College of Business, Business Career Accelerator, Qualitative Research Study on Student Involvement in Professional Development Activities

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College of Business, Business Career Accelerator, Qualitative Research Study on Student Involvement in Professional Development Activities

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Honors Project (HNRS 4990)

Submitted to the Honors College at Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements to graduate with

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College of Business, Business Career Accelerator, Qualitative Research Study on Student Involvement in Professional Development Activities

Abstract

The creation and execution of this project began by analyzing the honors project specifications, to design a project that met the Honors College criteria. To meet these criteria, a market research study was conducted to assist the College of Business’s Business Career Accelerator management in understanding the student market of the College of Business. In addition, the study’s goal is to make recommendations utilizing marketing and education frameworks to maintain and increase student usage of the center. The project was executed using traditional market research frameworks, which required conducting in-depth interviews of College of Business students to determine student attitudes and behaviors towards professional development and usage of the Business Career Accelerator. The College of Business student market was then segmented based on typical usage behaviors. A ‘validity check’ was also conducted with management of the Business Career Accelerator, which compared management’s understanding of student attitudes and behaviors with the student responses received from the in-depth interviews. After conducting the in-depth interviews, several barriers to student participation in the Business Career Accelerator were identified. These barriers were identified and analyzed by applying relevant marketing and education frameworks identified by interviewing College of Education faculty and industry professionals at Root Inc., a center which focuses on implementing strategic change in organizations.

Following marketing and education methods, tentative recommendations were made based on the education frameworks, to address the barriers to student participation that were
identified in the qualitative interviews. Feedback was then sought on these recommendations, by conducting a focus group with a group of senior level College of Business students. The focus group sought student feedback that would help to adapt or further refine these career development suggestions. Following the focus group, the career development suggestions were adapted to reflect student input. Finally, the results of this study were presented to a market research course of approximately fifty students. Students attending the presentation provided more feedback on the recommendations prior to the development of this report, and its presentation to the Honors College and Business Career Accelerator’s management for implementation.

**Honors Project Requirements and Execution**

There are three key requirements identified in the Honors Project Handbook for the Honors College at Bowling Green State University. First, the project must reflect original scholarship, in other words “it requires you to develop, synthesize, and/or create ideas in new and different ways” and it needs to be something that is “new for your discipline and area of study” (“Honors Project Handbook” 2018). The qualitative research study of the College of Business’s Business Career Accelerator fulfills this requirement by exploring student involvement and barriers to participation in professional development activities which have not been investigated in a qualitative research study here at BGSU before. The study reflects original research by combining market research methods and education frameworks to understand attitudes and behaviors of the College of Business student body from a new perspective. By combining proven theoretical frameworks with student’s perspectives this research study has provided the college with new ideas to address previously unexplored barriers.
The second requirement for the honors project is that the project must be interdisciplinary, which is “an approach to scholarship that recognizes that some topics, questions, and/or issues are too complex to be answered by a single academic discipline or field of study (“Honors Project Handbook” 2018). The study meets this requirement by combining traditional market research methods of a qualitative research study, through in-depth interviews and focus group methods, with education frameworks. Only through the combination of both marketing and education was the study able to meet its objectives. The first objective is identifying student attitudes, behaviors, and barriers to participation in professional development activities offered through the College of Business. The second objective is making supported suggestions that will address these barriers and enable strategic change in the college that will increase student participation in professional development resources. While conducting an exploratory marketing research study provided an understanding of College of Business students’ attitudes and behaviors, studying and understanding education frameworks that can address these issues was pertinent to making suggestions to make valuable recommendations that could lead to strategic change. Accomplishing the research study’s objectives would be too complex to achieve with a singular field of study, and thus two were used to execute this requirement.

The final requirement of the honors project is that it must “have a justification of theory/methodology supporting it” (“Honors Project Handbook” 2018). The marketing research portion of the study follows the eight-step marketing research framework commonly used in academia today. This framework begins with problem definition, setting research objectives, research design, research methods, sampling, data collection and analysis, presentation of results, and follow up (McDaniel, Carl, and Roger H. Gates 2018). The marketing research framework was
adhered to when conducting both the in-depth interviews and the focus group portion of this study. Education-based theory/frameworks were utilized when creating suggestions for the Business Career Accelerator’s management, including the JDR framework, Self-Determination Theory, Goal Setting Theory, Millennial Engagement techniques, and Career Self Efficiency.

The Honors project was also developed with the primary goal of assisting the student’s college or major in some way. The project achieves this goal by assisting the College of Business with its primary educational objectives of increasing student participation in the Business Career Accelerator. The College of Business’s learning objective is “Students graduating with a BSBA degree will demonstrate competency in applying appropriate problem solving, decision making and critical thinking skills” (“Objectives of the BSBA Program.”). The resources that students learn through the Business Career Accelerator are commonly applied to business problems that occur during a job search, interview, and job negotiation. These resources assist students in developing skills to meet the College of Business’s learning objective. Common business problems that the Business Career Accelerator can assist with are “how to find a job, resumes, intro letters, the interview, recruiting, the job offer, internships and co-ops, portfolios, networking and job fairs” (“Students.”). Increasing student participation in the Business Career Accelerator demonstrates the College of Business is striving to become more effective at accomplishing this strategic educational objective. The second College of Business objective that the Business Career Accelerator assists with is “students graduating with a BSBA degree will demonstrate effective communication and interpersonal skills” (“Objectives of the BSBA Program.”). Students become more effective in oral communication skills by working with the Business Career Accelerator’s management on networking and interview skills. The Business Career Accelerator also assists with developing written communication skills, through improving
resumes and correspondence with employers (“Students.”). If more College of Business students actively participate in developing these professional skills through the Business Career Accelerator, the College of Business will be able to more effectively accomplish this second College of Business learning objective as well.

