



Summary of Comments from DETC Fall Workshop Session
Led by Ron Gregory,
October 15, 2012

The reason for the session was to share tips and techniques for selecting academic programs that are more likely to be successful in a competitive market. The session focused on the front-end marketability of the program or courses, and the backend employability of its graduates.

The session began with a presentation by Ron Gregory on the topic and subject matter: **How to select winning academic programs for development in a competitive market.** For a copy of his PowerPoint presentation in PDF format, complete with live, helpful links to online research resources, just [click here to retrieve it.](#)

Ron prefaced the presentation with a comment: Sometimes it's easier to develop a program that is closely related to an institution's current programs or curricula. However, that doesn't always assure a new program's **success with enrollment of prospective students, or placements in the job market for graduates of the program.** Instead, it would be better long term to develop programs that add to the institution's success on several fronts, regardless of their immediate relevance to current curricula – while also taking into account the advantages of developing related programs.

For all program selection decisions, Ron recommended following a procedure that judges the odds of the potential program to be successful in the areas of marketability and employability. The consequences of developing a failing program on these factors, versus the rewards of developing a successful program, were presented. When these are considered, the importance of "looking before you leap" is magnified.

A suggested selection procedure was suggested, along with tips and techniques for following each step, especially in the key area of marketing research.

During and following the presentation portion of the session, the floor was opened up to discussion of various relevant points, and Ron asked for a show of hands on a few questions.

- One of these questions concerned how many attendees considered the marketability of new programs to be developed; about two thirds of the hands went up.
- Another question asked how many schools considered the employability of graduates before developing a new program; only a few hands went up.
- A third question asked of the attendees asked if their institution already had, or planned to develop, a career services function for the benefit of their graduates; about a third of the hands went up.

A summary of the comments made by the attendees follows, grouped by topic area:

- Discussion about what makes a course “great” – financial, academic, marketability, employability of grads, or otherwise?
 - The question was raised: Do great programs attract more qualified students? While this is not always true, in the context of success as defined by the presentation, this is a given. There is some circular logic here: Great programs are partly, though not completely, defined by their attraction of more qualified students. However, this attraction in turn contributes to higher inquiry conversion rates, revenues and profit, retention, and graduation rates.
 - While there are a number of ways to measure success, Ron chose to focus on the front end of the program (“enrollment” success) and what happens after a student completes a program (“placement” or “promotability” success.) These are key factors in the financial and marketing success of the institution and are often underweighted in selecting new programs to develop.
- John Curcio of Apollos University said they are building new programs that are not related to their current programs, including some in the medical and allied health areas.
- Charli Hislop of Allied American University said they have career services for their programs, with one full-time staff person assisting students and graduates. (See their online career center page for the University by [clicking here](#). They also offer a number of articles with tips and techniques for a job search on their vocational site. [Click here.](#))
- Charli also said that military spouses are a big focus for program planning in the vocational areas. For this market, they develop programs that allow graduates to work in “portable” jobs. These spouses are then able to find a job more easily when a military assignment requires their families to move to a different area.
- Cristina Espinoza-Alguera of Innova College said they are developing courses on management of not-for-profit organizations and also for entrepreneurial businesses. These new program concepts were selected after they conducted roundtables with a cross section of employers. Previously, they also held round tables four times a year with knowledgeable professionals in the industries of finance, hospitality, and technology. These roundtables helped them define new programs to develop, based on what skills were needed in those fields.
- Cristina also spoke about what they call the “nurturing stage” of a prospective student. During this period, the school tries to make sure these prospects are right for their school. Over 21 days, they send out seven emails with information and details about the college and their program of interest. Some of these messages contain a link to view the recorded roundtable session that relates to each prospect’s program of interest. This allows these inquirers to learn more about the skills needed and type of jobs that are available now – from an unbiased, industry source.

- Cristina also described another process which adds to the success of their retention and graduate rates. Once an Innova student nears the completion of their associate-level courses, they are assigned a counselor who has them take a Myers-Briggs profile, along with certain other evaluations. These are used to assess the odds of the student's success in the program or major of their choice – if they are suited to that area and have a passion for what they want to do with their degree. The counselor will encourage them to consider another major or emphasis within the major, if the student doesn't seem suited for their original choice.
- Daryl Fisher-Ogden of Abraham Lincoln University stated that they are developing an online, multimedia course that will be available to seniors, which covers various aspects of career prep and job search.
- Charli of Allied American said that they develop courses to prep students for various industry certification exams, which, when passed, add credentials for increased career prospects in the field. Certain other schools offer programs that align with industry certification program curricula. These include, for example:
 - Columbia Southern University, whose Bachelor of Science in Human Resource Management aligns with SHRM's HR Curriculum Guidebook and Templates.
 - American Graduate University's Master for Project Management, which parallels PMI's PMBOK Guide, and moves beyond the PMP curricula, to provide theoretical underpinning behind the field of project management.
- There was a lively discussion about certificates:
 - One attendee pointed out that certificates are part of the lifelong learning approach.
 - John Riser of Ashworth College said that certificates allow their students preliminary exploration of the degree they want to pursue, by first completing three or four courses in that discipline as a certificate program. The Ashworth student may choose from a menu of certain course choices to make up their own, custom certificate program. Then if they choose to complete the degree, their certificate courses are credited toward that degree.
 - Ron brought up a point that there is a growing trend with students picking and choosing what courses they want to take, and from different institutions. Essentially, they are beginning to build their own learning plan for a targeted career. They may finish some courses from one school, a certificate program from another school, and then transfer all these credits to a third school, where they complete a degree program. His conclusion was that the days are over when a school can breathe easily, once they've enrolled and started a new student. That student may be using their program as just a stepping stone to a self-selected, customized education.