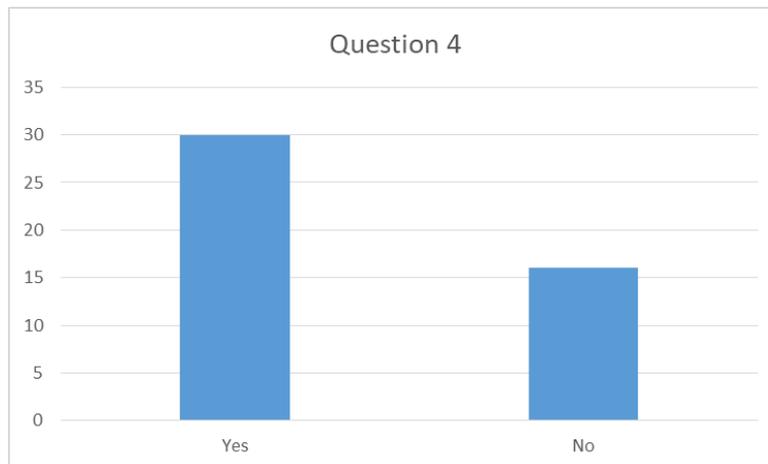
Overall, question two showed 46 percent of students had never utilized any services provided by Career Services. According to a study conducted by Strada-Gallup, “43 percent of students have been to their institution’s career services office or used related online resources more than once, and 34 percent have never visited the office or used the resources at all” (Strada-Gallup 2017). The number of BSU students not using career services is slightly above average, which may be influenced by all graduate students living off campus (housing available, Fall 2019) and the majority of students surveyed were currently employed either part or full time (as analyzed in a later question). The lack of time on campus and working off campus may attribute to the higher level of non-utilization of resources, which supports the development of a course that would incorporate career service resources into the curriculum.

Question 3 - A career fair, also referred commonly as job fair or career expo, is an event in which employers, recruiters, and schools give information to potential employees. Have you ever been to a career fair (BSU or other)?



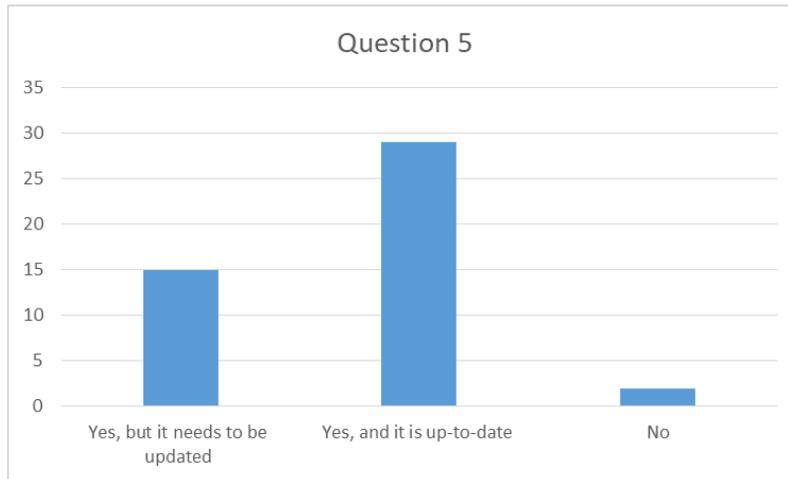
The majority of the students (29/46) had attended a career fair in the past, either at BSU or at another institution. Career fairs are offered at BSU each semester and students are strongly encouraged to attend.

Question 4 - Would you be interested in learning how to get the most out of a career fair?



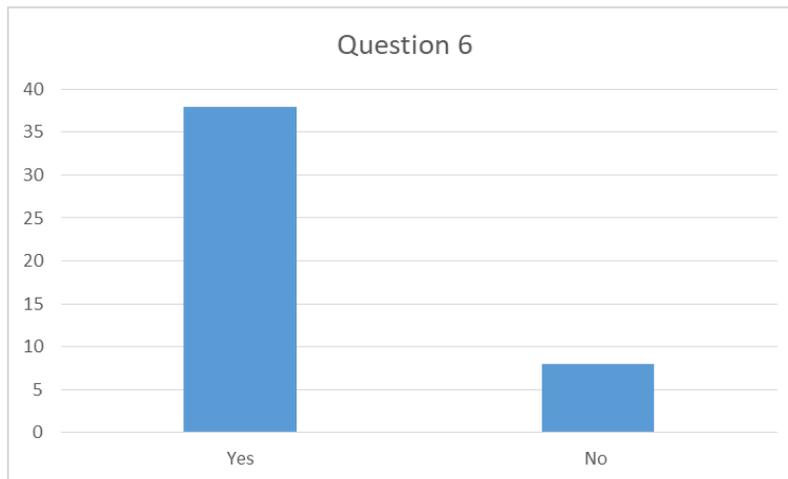
The majority of the students (30/46) were interested in learning how to benefit from attending a career fair. While most students were interested in learning more about career fairs, many students may already have experience with career fairs (see Question 2) or are currently in a stable job and have no intention of looking for a new one (see Question 25).