**Methodology**

The marketing research portion of this study uses the eight-step market research framework identified in McDaniel, Carter, and Roger H. Gates’ 2018 edition of “Market Research”, including problem definition, setting research objectives, research design, research methods, sampling, data collection and analysis, presentation of results, and follow up (McDaniel, Carl, and Roger H. Gates 2018). The first two stages of this market research method are most commonly identified as the most important to an effective market research study. With assistance from marketing faculty, time was spent identifying the true research problem explored and the learning objectives that the study sought to accomplish. The research problems that the study seeks to resolve included: 1) maintaining and increasing student participation in the Business Career Accelerator at Bowling Green State University; and, 2) assisting the Business Career Accelerator’s management with the drive for quality and customer satisfaction that they are tasked with by the College of Business. To address these problems, as identified, research methods/objectives were set to obtain and understanding of both attitudes and behaviors of College of Business students towards professional development activities. Education frameworks that would be useful in addressing barriers to participation in professional development activities that were identified after student attitudes and behaviors were understood. To accomplish these objectives, a research study design method was chosen that reflected the nature of the study. The study is exploratory, because the primary objective is to “get a better understanding of the
environment” (McDaniel, Carl, and Roger H. Gates 2018) by understanding students current attitudes and behaviors towards professional development and the Business Career Accelerator. The study is also descriptive, as it “seeks to understand attitudes, behaviors and perceptions… measures attitudes and perceptions… [and] measures brand loyalty” (McDaniel, Carl, and Roger H. Gates 2018) of students who have access to the Business Career Accelerator and its resources.

Next, a research method must be selected. The primary decision when selecting a research study methodology is between a qualitative and quantitative inquiry. The research study method selected for the purposes of this study was qualitative, because benefits of a qualitative research study include being “better [for] understanding motivations, less structured, cheaper, and faster” (McDaniel, Carl, and Roger H. Gates 2018). Given understanding student attitudes, motivations, and behaviors was a primary research objective, a qualitative research study methodology was deemed more appropriate. Additionally, limited resources of a sole market researcher conducting this study with assistance from two advisors, made the benefits of a cheaper and faster study necessary for the timely completion of this project. There are, however, two key drawbacks of this method of study, including “weak generalizability and [that it] does not distinguish small differences” (McDaniel, Carl, and Roger H. Gates 2018). Weak generalizability means that the opinions, behaviors, and attitudes of the sample of College of Business students interviewed for the study may not be reflective of the opinions of all College of Business students in the market. For this reason modern market researchers often pair a preliminary qualitative market research study, such as this one, with a follow-up quantitative study. A quantitative study would also be helpful to addressing the research objectives of this study, if resources are available to conduct this study in the future.
The next step of the marketing research methodology is sampling, the process of selecting participants in the study. A set of sampling criteria was used when selecting a sample for study participants. Participants were all College of Business students in their Junior year of study at Bowling Green State University, either gender, and any specialization were interviewed, to provide a sample that was representative of the College. A convenience sample of five students meeting these criteria were ultimately recruited and interviewed. These five students had unspecified usage behaviors, meaning that prior to the interview researchers did not know how often the interviewee participated in professional development resources or the Business Career Accelerator. A target sample was also taken of five additional students, who were identified by the Business Career Accelerator’s management as ‘heavy users’ of professional development services. This target sample was utilized to identify differences that may exist between heavy users and students with unspecified usage habits. The samples were of the same size to ensure that ‘heavy users were equally represented in the study.

After the two target samples had been recruited, the interview data was collected and analyzed. Data was collected using the in-depth interview data collection method, utilizing the ‘In-Depth Interview Discussion Guide’ created with the assistance of College of Business Faculty (Appendix A). In-depth interviews have several benefits, including eliminating group pressures, the respondent being the focus of attention, encouraging the revelation of new information, being easier to improvise in a new direction, receiving better nonverbal feedback, and that they can be conducted anywhere (McDaniel, Carl, and Roger H. Gates 2018). The key benefits for this study was that in-depth interviews can encourage the revelation of new information, making it is easier to improvise in a new direction, and better nonverbal feedback is received. Encouraging the revelation of more participant information was key, because the study
sought to understand student behaviors and attitudes not previously not explored. Understanding student behaviors and attitudes is also more effective when nonverbal feedback is received and improvising in a new direction by asking follow up questions is easier to do by the market researcher. The limitations of this research method are that the researcher cannot leverage group dynamics, conducting the interviews is time consuming, and there is less client involvement (McDaniel, Carl, and Roger H. Gates 2018). These research limitations were considered, but the research benefits of a qualitative study outweighed the drawbacks given the purpose of this study.

After the in-depth interviews were conducted, further data analysis was conducted included segmenting the market into student participation segments based on typical attitudes and behaviors. These student segments typically had the same answers to questions asked in the ‘In-Depth Interview Guide’ (Appendix A), which highlighted key barriers to participation in professional development activities. Further data collection and analysis involved the Management of the Business Career Accelerator that was asked how they believed students would respond to the questions on the ‘In-Depth Interview Discussion Guide.’ Researchers can understand where gaps exist in the Business Career Accelerator’s management’s understanding of their target market of College of Business students, and these gaps can be addressed. An understanding of applicable education frameworks was undertaken to understand and interpret the gaps in management’s understanding and the barriers to student participation identified through in-depth interviews. Representative Brodie Hausch, a developer of training programs at Root Inc., was also interviewed as part of this aspect of educational/industry research. This organization’s mission statement is to “launch strategies, change cultures, and transform managers, altering the trajectory of organizations and accelerating success” (“Change Starts
Here.”), which aligns with the objectives of this study. The interview discussion guide utilized for the Root Learning interview is provided at the end of this document (Appendix B).

