
Graduate-Level Education: A Survey of Stakeholders

As part of the redesign of Cornell's professional master's degree program, people with an interest in graduate business education were surveyed about the skills they consider important for career success

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THE GRADUATE-FACULTY members of the School of Hotel Administration at Cornell University initiated a survey to help them evaluate the curriculum and pedagogy of the school's professional master's degree program. Stakeholders in the program—people who have an interest in graduate-level business education and, indirectly, in the success of graduates—were surveyed. They were hospitality-industry senior-level professionals, M.P.S. alumni, the school's graduate-faculty

members, and students entering the program in 1992. The faculty felt that by understanding those perspectives, it could better identify, articulate, and implement those elements that would enhance the probability of success of the graduates.

Objectives

The study had four objectives. The first was to find out what skills and competencies senior hospitality-industry professionals and M.P.S. alumni considered important for success in their organizations.* The focus was on identifying the skills that were perceived to be most important, useful, and

critical when hiring a person with a graduate degree. It was felt that managers, senior executives, and M.P.S. graduates in the hospitality industry would know what skills and competencies hotel-school master's-level graduates should have. Their views thus represent "what should be."

The second objective was to find out what skills and competencies the graduate-

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* M.P.S. refers to Cornell's Master of Professional Studies degree.

faculty members consider most important in designing and conducting their courses. The survey revealed which skills are currently addressed by the faculty members in their classes and thus reflects what the faculty members think are the most important skills and competencies for success. The assumption is that faculty members teach what they consider important for success. Their views, therefore, represent "what is."

The third objective was to gain insight into the incoming M.P.S. students' expectations about their education. That information provides insight into what they consider important in a graduate education. Given these individuals' decision processes to attend Cornell, their views might represent "what is expected."

The fourth objective was to explore both the agreements and differences among the views of the different stakeholders (i.e., alumni, industry representatives, faculty, and students). We compared the views of people who hire our graduates (those who "buy" the graduates' skills and knowledge, as it were) with the views of the faculty responsible for preparing the students, and we compared the views of the faculty with those of the students. The gaps (i.e., the differences) provide a basis for discussion about how graduate-level hospitality education fits with the industry's needs and requirements, and can serve as a guide for developing a successful master's program.

Methodology

The research design was adapted from a study conducted for the benefit of the M.B.A. program at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University.¹ A card-sort methodology, in which respondents group and rank a list of skills and competencies, was used.

Instrument design. The study was developed and administered specifically for Cornell's School of Hotel Administration.

¹Richard E. Boyatzis, Scott S. Cowen, and David A. Kolb, "Curricular Innovation in Higher Education: The New Weatherhead MBA Program," *Selections* (the magazine of the Graduate Management Admission Council), XIII, No. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 27-37.

EXHIBIT 1

Response rate for each survey group

GROUP:	SURVEYS MAILED	SURVEYS RETURNED	RESPONSE RATE
Industry Professionals	106	67	63%
Cornell M.P.S. Alumni	98	43	44%
Incoming M.P.S. Candidates	61	37	61%
Cornell's Graduate Faculty	25	21	84%
Totals:	290	168	58%

The card-sort portion of the study was adapted from the Case Western study with the addition of hospitality-industry-specific skill items. Other items were solicited from members of the graduate-faculty committee. All together, 110 skills were assembled.

Using M.P.S. students for a pretest, we found that the sorting task was too long for respondents to complete with interest and accuracy. We therefore grouped the 110 skills into categories and eliminated redundant skills, bringing the set down to 54. We wanted respondents to be able to finish the task in 15 minutes, before boredom set in (we assumed boredom would reduce both the response rate and the truthfulness of responses actually obtained). We conducted a second pretest with student and faculty volunteers to ensure that the wording was unambiguous and the time goal could be met.

We gave each of the four different groups response categories that reflected their perspective. The industry and alumni respondents rated skills from 1 ("least important, least essential, and least useful" for people with master's degrees to succeed in the organization) to 5 ("most important, very useful, and most essential").

The faculty members sorted skills into categories ranging from 1 ("not addressed or not applicable in designing and conducting my class") to 5 ("of primary importance to me in designing and conducting my class").

The incoming M.P.S. students sorted items into groups ranging from 1 ("not important for a successful career and not a part of the formal education process") to 5 ("of primary importance in my education for a successful career").