Question 5 - Do you have a LinkedIn account?



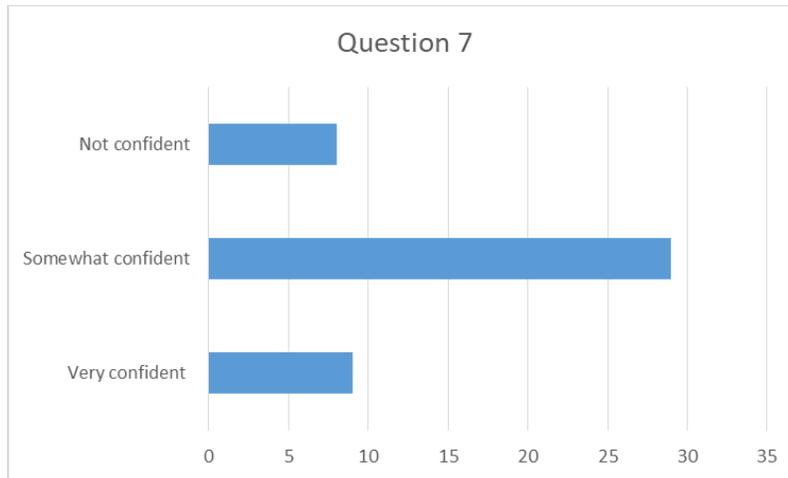
Results indicated 45 of the 47 students surveyed have LinkedIn accounts. The majority of respondents have up-to-date accounts (29) and 15 of them have accounts that need to be updated.

Question 6 - Would you be interested in learning how to improve/create your LinkedIn account?



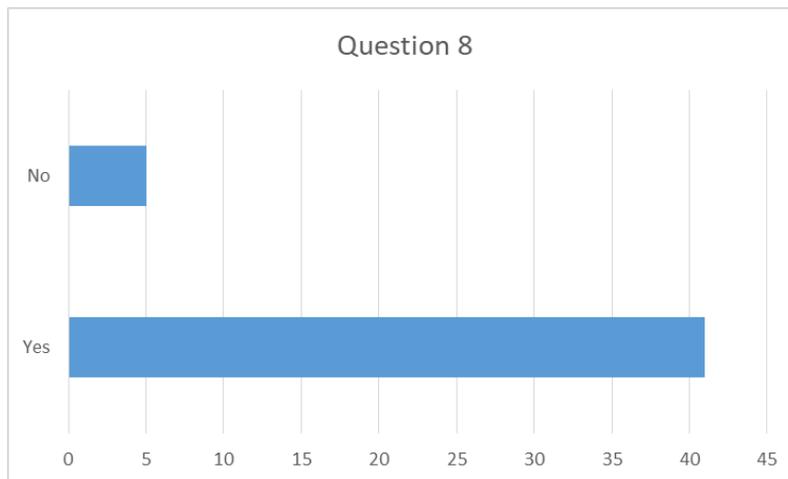
Of those surveyed, 38 students were interested in learning how to improve/create their LinkedIn account, while 8 students were not interested. On average, 64 percent of employers view LinkedIn accounts of potential employees (Robert Walters 2019). A student's LinkedIn account is an online extension of their resume and they should know how to present themselves professionally online.

Question 7 - Professional networking involves connecting with others for career or business-related reasons. How confident are you with your professional networking skills?



The majority of students (38) reported some level of confidence with their professional networking skills, while only 8 did not feel confident at all. As graduate students and the average age being 28 years old, many of the participants may have networking experience. However, there is room for improvement with only 9 students feeling very confident in their skills.