After data collection was completed, information from the market research study, education research and industry professionals at Root Inc. was combined to make tentative suggestions that addressed barriers to participation in professional development activities and the Business Career Accelerator at Bowling Green State University. The data was also analyzed to assist management of the Business Career Accelerator with the drive for quality and satisfaction that they are tasked with by the College of Business. These suggestions were then presented to a final student focus group, utilizing the ‘Focus Group Discussion Guide’ (Appendix C). After having student participants complete waivers to participate (Appendix D) with the goal of getting further input and refining these suggestions while leveraging the group dynamics that a focus group allows. Finally, to follow up with the findings of this study, these results were presented to a BGSU marketing research course of approximately fifty students to get added feedback on the suggestions from members of the target market of the Business Career Accelerator (Appendix F). Some informal statistical data was gathered from students this course as well to further test the validity of the results of the study. This final report of the study will be submitted to include a detailed description of the Honors Project, the methodology, findings, and suggestions to the Business Career Accelerator’s management, the Dean of the College of Business, and the Honors College as the final follow up of this study.

Findings

After conducting in-depth interviews with 10 College of Business students, utilizing the methodology identified above and the in-depth interview guide (Appendix A), student responses were analyzed for similarities and grouped into two student participation segments that reflect
typical responses from each segment. A summary of representative answers to each of the sixteen in-depth interview guide questions can be found at the end of this document (Appendix E). The two segments identified by this research study in the College of Business student market were labeled: segment 1) “Utilitarian’s;” and segment 2) “Continual Learners.” These segments were named and characterized by the typical attitudes and behaviors which they harbor and embody. “Utilitarians” are characterized by a typical usage behavior of going to the Business Career Accelerator their freshman year through their introductory business course and not returning after obtaining their first internship, and typical attitudes of thinking the Business Career Accelerator helps with getting jobs and internships and professional development is very important, on average 9.4/10. The Utilitarians also identified two main pain points of using the Business Career Accelerator were: 1) that they feel students aren’t guided to resources and 2) they must be sought out and that the culture of the College of Business portrays professional development as an extra responsibility and ‘going above and beyond.’

The second segment of “Continual Learners” can be characterized by typical usage behavior of first going to the Business Career Accelerator when they transferred into the College of Business, typically from another college or university, and continuing to visit the center at least once per week. These students think of the Business Career Accelerator as a continuous guiding resource that assists in answering career-oriented questions. These students also think professional development is very important, slightly more so than the “Utilitarians” ranking professional development a 10/10 in terms of importance. These students identified similar, yet slightly different pain points in using the Business Career Accelerator, when compared to segment 1. These pain points include that the resources aren’t explicitly advertised, networking with other students and making friends is difficult, and requesting that more resources be available online.
When management of the Business Career Accelerator was interviewed, through the ‘validity check’ process, several differences were identified in how management anticipated the students answering questions on the in-depth interview guide and how students actually responded. These responses are also detailed in the same chart at the end of this document (Appendix E). Five key gaps were identified through the ‘validity check’ process and discussed with management of the Business Career Accelerator to determine possible reasons these gaps may exist. The first gap was that management anticipated students would first go to the Business Career Accelerator for resume help, or questions for their FIT certification, where students from both markets first went to the center for career assistance, whether that be figuring out a career path or trying to obtain an internship position. Our interview with management concluded this gap may exist because students seek more resources on their own for resume help and classwork, but only engage the help of the Business Career Accelerator for more strategic assistance that they could not develop independently.

The second gap identified was that management believed that students have a clear understanding of how the Business Career Accelerator can assist them, whereas students from both participation segments could not clearly identify all the resources that are available to them. Through a discussion with management regarding this gap, it was identified that it may exist due to low involvement with e-mails, or a lack of direct communication of the resources available to students. The third gap that was identified was about typical usage of the Business Career Accelerator. Management believed that typical usage pattern would begin with students seeking resume help, then improving written communication, followed by job offer negotiation and contracts. This contrasts with typical student’s usage pattern of utilizing the center to obtain an internship and resume help, and subsequently not returning after obtaining their first internship
experience. A conversation with management concluded this gap may exist because the College of Business has a strong of a cultural focus on obtaining an internship, as opposed to a post-graduation job and continual professional development. This conversation also revealed a concern that relationships may be difficult to form due to limited personnel resources of the center.

The fourth gap reflected a difference between how important management believes professional development is to their student target market. Management anticipated a 7-8/10, whereas students believe professional development to be more important than management would anticipate, a 9.4-10/10. This gap may exist because management of the Business Career Accelerator does not see additional professional development activities students are involved in outside the Business Career Accelerator itself. The last gap identified was the timeline of when students become interested in professional development activities. While students recall first becoming interested in professional development either during high school or their first year of college, management anticipated this interest would not manifest until the students’ second or third year of college. This gap may exist due to job seeking behavior not being visible to management until later in their collegiate career, as more students seek internship positions, and enlist the help of the Business Career Accelerator to do so.

From the findings of the in-depth interview process and the ‘validity check’ process with Business Career Accelerator management, four key barriers to participation in professional development activities were identified. The first barrier was that students would rather seek resources on their own. This finding was found in both segments of the market when conducting in-depth interviews, as “Utilitarians” mention having higher involvement in professional development activities outside the Business Career Accelerator and the College of Business, which they find of their own accord. Some possible causes of this participation barrier are that visiting
the center may be intimidating or take too much time. The second participation barrier identified is that students are unsure of all the resources the Business Career Accelerator provides. This result was evident in both segments of the market, as even heavy users of the center were unable to identify all resources that were available to them. This participation barrier also reflects a gap in management’s understanding of their student markets. Students have a much clearer awareness of all professional development resources available to them.

The third barrier to participation was that the initial interaction with the Business Career Accelerator did not prompt return. Unlike management’s expectation of typical customer usage behaviors of their resources, the majority of students, who were not identified as ‘heavy users’ of the center, did not feel inclined to return following their initial interaction. This presents a barrier to providing student’s resources they need later in their collegiate career, such as job offer and contract negotiations, by not providing a lasting impression after the first visit to the center. The final barrier to participation our study identified was that, following students obtaining their first internship, the majority of students do not return to the center. This is indicative of a cultural focus on obtaining an internship, as opposed to a post-graduation job and the importance of long-term professional development activities.