Sample selection. We drew the industry sample from a variety of lists, including guest speakers at the school, recruiters, participants in executive-development programs, and names provided by the faculty. The sample included people from companies in different service industries that are known to hire Cornell graduates and people from companies in segments of the hospitality industry in which Cornell graduates are underrepresented, such as cruise ships, airlines, and suppliers of products to the hospitality industry. Among all the people in our sample, there was great variety regarding their titles and their operating responsibilities within their organizations. While the sample was stratified using the criteria noted above, it was a convenience sample.

The faculty group included all members of the graduate faculty and other faculty members who taught graduate courses.

All members of 1992's incoming M.P.S. class received the student survey.

Response rate. To increase the response rate, we contacted all industry individuals on the initial list (153) by phone to request participation. Six refused, and 41 did not respond. In June we mailed survey kits to the remaining 106 people.

We drew the alumni sample of 98 randomly from a list provided by the alumni office. We checked the alumni participants against the industry sample to avoid duplications. We mailed survey kits in May.

The 25 faculty members teaching graduate courses were given a survey kit at a faculty meeting in May 1992. We sent all 61 incoming M.P.S. students a survey kit in July. A total of 168 people responded—a response rate of 58 percent (Exhibit 1).

EXHIBIT 2

The most-important and least-important skills reported by each group

Industry and alumni combined (average scores)

Most important

Acting in an ethical manner	4.48
Taking a leadership position	4.35
Communicating with clients, customers	4.28
Working as a member of a team	4.25
Identifying and defining problems	4.23
Organizing and writing skills	4.21
Inspiring and motivating others	4.17
Seeing how things fit in the big picture	4.16
Making decisions under time pressure and with limited resources	4.15
Adapting to changing circumstances	4.10
Being objective, viewing issues from many perspectives	4.07
Persuading others	4.00

Least important

Developing personal relationship networks for sharing or receiving information	3.21
Being aware of social protocol & etiquette	3.21
Building conceptual models & thinking	3.17
Being sensitive to societal & environmental concerns & issues	3.08
Developing and implementing training programs	3.06
Creating management info & planning programs	2.93
Translating special technical information into practical, understandable reports	2.93
Being aware of the current knowledge in the academic and professional literature	2.88
Using statistical/mathematical models to analyze data	2.75
Designing & conducting research projects	2.43
Developing culinary skills, knowledge	1.70

	RANKINGS BY GROUP		
	IND./ALUMNI	FACULTY	STUDENTS
	1	4	46
	2	11	12
	3	25	10
	4	32	34
	5	1	3
	6	8	11
	7	10	20
	8	15	32
	9	18	26
	10	19	41
	11	6	38
	12	46	37
	44	41	42
	45	53	45
	46	2	27
	47	29	49
	48	49	25
	49	48	23
	50	21	30
	51	3	33
	52	39	13
	53	42	22
	54	54	47

Respondent profile. The average age of the industry respondents was 41 years and members of that group ($n = 67$) reported an average of 13 years' work experience. The alumni group ($n = 43$) was similar to the industry group (care was taken to avoid any overlap): the alumni's average age was 36 and their years of work experience averaged 9. Because there was no statistically significant difference between the alumni and the industry groups on dimensions of importance, they were combined for the majority of the analyses. When we combined the alumni group with the industry leaders, we obtained a composite average profile of 37 years of age and 10 years of experience for those 110 individuals.

Almost 50 percent of the combined industry-alumni sample were vice presidents or higher, people in a position to influence hiring decisions. We did an analysis to ascertain whether there were any differences in the skill choices among the responses of those holding positions of VP and above and all others. We found no statistically significant difference, indicating that the chosen "success skills" were the same at all levels. Hence we conducted no additional analyses based on position.

A breakdown of the industry-alumni sample by segment of the hospitality industry reveals a dominance by the lodging and food-service segments, as one might expect. The sample sizes for the various segments are as follows: lodging, 39; food and beverage, 26; finance experts,

developers, and consultants, 13; resorts and cruise lines, 9; suppliers, 5; airlines, 3; and "other" (including association professionals and those who gave no indication of their field), 15.

Caveats

It's important to keep in mind that this was a survey of *stakeholders*—individuals with some interest in or knowledge of the Cornell University hotel school. Querying such an audience may have limited usefulness to a larger population, although with respect to the industry sample we were careful to reach individuals who (1) represented different industry segments, (2) had different occupational titles, (3) did not graduate from Cornell, and (4) held senior-level positions in many cases.