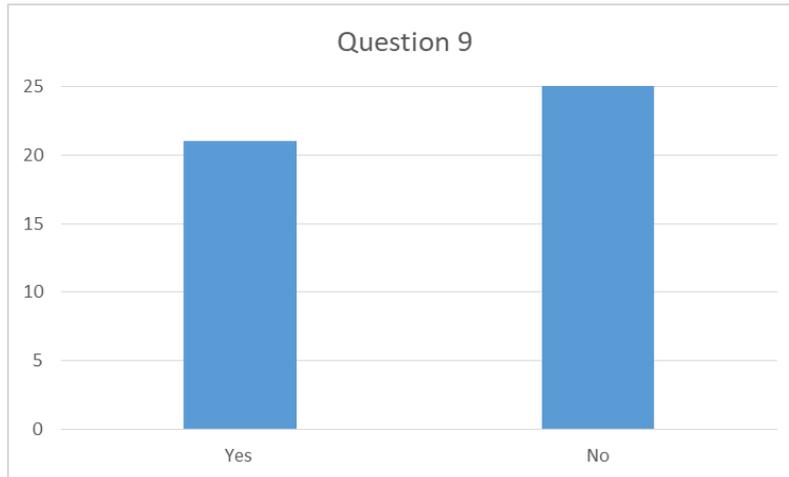
Question 8 - Would you be interested in learning how to improve your professional networking skills?



The majority of the students surveyed (41) were interested in learning how to improve their networking skills. Between 70 and 80 percent of jobs are acquired through networking (Belli

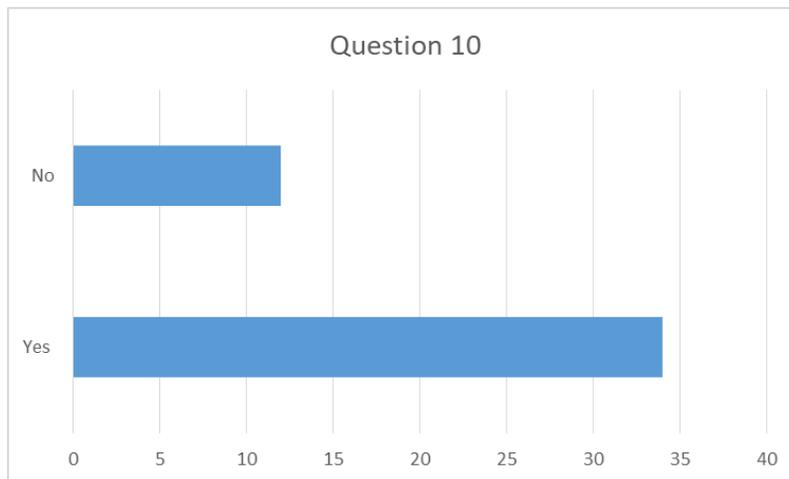
2017). When students improve their networking skills and expand their personal and professional networks, they are increasing their career opportunities.

Question 9 – A mentor is someone willing to share their professional knowledge and expertise in the field. Have you ever had a professional mentor?



The majority of students surveyed (25/46) have had a professional mentor in the past. BSU alumni are interested in working with students and mentorships could be a possibility.

Question 10 - Would you be interested in meeting a BSU Alumni mentor in your chosen field of study?

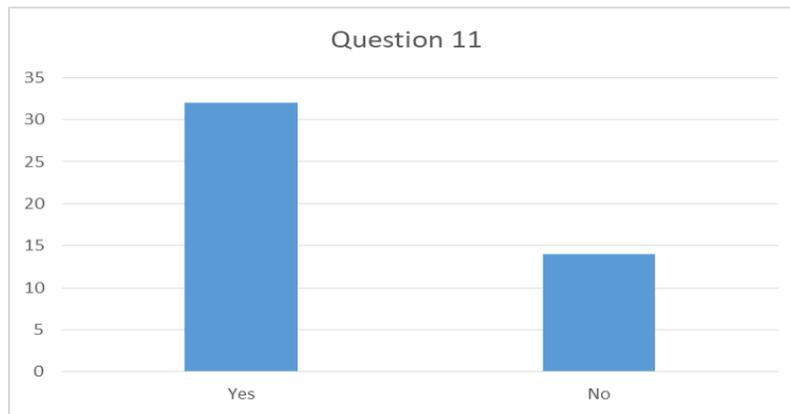


Results indicated 34/46 students answered they would be interested in meeting a BSU Alumni mentor in their chosen field of study. With the majority of BSU students being first

generation college students, many of their parents' academic and career paths are not relatable to the students' and a mentorship could prove to be beneficial.