The study seeks to address these four identified barriers to participation in professional development activities in the college. Theoretical education frameworks that were applicable to these barriers were studied to help interpret the findings and make tentative and recommendations to the Business Career Accelerator’s management. These barriers may be addressed to maintain and increase student usage of the Business Career Accelerator, and help management improve the quality of their service offerings and increase student participation in professional development activities.
Tentative Recommendations

Tentative recommendations were made to address barriers to student participation in professional development activities at the Business Career Accelerator, by using the information gathered from in-depth interviews and research conducted on applicable education frameworks. These recommendations are tentative, because while the recommendations do combine proven education frameworks and market research methodology, further feedback was gathered from the target market of College of Business students to adapt and refine these recommendations prior to presenting the ideas to management of the Business Career Accelerator.

The first tentative recommendation was to address the barrier to participation that students would rather seek resources on their own, as opposed to visiting the Business Career Accelerator. This issue was identified as a barrier to participation, or a pain point, in both student segments of the market. The tentative recommendation to address this barrier is to make common Business Career Accelerator resources available online. Not only was this a request from the “Continual Learner” market segment, but the idea is also supported by an education resource, and utilized effectively by learning centers such as Root Inc. This participation recommendation finds support from an education framework known as Self Determination theory. The framework states that individuals have both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, but individuals with intrinsic motivation have higher goal commitment and goal achievement. Intrinsic motivations are those which are based on values and passions, and the theory argues there are three ‘nutrients’ that lead to developing intrinsic motivation; autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy is defined as feeling in control of the situation; the more in control of a situation the individual feels the more intrinsic motivation they will have. Competence is the feeling of being able to do something; counterintuitively, the more incompetent an individual
feels, the more likely they are to avoid a problem. Finally, relatedness is the ability to not feel isolated in a problem; the less isolated a person feels the more intrinsic motivation they will have. (“Motivating Students To Access Support Services In Higher Education: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective.”)

Making resources available online nurtures each of the three nutrients of intrinsic motivation. Having resources readily available to students will allow students to feel more in control of their own professional development experience, allowing the students to explore solutions on their own prior to seeking further guidance. Online resources also address the counterintuitive issue of competence. Students who feel incompetent about a topic require resources to become more competent, but if the students are less likely to seek help if they feel incompetent, it may be helpful to develop a less interactive way for these students to receive the help they need, without having to publicly seek the help of a professional development advisor at the Business Career Accelerator. Finally, relatedness can be formed through online communities of individuals utilizing the same resources. Instead of having a one-on-one appointment with an advisor to discuss individual career needs, having common topics available online is a subliminal reflection that other students are having the same questions, and that the student is not isolated in the problem. The concept of putting common resources online applies Self Determination Theory’s concept of developing intrinsic motivation to lead to higher goal commitment and goal achievement. The idea is also supported by Brodie Hausch, Senior Learning Developer at Root Inc., who’s opinion is that “meaningful e-learning is increasingly impactful if it is memorable, consumable, digestible, and actionable.” We further sought to refine this suggestion through a focus group to determine how the College of Business student market thought e-learning could be the most impactful.
The second tentative suggestion addresses the barrier to participation that students are uncertain of the resources that the Business Career Accelerator provides. Both student segments of the market were unclear on all the resources that are available to them at the Business Career Accelerator. This was also a gap in management’s understanding that believed that students would be aware of the resources available to them. After discussing this barrier to participation may have resulted from lack of student interaction with email campaigns or that resources are not communicated directly, the tentative recommendation was created to develop a marketing campaign in partnership with the Bowling Green State University Chapter of the American Marketing Association. The idea was to have a simple poster campaign that placed advertisements in the College of Business Administration Building demonstrating Business Career Accelerator resources that students would benefit from utilizing at each class level (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior). This suggestion is supported both by the findings of the in-depth interviews and an education concept centered on millennial engagement. The study found that 86% of millennials would prefer not to engage with an organization until the middle of their purchase process or later, and that interaction prior to the millennial client being ready can be off-putting, because they prefer to explore various solutions on their own before engaging a chosen organization. The concept also describes the high value millennials place on solutions that are referred to them through their personal networks (“Building Relationships With Millennials, One Life Stage At A Time.”). This suggestion seeks to address the low interaction rate that the student body currently has with e-mail campaigns organized by the Business Career Accelerator’s staff, by creating a more passive advertisement campaign to make students more aware of the resources available to them. The goal of the suggestion is to reduce the impact of being off-putting to a millennial audience by engaging them prior to the individual being ready
to communicate with the organization. By partnering with the American Marketing Association, the recommendations would be provided by a group of the markets peers as well, as opposed to management of the center. This may lead the student target market to place a higher value on the recommendations, because it would be a recommendation from a peer within their social network.

The third tentative participation recommendation seeks to address the barrier that students’ initial interactions with the Business Career Accelerator did not prompt significant student return. Feedback from in-depth interviews suggests students who first interacted with the Business Career Accelerator through the required resume review in their introductory business course were not inspired to return following the assignment, because after making corrections to their resumes, students did not see a reason to return. The tentative recommendation is to adapt the initial interaction with the Business Career Accelerator. The strategy here is to change the emphasis of the assignment away from just improving the student’s resume; and instead conduct a evaluation of the impact of activities the student is involved in, such as extracurriculars or part time employment, on their future employability. Students could also have a conversation with the Business Career Accelerator’s management on specific career goals that they have and actions that can be taken to assist in achieving those goals. The first part of this recommendation, to evaluate the impact of student activities on their future employability, is an application of the Jobs Demand Resources (JDR) Model. The model argues that students have several competing priorities that can help or hinder a student’s future employability. The model suggests categorizing the qualities of a job or activity into relevant activities that require energy and effort to manage, or demands, and activities which enable goal achievement, reduce demands, and provide opportunities for development, known as resources. The professional development
activities students engage in, can compete with, or enhance a student’s future employability and academic workload (Clements, Andrew James, and Caroline Kamau). Students would be able to understand the impact of their actions today on their future employability and would leave with an actionable career objective to achieve their future career goals after completing this exercise. The evaluation would also change as students become interested in more activities, which may inspire them to return to the Center for more guidance if the assignment was impactful.