Faculty (average scores)**Most important**

Identifying and defining problems	4.67
Building conceptual models, conceptual thinking	4.62
Being aware of the current knowledge in the academic and professional literature	4.48
Acting in an ethical manner	4.33
Dealing with unpredictable and uncertain situations	4.24
Being objective, viewing issues from many perspectives	4.24
Reading and understanding business information	4.19
Organizing and writing skills	4.19
Making decisions under conditions of risk & uncertainty	4.19
Inspiring and motivating others	4.19
Taking a leadership position	4.05
Organizing large amounts of info into meaningful patterns	4.05
Forecasting future trends	4.05
Establishing criteria for work quality & work standards	4.05
Seeing how things fit in the big picture	4.00
Evaluating results against goals	4.00

Least important

Managing a diverse work force	2.86
Persuading others	2.67
Understanding the reasons for conflict or disagreement	2.67
Creating management information & planning programs	2.67
Developing and implementing training programs	2.57
Negotiating	2.52
Balancing professional & personal interests, needs, goals	2.52
Balancing work and family	2.52
Being aware of social protocol and etiquette	2.43
Developing culinary skills, knowledge	1.67

Incoming MPS students (average scores)**Most important**

Forecasting future trends	4.62
Managing and leading group processes	4.51
Identifying and defining problems	4.46
Negotiating	4.41
Using financial analysis techniques	4.32
Operating budgetary control systems	4.32
Directing and supervising the work of others	4.30
Developing systems to monitor & manage customer satisfaction	4.30
Selecting & assigning personnel and allocating resources	4.27
Communicating with clients and customers	4.27
Organizing and writing skills	4.24
Taking a leadership position	4.22

Least important

Being aware of and understanding yourself, assessing yourself accurately	3.30
Being aware of social protocol and etiquette	3.27
Acting in an ethical manner	3.27
Developing culinary skills, knowledge	3.14
Having positive regard, cooperative, optimistic and appreciative attitude toward others	3.11
Being sensitive to societal & environmental issues	3.08
Being sensitive to persons of other social, cultural, racial and ethnic groups	3.08
Being sensitive to minorities and women	3.03
Balancing work and family	2.76
Balancing professional & personal interests, needs, goals	2.62
Understanding & being influenced by others' feelings	2.57

Furthermore, no survey will tell what curriculum and teaching methods will lead to career success for the graduate of a master's program. The issue is too complex, with various factors interacting in ways that are difficult to identify and understand. The goal of this study was to identify issues that should be addressed by the faculty and to uncover contradictory beliefs among the important stakeholders. The data should be used to spark dialogue, debate, and reexamination of what hospitality education does and what it should do to produce excellent graduates.

Results

It is best to think of the results as providing direction for discussion, not definitive statements of changes that should be made.

We support no point of view; we merely suggest areas worth exploring and point to directions where answers may be found.

Preliminary analysis. First, we computed the mean scores for each of the 54 variables within each stakeholder group.

The scores ranged from 1.67 to 4.67 (1 = least important, 5 = most important). A high score signifies a skill that is important to the respondent. Using a mean value of 4.00 as an arbitrary cutoff, we found that the incoming students placed 26 skills in the "important" (4) and "most-important" (5) categories, the faculty sorted 16 skills as "important" and "most-important," and the industry group listed 12 skills at "4.00" or above. The three lists had several similar items. Worthy of mention is the large number of skills in each of the groups with

high standard deviations, suggesting some diversity of opinions. There was no apparent systematic pattern to the skills with the high standard deviations that permitted any precise themes to emerge.

Comparison of most-important skills. Exhibit 2 shows the most-important and least-important skills for each group and compares the faculty and student ratings to the combined industry-alumni group.

The industry-alumni group valued interpersonal skills and competency variables that reflect a get-things-done or team philosophy necessary to succeed in a corporate environment. Those are the skills (e.g., teamwork and adaptability) that are necessary for making effective decisions and leading people to achieve a goal in an organization.

After the Stakeholder Survey

The Cornell Hotel School's graduate faculty will introduce a completely redesigned professional master's program in Fall 1994, following three years of planning and development. The new program was developed after in-depth internal and external reviews, including the stakeholder survey described in the accompanying article.

The new program's mission is to develop leaders for the international hospitality industry by educating students to have a broad, strategic orientation; be competent in using business and industry skills and concepts; and excel in implementation.