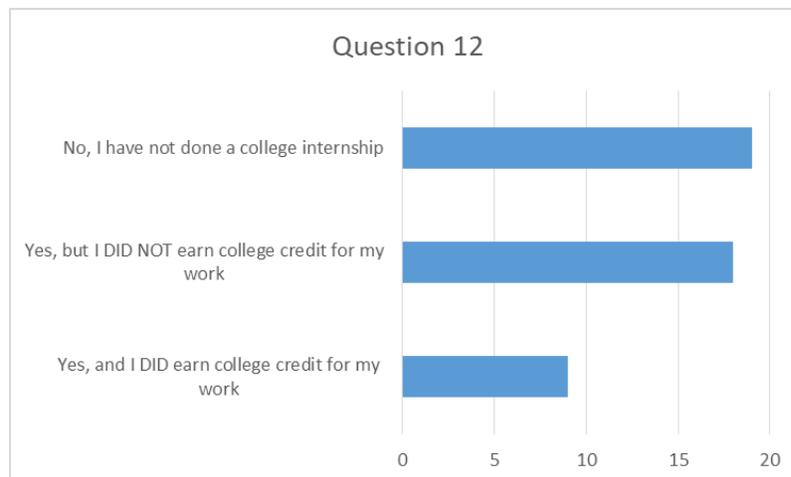
Question 11 - Job shadowing is a career exploration activity that offers an opportunity to spend time with a professional currently working in your career field of interest. Job shadowing offers a chance to see what it's actually like working in a specific job.

Would you be interested in job shadowing a professional in your chosen field of study?



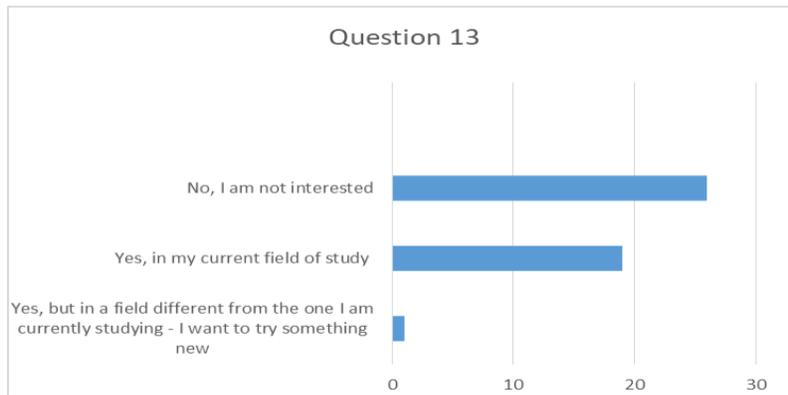
A total of 32/46 participants indicated an interest in job shadowing. Providing such an experience would allow students to see what a particular job was like and whether or not they are interested in a chosen career.

Question 12 - An internship is a period of work experience offered by an employer to give students exposure to the working environment, often within a specific industry. They allow students to gain practical work experience, develop new skills, network, and apply classroom theory in a professional setting. Have you ever done a college internship?



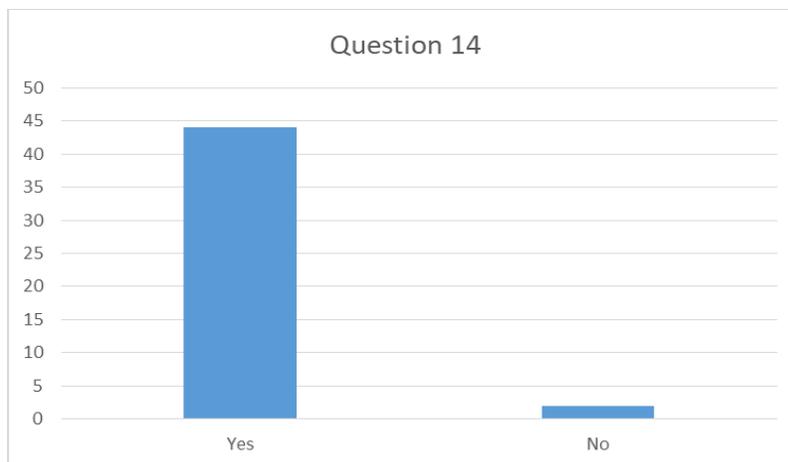
Nine students earned college credit for their internship, 18 did not earn credit, and 19 have not completed an internship.

Question 13 - Would you be interested in doing an internship?