The latter part of this recommendation, to set career goals and set steps students can take to achieve these goals, is in line with the education framework of Goal Setting Theory. Goal Setting Theory argues that people perform better when they have ‘high goals’ which are specific, challenging, and achievable. The theory also argues that goal commitment is higher in people who have not yet developed the skills to achieve their goals, and that people are more successful when they set goals to achieve success, rather than avoid failure (Clements, Andrew James, and Caroline Kamau). The framework suggests students would be successful by setting ‘high goals’ with the Business Career Accelerator during their initial meeting, by working to identify a specific career goal the student would seek to achieve in their four-year collegiate career at Bowling Green State University. These goals would be challenging, because the goal would be a long-term goal that the student would work towards during their time in college, yet the goals would be achievable, because the Business Career Accelerator would be able to provide steps and guidance toward achieving these goals. The timing of this meeting is important, as the meeting would need to occur prior to the student developing goal achievement skills to be most effective. The focus group was consulted about when the best time would be for a meeting like this to occur.
The fourth, and final, tentative recommendation seeks to address the barrier to participation that students often do not return to the Business Career Accelerator following their first internship. This behavior was identified with the “Utilitarian” segment of the market, whose usage behavior varied largely with what management anticipated students would use the Business Career Accelerator’s resources for throughout their collegiate career. Management of the Business Career Accelerator expects that this gap occur, because relationships are difficult to develop with limited staff and that their may be too strong of a cultural focus in the College of Business on obtaining an internship, as opposed to the importance of long term professional development. The tentative strategic recommendation to address this barrier is to require a post-internship review meeting with students to discuss their internship experience and future career path with the staff of the Business Career Accelerator. This strategic suggestion is supported by the education theory of Career Self-Efficacy, which involved a study of college students who participated in internship programs. The study showed that internships can often lead students to become even more uncertain of their career path, and when an internship is not the experience that the student anticipated the students form misconceptions of their industry and feel lost regarding their career path (Tsai, Chen-Tsang (Simon), et al. 2017). This study highlights the benefits that could result from a cultural shift in the College of Business, away from obtaining an internship experience, and more toward professional development skills and life-long learning.

Focus Group Feedback

After making tentative suggestions using education frameworks, theories, and concepts to address barriers to participation in professional development activities in the College of Business at Bowling Green State University, this study sought further input on these suggestions from a focus group of eight College of Business seniors using the below ‘Focus Group Discussion
The goal of the focus group was to get further input on the findings of the study, and to refine suggestions before presenting them to the Business Career Accelerator’s management. A focus group was conducted after participants completed a waiver (Appendix D). The main benefit of conducting a focus group, as opposed to another market research method, was that focus groups allow researchers to leverage group dynamics (McDaniel, Carl, and Roger H. Gates 2018). The adaptations made to the final research recommendations as a result of the focus group were thus a combination of ideas from student participants’ feedback.

The focus group confirmed our findings and understanding of the barriers to participation that were identified through the in-depth interview process. Student participants in the focus group noted having similar experiences to those identified as primary barriers to participation. The focus group participants provided valuable feedback on the first tentative suggestion to make resources available online. This feedback lead to an in-depth discussion of the benefits and drawbacks of different leaning format options available for online resources, including video, PowerPoint, voice overlays, links to examples, and split screen video options. The focus group findings supported the second initiative to establish a marketing campaign with the American Marketing Association, recalling that their experience was aligned with other students interviewed, in that they were also unaware of all the resources the Business Career Accelerator provides. The discussion on adapting the initial interaction with the Business Career Accelerator provided more information of when this adapted interaction would be held. Students seemed to be in agreement that the meeting would be most beneficial if it were held during the student’s sophomore year, in a business core class such as Business Communication. Students in the focus group found that this timing may be more beneficial to developing a career plan, because students would have completed their ‘Bowling Green Perspective’ courses, and be more focused
on developing their business acumen and career paths at this time. Finally, the fourth tentative strategic suggestion, to have a required post-internship review, was also heavily supported by the focus group. Student participants recalled their own internship experiences, some of which did not meet their expectations, and noted that this would have been a helpful resource to reevaluate their career path. The suggestions and feedback gathered from the focus group were utilized to adapt a finalized list of recommendations for management of the Business Career Accelerator.

Final Recommendations

Final strategic marketing recommendations to address the barriers to participation in professional development activities at the Business Career Accelerator at Bowling Green State University are as follows: (1) Make common resources available online utilizing a split screen video format, with half of the screen being an individual talking and the other half of the screen being an example. Provide links to examples for students to review themselves. (2) Develop a marketing campaign in partnership with the Bowling Green Chapter of the American Marketing Association. The campaign should be a simple poster campaign advertising resources available to students at each class level (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior). (3) Adapt the initial interaction with the Business Career Accelerator to evaluate students’ participation in extracurriculars and part-time employment on their future employability. Work with students to set career goals in this initial meeting and develop steps to reach these goals. This meeting should occur during students’ sophomore year in a business core class, such as business communication. (4) Require a post-internship review meeting for students that register their internship with the college. Focus on developing a career path post-internship, and long-term professional development skills, as opposed to obtaining internship experiences.
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Appendix A: In-Depth Interview Discussion Guide

1) When did you first learn about the business career accelerator?
2) How did you first learn about the business career accelerator?
3) When did you first go to the business career accelerator? Why?
4) What resources does the business career accelerator provide you? What do you wish they offered?
5) How often do you use the BCA resources?
6) How has your use of the BCA changed throughout your collegiate career?
7) How important is professional development to you on a scale of 1-10?
8) What professional development activities are you currently involved in? (Such as student organizations, events attended, additional things such as reading, podcasts, blogs, online)
9) How active are you in professional development activities on a scale of 1-10?
10) What is your current field of study?
11) What are you hoping to gain from the professional development activities you are involved in?
12) When did you first get an interest in professional development?
13) Have you experienced any pain points/things lacking/resources you wish you had to further your professional development?
14) Were there any people that were the most helpful to furthering your interest in professional development?
15) What other campus resources do you utilize? Outside resources?
16) Do you utilize any online resources for professional development activities? What resources? How often
Appendix B: Root Learning Center Interview Discussion Guide

