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UPPER-DIVISION BUSINESS MAJORS AND LOWER-DIVISION NON-BUSINESS MAJORS: A COMPARISON OF CAREER DESIRES, EXPECTATIONS AND CONFIDENCE

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Upper-Division Business Majors and Lower-Division Non-Business Majors: A comparison of career desires, expectations and confidence

ABSTRACT

In this study, we surveyed upper-division business majors (management and accounting) participating in their senior capstone class and lower-division (freshman and sophomores) students participating in an introduction to business survey course.

The students were asked to describe their knowledge of the current employment outlook for university graduates and their expectation that they will be able to secure employment in a field directly related to their major, whatever that might be. They were also asked whether they felt they had received or expect to receive value in relation to the cost of their university studies. Lastly, all were asked to rank order a list of career and/or job elements in importance to themselves personally. For the item most important they were to rank it as 1, for the next most important to rank it as 2, and so on through nine items. The nine elements, given in no particular order, were working conditions, quality of co-workers, salary, benefits, location of job, level of challenge and responsibility, advancement opportunities, job security and, lastly, job title.

Analysis of the survey revealed that the business majors, close to graduating, were significantly more aware of the current employment situation for university graduates than were the lower-division students who still had several more years of study ahead although both groups underestimate the unemployment rate of recent university graduates. This misunderstanding of the actual unemployment rate for recent university graduates may explain the students' optimism that they will find jobs in their major field of study. Fully 93% of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I am confident I will find a job related to my major."

Business majors reported by a margin of 74% to 26% they had received or expect to receive value that compared favorably to the cost of their university studies. Non-business majors agreed with this statement only 46% of the time with 54% disagreeing.

It was no surprise that salary was the highest ranked job element in the survey for both business and non-business majors with both groups of students selecting this as the most important at the same percentage rate of 32%. Similarly, benefits, working conditions and relationship to co-workers showed no significant difference in importance to the two groups. Interestingly, business majors were seven times more likely to emphasize the importance of job location than were non-business majors. Advancement opportunities were also significantly more important to business majors than non-business majors while job security, in contrast, was twice as important to non-business majors as business majors. A surprising finding; a challenging and responsible job was ranked as important by significantly more non-business majors than business majors. Finally, also no surprise, job title was ranked as least important by both groups.

The findings extend our understanding of how university students perceive their job opportunities, the value of their higher education, and what they seek in a career.

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