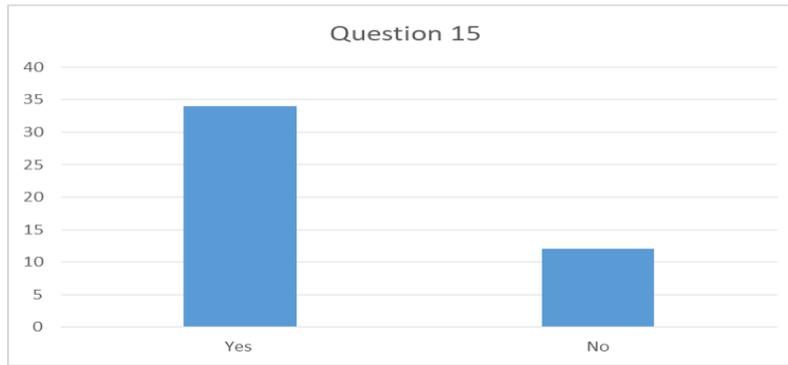


Results indicated 27 of the 46 students have completed an internship as undergraduates or graduate students. A total of 20 students were interested in doing an internship either in their current field of study or in a different field (1 student). As indicated in a previous question, more than half of the students have already completed internships. Although an internship is a way for students to see what a particular job entails and provides them the opportunity to gain real-world work experience, most of the graduate students surveyed are full-time employees and simply do not have the time or need to complete an internship.

Question 14 - A cover letter is a document sent with your resume to provide additional information on your skills and experience. The letter provides detailed information on why you are qualified for the job you are applying for. Have you ever written a cover letter?

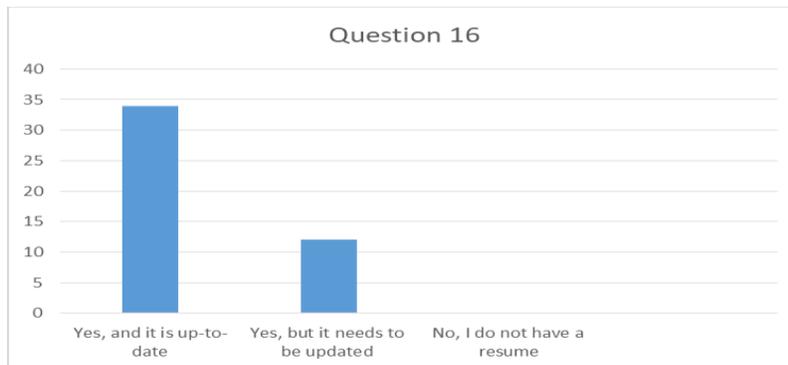


Question 15 - Would you be interested in learning how to improve your cover letter writing skills?

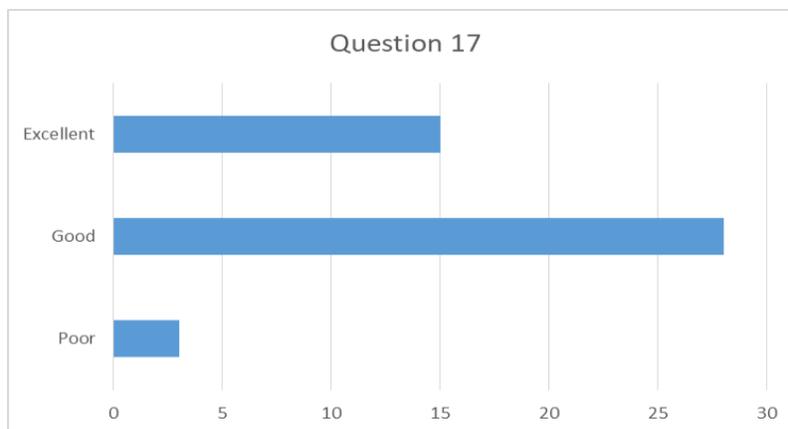


The majority of the students surveyed (44/46) have experience in writing cover letters and 34/46 are interested in learning how to improve their cover letter writing skills.

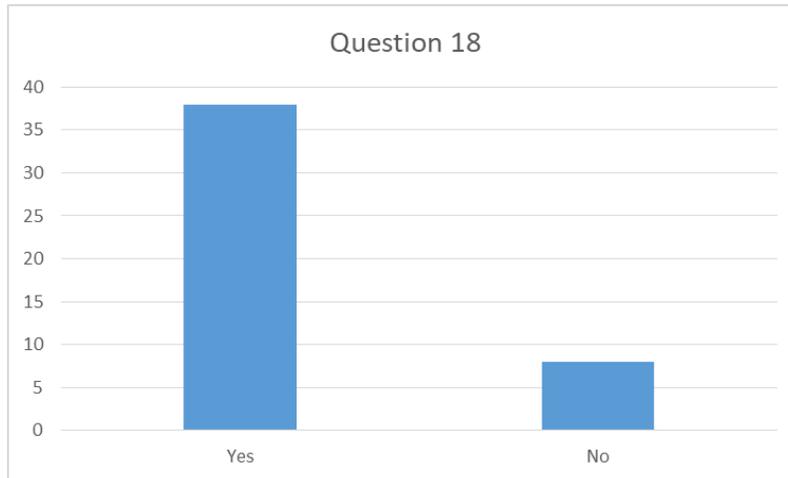
Question 16 - A professional resume is a formal document submitted to job recruiters which represents an applicant's work experience, education and skills. Do you have a resume?