1) What is your role at the Root Learning Center? Please describe your day-to-day role and responsibilities.
2) What is the Root Learning Center’s philosophy on the best way to educate business professionals?
3) How was this philosophy developed?
4) What methods does the Root Learning Center utilize when developing solutions for external clients?
5) Why are these methods utilized?
6) Which of these methods is the most effective when working with a large organization?
7) Why do you think these methods would be best for large organizations?
8) Has the Root Learning Center worked with large organizations to improve employees’ participation optional support services?
9) If yes, could you provide examples of solutions the Root Learning Center developed for organizations looking to make these changes?
10) What feedback have you received from these organizations on the impact of these solutions?
11) What common roadblocks to participation have your clients experienced when implementing your solutions?
12) What methods are used to overcome these roadblocks?
13) How does the Root Learning Center get feedback from external clients about the impact of your solutions?
14) Who is feedback collected from?
15) When is feedback collected?
16) How is this feedback used to adapt the solutions in the future?
Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Discussion Guide

1) When you think of professional development what do you think of? (Have participants write down answers, then get everyone to speak)

2) Through our research, we have discovered several barriers to participation in professional development activities. We would like your reaction to each of these issues.

   a. Students are unsure of the all resources the Business Career Accelerator provides. (Is this consistent with your personal experience?)
   b. Students feel their initial interaction with the Business Career Accelerator in BA 1500 is not helpful to their professional development, and does not prompt them to return to the center. (Is this consistent with your personal experience?)
   c. Students feel that going to the Business Career Accelerator takes a lot of time, can be intimidating, and that they would rather find resources on their own. (Is this consistent with your personal experience?)
   d. Students do not return to the Business Career Accelerator after obtaining their first internship experience, because they feel they have accomplished their career goals. (Is this consistent with your personal experience?)

3) We have four initiatives that we hope will increase student participation. We would like to get your feedback to each possible initiative.

   a. Establish a marketing campaign in partnership with the American Marketing Association. The marketing campaign will include a quantitative research study and a simple poster campaign in the College of Business. The poster campaign will have the goal of demonstrating resources available to students at each class level (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior). Do you think this would help students become more aware of resources available to them? Why?
   b. Adapt the initial interaction students have with the Business Career Accelerator in their BA 1500 class. The assignment would be adapted to evaluate the impact of student’s current employment and extracurricular involvement on their employability in a future career. Students will also have a discussion of their career goals with BCA management, and discuss specific actions that students can take to reach these goals. Do you think this would be more effective in sparking students’ interest in professional development? If not, what should be done? When should this initial interaction take place (during BA 1500 still or another course?)
   c. Making common Business Career Accelerator resources available online. Would you use it? Various formats were contemplated for these resources; which do you feel would be most effective (PowerPoint, video, etc.)?
   d. Require a post-internship review meeting with the Business Career Accelerator to assist in developing a career path after your internship experience. Do you feel this would be an effective way of helping students develop their involvement in professional development? If not, what should be done?
Appendix D: Focus Group Participant Waiver

College of Business, Business Career Accelerator (BCA) Qualitative Research Study on Student Involvement Participant Waiver

Purpose
This study investigates students’ attitudes about career professional development at Bowling Green State University and their participation in activities and services related to professional development. As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group and answer structured and open-ended questions. This study will take approximately 20 minutes.

Participants’ Rights
I understand that my responses will be kept in confidence and will be available to the researchers and the Honors College at Bowling Green State University. No one will be able to identify me when the results are reported and my name will not appear anywhere in the written report. I also understand that I may skip any questions or tasks that I do not wish to answer or complete. I may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time during the study without penalty. I agree to have my verbal responses video-recorded and transcribed for further analysis with the understanding that my responses will not be linked to me personally in any way. I understand that I am participating in a study of my own free will.

Consent to Participate
I acknowledge that I am at least eighteen years old, and that I understand my rights as a research participant as outlined above. I acknowledge that my participation is fully voluntary.