As associate dean for academic affairs Michael H. Redlin describes it: "Our new program will produce graduates whose knowledge will make them competitive with any top professional-management graduate program, but they will truly shine in their ability to implement their visions and decisions."

The stakeholder survey and other research produced seven key themes that form the foundation of the new program:

- Strategic orientation, or the ability to see the "Big Picture";
- Communications ability;
- Management style, particularly working as teams;
- Leadership skills (i.e., the ability to persuade, motivate and encourage);
- Analytical ability and sufficient mastery of technical skills and industry concepts to couple knowledge with excellence in implementation;
- Ethical awareness; and
- International scope.

The new program begins with rigorous candidate selection and continues with individual student assessments over the full two years. The assessment process begins before the students enter the program, at which point their strengths and weaknesses are evaluated and their programs are adjusted accordingly. The students' career goals and interests are also assessed and incorporated into a customized program of study. Additionally, they are matched with a faculty adviser who will work with them throughout the two years to guide their program of study right through and including job placement.

The graduate faculty is developing completely new courses that will cover all critical technical and analytical skills, while the key themes of the program are emphasized. All courses are integrated, many are interdisciplinary, and several are team-taught. Woven through all courses will be a communications component to provide

instruction and coaching for the improvement of communications ability and opportunities to practice professional reports and presentations.

To enhance the students' capability for implementation, the program includes two major experiential elements. In the first semester, a team experience will be used to acclimate students to working in groups and to enhance their critical skills in team building, team effectiveness, and assessment of performance.

A group project is scheduled at the end of the second semester. It is a major on-site consulting assignment for an existing hospitality operation or project under development. The project is an actual assignment, including presentations made to sponsors, which makes Cornell's program truly innovative among professional management programs. It creates a unique opportunity for students to practice and hone their management and leadership skills in an actual hospitality-industry setting rather than in an academic one.

Another ground-breaking feature of the new program is the industry-residency program. Following the assessment, each student will be matched with a high-level industry mentor keyed to their individual program of study. During the intersession of the first year each student will spend a two- or three-week period with her or his industry mentor to foster awareness and understanding of the factors critical for success at the mentor's level of achievement. That relationship, and the knowledge it creates, will be invaluable to the students.

In the second year, each student is required to choose a course providing a hospitality-management work experience in the school's Statler Hotel. Also in the second year, all students take a year-long interdisciplinary course in service excellence that includes elements in services marketing, operations management, and organizational design. The course, taught by a faculty team, also requires the students to evaluate their hospitality-management experience in a critical and diagnostic way. This analytical experience will enhance the students' ability to think critically and will serve to integrate their entire two-year experience.

Cornell faculty members believe that the design of the new professional master's program responds to the industry's need for talented leaders in a world in which the hospitality industry has become more complex, global, competitive, and technical. The crucial themes—strategic orientation, communications ability, management style, and leadership skills—are all screened for and further developed by this program. Furthermore, the interdisciplinary and experiential nature of the program ensure that its graduates are skilled in accomplishment—that they can get the job done for the hospitality industry of tomorrow.—A.N.G.

The faculty group identified skills and competencies that were analytical and process-oriented, such as conceptual thinking and literature knowledge. Those areas speak to their conceptual interests and are the skills acquired in the process of education. Notice that the faculty members weren't asked what they value. They were asked what's important in designing and conducting their classes.

There may be many things that faculty members might think important for success but not teachable, or not what they were hired to teach. Of necessity their answers were weighted toward the skills that can be acquired in the process of education and which professors may be able to convey in the classroom.

The incoming M.P.S. students considered technical competencies (such as

financial-analysis techniques) as the most valuable skills to acquire while in graduate school. Bear in mind that the incoming students were not asked what's most important to a successful career. Instead, those students were asked to answer the question, what is "of primary importance in my education for a successful career."

Top three. There are three skills that all groups clearly considered among the most

EXHIBIT 3**Factor analysis of top-rated skills (alumni-industry sample) and thematic groupings**

SKILLS	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
	STRATEGIC ORIENTATION	COMMUNICATION	MANAGEMENT STYLES	LEADERSHIP
Big picture	0.93	0.21	0.08	0.12
Problem identification	0.51	0.42	0.16	-0.24
Ethics	0.10	0.65	0.36	0.04
Organization/writing	0.24	0.71	-0.01	0.06
External communication	0.15	0.66	0.21	0.07
Decision making	0.07	0.66	-0.01	0.11
Team work	-0.18	0.38	0.76	0.04
Objective views	0.45	-0.13	0.72	0.00
Leadership	-0.04	0.06	0.16	0.88
Persuading others	0.16	0.13	-0.15	0.80

important: leadership, the ability to identify a problem, and organizing and writing skills (Exhibit 2).