Question 17 - How would you rate YOUR resume writing skills?

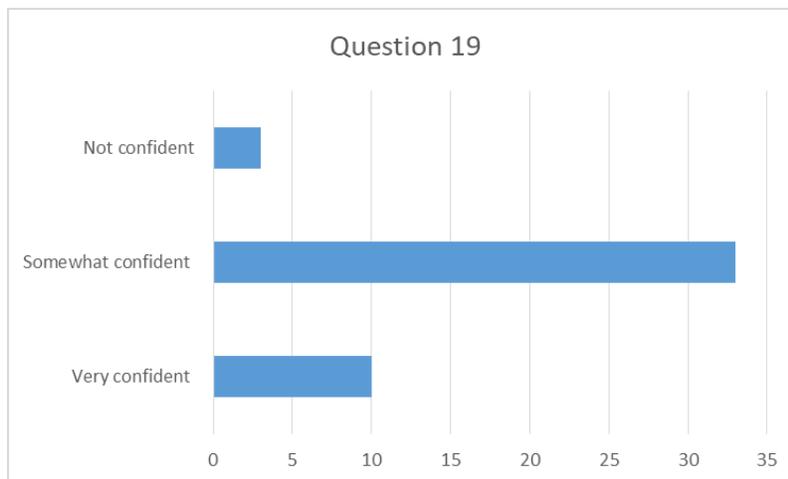


Question 18 - Would you be interested in learning how to create/improve your resume?



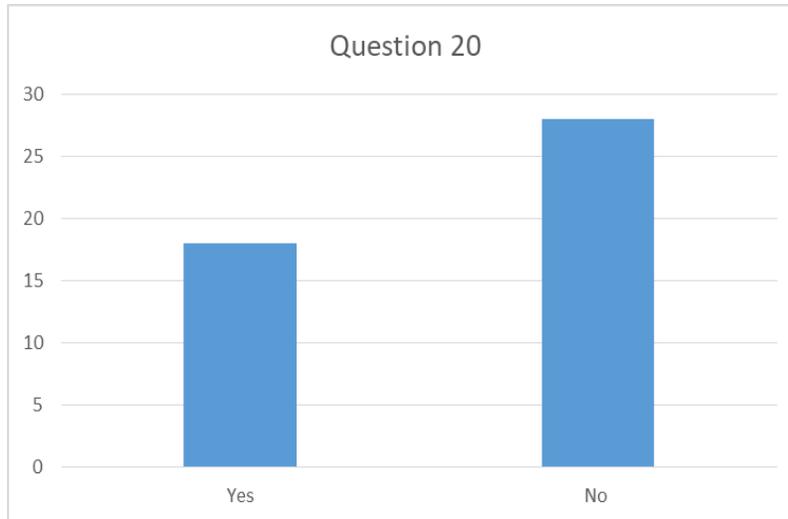
All of the students surveyed have a resume, while 12 indicated theirs needed to be updated. The majority of the students (43/46) rated their resume rating skills as good or better. Although all students have resumes, 38/46 were interested in learning how to improve their resumes. As a member of the work force, it is advantageous to always have an updated resume that is a true representation of your accomplishments and abilities. The ability to write a strong, professional resume is an asset to any graduate student.

Question 19 - How confident are you with your professional interviewing skills?

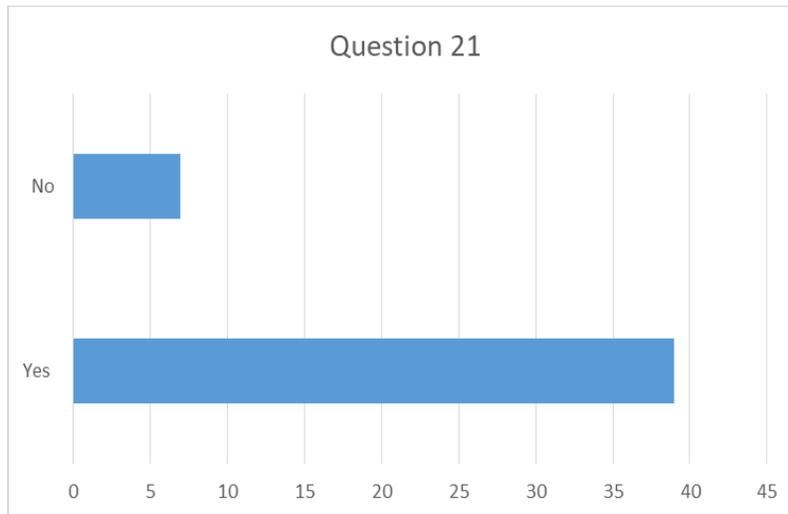


The majority of the students (43/46) have a level of confidence in their professional interviewing skills, but there is room for improvement with only 22 percent being very confident.