Print Name: _____________________________________

Signature: ______________________________________ Date: _____________
### Appendix E: Summary of In-Depth Interview and Management Validity Check Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Segment A “Utilitarian” Response</th>
<th>Segment B “Continual Users” Response</th>
<th>BCA Hypothesis Response</th>
<th>Differences/Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **When did you first hear about the Business Career Accelerator?**       | “When I started freshman year, intro business classes.”                                       | “When I switched to the business college.”                                                      |                         | - Students discovery the BCA later than expected  
- Students are given a lot of information at orientation that may not be maintained                                               |
| **How did you first learn about the Business Career Accelerator?**       | “Word of mouth and posters.”                                                                  | “Some of my first business classes and word of mouth.”                                        |                         | - Good to know signage is getting students’ attention  
- BCA employees go into classes when requested, but do not ask to go into classes due to lack of time and resources                       |
| **When did you first go to the Business Career Accelerator? Why?**       | “The job fair was approaching and I needed help perfecting my resume/interview; help that I wasn’t getting in my intro classes and couldn’t find anywhere else.” | “I first went to discuss my career options. I was still figuring out what I wanted to do and wanted some help figuring that out.” |                         | - The job expo is definitely a main reason students stop into the office  
- Feel too much emphasis is being placed on job expo  
- How do we maintain people stopping in for expo help to use other resources? Do they continue using services or stop after expo? |
| **What resources does the Business Career Accelerator provide you?**     | “Help with getting jobs and internships. They help me get things done and get jobs easier.”     | “A guiding resource that I can go to with questions about how I can make myself more competitive. Help with my job-related skillset.” |                         | - Definitely see both types of students come into the office  
- Nice to see that relationships are driving target market, but have staff/resource concerns that these relationships can’t be maintained  
- How can we maintain these relationships without people?                                                                 |
<p>| <strong>How often do you use Business Career Accelerator resources?</strong>         | “I went for help with my resume freshman year, but I haven’t been”                            | “At least once per week when I have questions. I attend events”                                 |                         | - If the BCA helps students to get their job or internship, and they do not come back, at least they had some positive impact and that’s okay   |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How has your use of the Business Career Accelerator changed throughout your collegiate career?</td>
<td>“I went to the career accelerator to perfect the tools I needed to get a job/internship. Now that I have a job/internship I use the services infrequently, but I attend events if they work with my schedule, I think they could be useful.” &quot;I first started going to the BCA when I was trying to figure out a career path. Then, I perfected my resume/interview skills, and attended events when they worked with my schedule. Now, I go to Tom with specific questions when needed.” Start with resume, written communication, then interview, job offer negotiation and contracts. - Timing is important for their visit - If students have a lot of questions, they are headed in the right direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is professional development to you on a scale of 1-10?</td>
<td>Average= 9.4 Average= 10 7 or 8 - Surprisingly high importance level - Consider these are more involved students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What professional development activities are you currently involved in?</td>
<td>“Working part time/has an internship, organization related to career path, attends university events, online forums and videos” “Holds internship, high involvement with campus activities, some other strong leadership skillset (such as military, student organization leader, etc.), online videos” Professional organizations, workshops, employer spotlights, department events - Thought more about extracurricular activities and less of work experience - Not surprised students are involved online, but BCA has held online seminars with low participation don’t know why - Feels previous online workshops were not visually stimulating to viewers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How active are you in professional development activities on a scale of 1-10?</td>
<td>Average= 7 Average= 8 7 or 8 - Matched up - Every student felt they could be doing more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current field of study?</td>
<td>Two sales, one marketing, two accounting One outside college of business, two supply chain, two accounting N/A - BCA services mostly CoB students, but students from other majors are sometimes referred by business students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are you hoping to gain from the professional development activities you are currently involved in?</td>
<td>&quot;A job or internship&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When did you first gain an interest in professional development?</td>
<td>&quot;High school, but accelerated when I came to college&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you experience any pain points/things lacking/resources you wish you had?</td>
<td>&quot;Students aren’t guided to resources; they have to be sought out. Professional development is viewed as ‘something extra’ and going above and beyond when it should be the main focus.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Students seem more concerned with the advertising/awareness of resources than the resources themselves - How do we improve awareness and make resources more transparent? - Talked about student social media activity, who’s reading the emails, how we are reaching people
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Tom</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Were there any people that were particularly important in assisting with your professional growth?</td>
<td>“Individual mentors and Kirk Kern”</td>
<td>“Tom, Kirk Kern, Advisors”</td>
<td>- Why is Kirk Kern a pattern for all these students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Kirk was cited as an inspiration/motivating force for switching to business; teaches a class that reaches all colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- How can we utilize Kirk Kern to promote via word of mouth and reach more of target market?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other resources do you utilize for professional development activities?</td>
<td>“Jobs and internships, online resources”</td>
<td>“Leadership opportunities offered through student organizations, company visits, networking events</td>
<td>- Surprised nobody mentioned the career center</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HONORS PROJECT OVERVIEW

REQUIREMENTS
- Original scholarship
- Include justification of theory/method
- Interdisciplinary Study
- Either research-based, creative, or applied
- Assist student's major or college

EXECUTION
- Exploratory, qualitative research study
- Investigates College of Business student's involvement in Business Career Accelerator
- Combines Education College and Business College methods
- Recommendations goal to improve student participation in career resources

RESEARCH STUDY METHOD

Problem Definition
- Maintaining and increasing student participation in BCA
- Drive for quality and satisfaction and importance of customer retention

Research Objectives
- Understanding students' attitudes toward personal participation in career professional development activities and services

Research Design
- Exploratory
- Descriptive

Research Method
- Qualitative
- Understand motivations
- Less structured
- Cheaper
- Faster
- Drawbacks
- Weak generalizability
- Does not distinguish small differences
**RESEARCH STUDY METHOD (CONT.)**

**Sampling**
- Convenience sample of five BGSU College of Business Students
- Various specializations
- Unspecified usage habits
- Quote sample of five heavy users of BCA
- Identified by BCA management
- Various specializations

**Data Collection and Analysis**
- In-depth interviews conducted
- Established typical customer profiles
- Identified barriers to participation
- Conducted validity check with management
- Interviewed Education College faculty
- Interviewed Rite Inc.

**Presentation of Results**
- Established suggestions to participation barriers
- Presented suggestions to focus group
- Adapted suggestions

**Follow Up**
- Presentation to class
- Presentation of final recommendations to BCA management for implementation

---

**IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE**

1. When did you first learn about the business career accelerator?
2. How did you first learn about the business career accelerator?
3. When did you first go to the business career accelerator? Why?
4. What resources does the business career accelerator provide? What do you wish they offered?
5. How often do you use the BCA resources?
6. How has your use of the BCA changed throughout your collegiate career?
7. How important is professional development to you on a scale of 1-10?
8. What professional development activities are you currently involved in? (Such as student organizations, events attended, additional things such as reading, podcasts, blogs, online)
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13. How have you experienced any pain points/thing lacking resources you wish you had to further your professional development?
14. Were there any people that were the most helpful in furthering your interest in professional development?
15. What other campus resources do you utilize? Distinctive resources?
16. Do you utilize any online resources for professional development activities? What resources? How often?
IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

- Conducted to research answers to research objectives one, two, and three
- Probe and elicit detailed answers to questions
- Advantages
  - Group pressures were eliminated
  - Respondent was focus of attention
  - Encourages revelation of new information
  - Easier to improve in a new direction
  - Better nonverbal feedback
- Drawbacks
  - More time consuming
  - Inability to leverage group dynamics
  - Less client involvement from BCA management

(McDaniel, Carl, and Roger H. Gates 2018)