Analysis of variance. To determine whether the stakeholder groups differed on the importance they attached to the most-important skills, we performed two analyses of variance, comparing all four of the stakeholder groups. To examine the question of stakeholder agreement or difference, we first grouped the most-important skills as assessed by industry. An analysis of variance on those skills revealed that the groups differed on the degree to which they found the skills important ($F = 3.75$; $P < .001$).

A second analysis of variance explored stakeholder agreement on the skills identified as most important to faculty. Again the groups were statistically different in their appraisals of these skills ($F = 7.63$; $P < .001$).

To explore the issues more completely, we conducted several additional analyses. First we compared industry and alumni to determine if they differed on the critical skills. They did not differ on the importance they attached to the various skills and were thus combined into a single group to represent the industry, as explained earlier.

A second comparison explored whether the industry-alumni group differed from the faculty on the skills critical to both groups. The findings show that there is not significant disagreement on the skills identified by industry (i.e., industry values skills "x, y, & z" and the faculty also values teaching those same skills). However, the two groups differ on the importance of the skills viewed as critical to faculty. This means that the faculty's list of important skills to teach is not shared by industry (i.e., faculty members value teaching skills

"a, b, c, d, & e" and the industry values "a, b, & c," which it considers skills for success). It is interesting that the faculty agree with the industry on the skills critical to industry, but the two groups do not agree on the importance of the skill set viewed as most critical when faculty design and conduct a class—which is precisely the sort of gap we wanted to be able to identify, if any gap existed at all. That suggests that the faculty may not be teaching what industry considers important for career success.

A third comparison explored the differences between faculty members and incoming students. Once again analysis of variance was employed to make comparisons. The findings revealed that faculty and students do not differ on the importance they attach to the skills found critical to industry, but they differ significantly on the importance of the skill set viewed as most critical in teaching by faculty (i.e., students expect to "get" skills "1, 2, & 3" but the faculty values teaching skills "1, 2, 4, & 5").

To reduce the large skill set to more-concise themes and to understand any patterns that might run through the skills, we performed a factor analysis on the combined alumni-industry subset of important skills. By focusing on the industry's skill set, we determined what themes were most important to the users of students' talents. As a result, four factors emerged: strategic or big-picture orientation, communication, work styles or managerial styles, and leadership.²

Where Do We Go from Here?

As noted earlier, a survey cannot tell researchers how to design or change a curriculum, at Cornell or elsewhere; only the faculty can make those decisions.

Educators' Forum

Our survey results do, however, raise some questions about which faculties everywhere may want to deliberate—including the desired outcomes of graduate programs in hospitality management.

The first challenge is whom to listen to in designing a graduate program. For example, what weight should faculty give to the views of industry members? If the role of educators is to prepare graduates for the future and to convey skills that have value throughout a career, then the focus may have to be on conceptual and analytical thinking and an understanding of a relevant body of knowledge. Such "thinking" skills, we believe, provide the most value over an individual's entire career. Yet industry leaders may be telling us that some of the important success skills are *not* intellectual but behavioral or interpersonal. We do not consider this to be a conflict of concerns, or to be irreconcilable.

With respect to students' perceptions the issue is different, since their views focus on tangible concepts and technical skills. The faculty's challenge may be less to accommodate those requests than to realign students' expectations of the program.

The challenge in curriculum design is to blend the vision of faculty with that of the students and of industry, and to do so by focusing on industry's needs as identified by the industry-alumni factor analysis, namely, big-picture orientation, communication, managerial styles, and leadership.

At Cornell, the revisions to the professional master's degree program are being driven by those four success factors. We plan to develop an educational model that matches the needs of industry by building one success factor upon the next: Cornell's program will (1) teach students the skills that relate to leadership so that (2) their work habits and management styles may reflect a "team" orientation and (3) those individuals, as managers, will then be able to communicate effectively the needs and goals of their organizations, thereby allowing for (4) problem solving and strategic planning. **CQ**

²A similar factor analysis could not be performed on the faculty list, as the number of responses (21) compared with the number of skills (54) was too small.