Question 20 - A mock interview is an emulation of a job interview used for training purposes. The conversational exercise usually resembles a real interview as closely as possible, for the purpose of providing experience for a candidate. Have you ever done a mock interview?

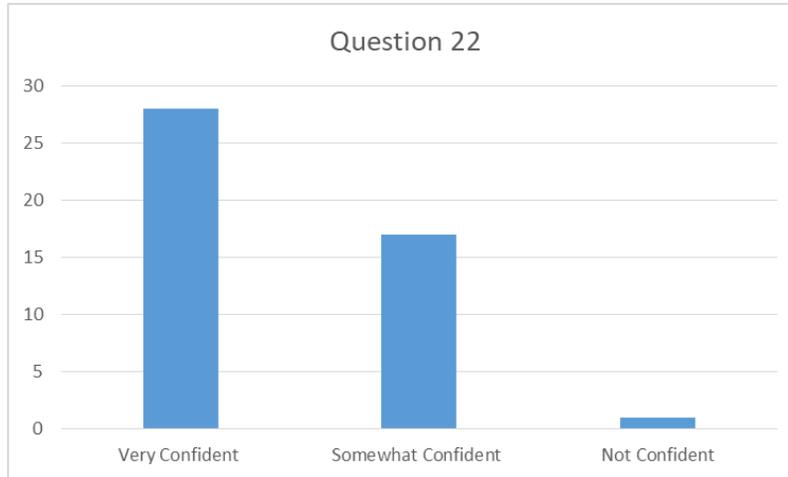


Question 21- Would you be interested in learning how to improve your interviewing skills?

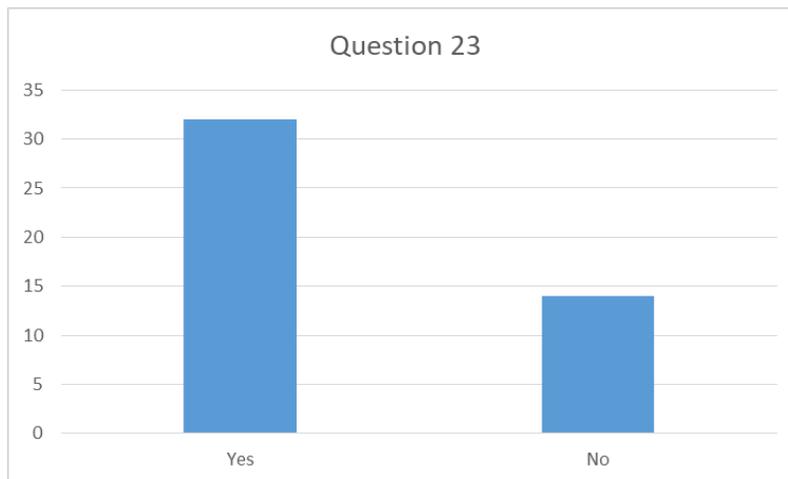


Of those surveyed, 18 of the 46 students have done a mock interview and 39 students were interested in learning how to improve their interviewing skills. The graduate students' responses identify the importance of good interviewing skills and their interest in learning how to improve such skills.

Question 22 - How confident are you in your overall abilities* to successfully transition from a student to a professional? *Skills include time management, etiquette, social norms, attire/professional dress, and handling different cultures, personalities, and backgrounds?



Question 23 - Would you be interested in learning skills that would assist you in successfully transitioning from a student to a professional?