MARKET SEGMENTS

SEGMENT I: “UTILITARIAN”
- Went to the BCA freshman year through introductory business course
- Thinks BCA helps with getting jobs and internships easier
- Hasn’t been back after securing their first internship
- Professional development very important (9.4/10)
- Pain points:
  - Feels students aren’t guided to resources and they must be sought out
  - Thinks professional development is thought of as an extra responsibility and “going alone and beyond”

SEGMENT II: “CONTINUOUS LEARNERS”
- First went to BCA when they switched into the CoB
- Thinks of BCA as a guiding resource/answers questions
- Continues to go at least once per week
- Professional development is very important (10/10)
- Pain points:
  - Resources aren’t explicitly advertised
  - Networking with other students and making friends is difficult
  - More resources should be available online
MANAGEMENT'S PERCEPTUAL GAPS

Management's Perceptions

- Students first go to BCA from faculty referrals and FIT certification
- Students understand how BCA resources can assist them
- Student usage starts with resume help, then writing communication help, job offer negotiation, and contracts
- Students think professional development is moderately important
- Students become interested in professional development during second or third year of college

Gap (Management vs. Students)

- Students go to BCA to figure out career path
- Students are unaware of all resources the BCA offers
- Students cite using BCA for resume help and not returning after obtaining first internship
- Students think professional development is very important
- Students become interested in professional development in high school or start of college

Reason For Gap

- Students seek more resources on their own
- Resources may not be communicated directly, low interaction with faculty
- Relationships may be hard to develop with BCA staff too busy with focus on obtaining internships
- Management may not understand student involvement in professional development outside BCA
- Job seeking behavior is not clear to management until late in college career

MAIN BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

- Students feel that going to the BCA takes too much time and is intimidating, they would rather seek resources on their own
- Students are unsure of all the resources the BCA provides
- Students initial interaction with the BCA does not prompt return
- Students do not return to BCA after their first internship experience
RECOMMENDATIONS TO BCA MANAGEMENT

MAKE RESOURCES AVAILABLE ONLINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students feel that going to the BCA takes too much time and is intimidating, they would rather seek resources on their own.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make common BCA resources available online</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Framework: Self Determination Theory</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People have either intrinsic or extrinsic motivational needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic—based on values and passions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsics—based on rewards, status, grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturants of intrinsic motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety—less control of situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence—more competent, more likely to avoid problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy—not feeling isolated in problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Root Inc.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful e-learning is impactful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a method is not memorable, consumable, digestible, and actionable it is unsuccessful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Change Starts Here.”

“Motivating Students To Access Support Services In Higher Education: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective.”
MARKETING CAMPAIGN IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AMA

**Issue**
- Students are unsure of all the resources the BCA provides

**Suggestion**
- Marketing campaign in partnership with the American Marketing Association
- Simple poster campaign in the College of Business
- Demonstrate resources available to students at each class level (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior)

**Education Framework: Millennial Engagement**
- 86% of Millennials do not want to engage until middle of buying process or later
- Interaction prior to need can be off-putting for prospects
- Would rather explore various solutions on their own
- Millennials want to engage with you only when they're ready first
- High value on personal relationships with vendors and solutions referred to them through their personal networks

"Building Relationships With Millennials, One Step At A Time."

ADAPT INITIAL INTERACTION WITH BCA

**Issue**
- Initial interaction with BCA does not prompt return

**Suggestion**
- Adapt initial interaction students have with BCA in their freshman year
- Evaluate impact of student's current employment/ extracurricular involvement on their employability
- Identify career goals with BCA management and specific actions to reach these goals

**Education Framework: OR Model**
- University students have several competing demands
- Commitments can help or hinder students' future employability
- Treat job characteristics as demands or resources
- Demands require energy and effort to manage
- Resources enable goal achievement; reduce demands, or provide opportunities for personal development
- Academic and employment workloads compete with or enhance their engagement in proactive career behaviors

**Education Framework: Goal Setting Theory**
- People perform better when they have 'high goals' (Specific, Challenging, Achievable)
- Goal commitment higher for learning goals where individual has undeveloped skills
- People who believe they are capable will try harder to succeed
- People set goals to seek success and avoid failure

(Clements, Andrew James, and Caroline Kamao)
REQUIRED POST-INTERNSHIP REVIEW

Issue
- Students do not return to BCA after their first internship experience

Suggestion
- Require a post-internship review meeting with the Business Career Accelerator
- Assist in developing a career path after your internship experience

Education Framework: Career Self-Efficacy
- Studies indicate intern experience can cause students to become uncertain of career path
- Interns discover work experience is the opposite of what they expected
- Interns form misconceptions about the industry and feel lost regarding their career paths

(Tsai, Chie-Tsang (Simon), et al. 2017)

Focus Group Feedback

- Goal—get further input and refine suggestions
- Went through each recommendation and recorded feedback on each
- Impactful feedback:
  - Conversation on benefits/drawbacks of online resource formats
  - Consistent uncertainty about resources available
  - Concerns faculty do not have resources to provide individualized approach
ADAPTED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

Make Resources Available Online
- Split screen video
- Half-screen individual talking
- Half-screen example
- Links to examples
- Help audio and visual learners

Marketing Campaign with AMA
- Strong agreement this would be helpful
- "Yes this would make research more clear"
- "Would be helpful to have resources separated by class"

Adapting Initial Interaction
- "I dislike individualized assessments"
- Make assignment in BA 2030
- Freshmen year is too soon
- Resume help needs to be kept current

Required Post-Internship Review
- "This would help me. I didn't enjoy my internship experience"
- "This would help me get a job I like more."
- "Provides more clarity for my career path."
- "Helpful if not hired full-time by company post-internship."

PRESENTATION/FINAL REPORT

Gathered statistical data from class feedback

Incorporates development of idea, methods, findings, and results

Finalized report 25+ pages

(Honors Project Handbook 2018 pdf, 7-12)
CONCLUSION/QUESTIONS

Thank you!

SOURCES