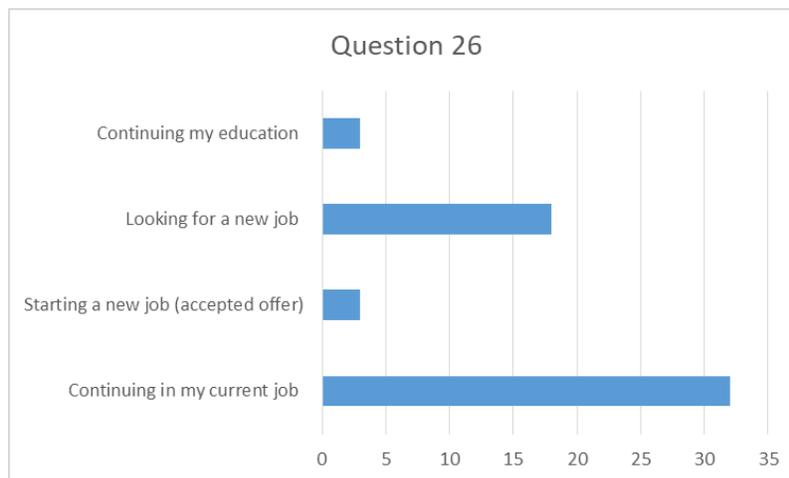
With the average age of the graduate students surveyed being 28 years old, it was expected that almost all of those surveyed (45/46) reported some level of confidence in their abilities to transition from student to professional. However, 70 percent of the students indicated they are interested in learning additional skills to improve their chances of success.

Question 24 - Rank your interest (1 being the most interested, 5 being the least interested) in the following ways to learn more about the career skills* mentioned in this survey. *Career skills include career fairs, mentor ship, networking, job shadowing, internship, writing a cover letter and resume, interviewing and student to professional transition.

MODALITY
1. Credited Hybrid Course
2. Credited Online Course
3. Workshops and Guest Speakers
4. Visit Career Services
5. Online Certification Course

The above table shows students’ preferences (in rank order) for how they would like to receive information regarding the career skills and resources mentioned in the survey. Their first choice is for a credited hybrid course to be offered, followed by a credited fully online course. Workshops and guest speakers were also popular options and could easily be incorporated into the hybrid and online courses. Visiting career services, which is the main form of modality for students to access career resources, was at the lower end of the list along with an online certification course. Results of the preliminary qualitative study indicated students are pressed for time and unless they are getting paid or receiving credit for their efforts it is highly unlikely they will utilize any such resources. These results support these finding and indicate students are most interested in modalities that provide them with course credit.

Question 26 - Upon graduation I will be (check all that apply):



The majority of the students (32) are planning to continue in their current job upon graduation, 3 students are starting a new job, 3 students are continuing their education, and 18 students will actively look for a new job upon graduation. Although the percentage of undergraduate students looking for jobs upon graduation would presumably be greater than the 40 percent of graduate students who indicated they will be job searching upon graduation, it is beneficial for all graduate students to have the opportunity and resources to improve their preparedness for the job search process. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Number of Jobs Held 2017), the average worker currently holds ten different jobs before age forty, and this number is projected to grow. Forrester Research (2015) predicts that today's youngest workers will hold twelve to fifteen jobs in their lifetime.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the survey are consistent with previous research findings of comparable institutions and show that the resources provided by Career Services are underutilized by the business graduate students here at Bridgewater State University. As stated earlier, with the majority of our students working (many full time), unless they are receiving course credit or getting paid they simply don't have the time to visit Career Services.

The first recommendation is to create a business hybrid elective course, offered to both undergraduate and graduate students. The course objectives would focus on the skills identified in the survey including resume writing, networking, interviewing, LinkedIn development, cover letter writing, and career fair navigation. The course information would be delivered through lecture, discussion, videos, podcasts, interactive learning, in-class workshops and guest speakers. Ultimately, the course would feature both in-class and online elements in order to appeal to students and their busy schedules, while also allowing for the most effective teaching of these skills through high impact learning techniques.

Within the course, Career Services would sponsor workshops specifically designed for the business students on how to navigate a career fair, learn about job etiquette, and perform mock interviews. For maximum impact, professors would partner with Career Services to deliver information and enhance students' learning and preparedness for the job search process.

The course would also feature guest speakers from local businesses. The business professionals would share their work experiences, lessons learned throughout their careers, and suggestions on how to best transition from student to professional. The guest speakers can be alumni and/or professionals looking to hire from BSU and willing to impart their wisdom on students. Representatives from management, marketing, human resources, accounting, finance, and aviation organizations can provide a wide range of information for the business students.

Finally, the course would feature networking events for students and local business professionals. Students would connect with local business leaders and BSU alumni and have the opportunity to participate in job shadowing, mentorships, and internship.

CONCLUSION

Students are feeling unprepared for the job search process and the current ways of offering career service resources to students is ineffective. Study results indicate students are interested in learning more about these resources and the best way to provide them is to offer a credited course. Professors should partner with the professionals from Career Services to develop a course focused on increasing students' preparedness for the job search process and their chances for job search success. The information is the same it's the modality that needs to change to better meet the needs of the BSU students' time constraints due to school, work and family obligations.

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