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## Connecting Students to Jobs: The Job Market for Administrative and Business Support Associate Degree Majors

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*The purpose of this paper is to examine the current job market for students in an office administration two year degree program (OA), discuss student outcomes of a career exploration project and internship, and evaluate the redesign of a program to perpetuate the much needed yet generalist skill sets linked to employability. Student success in internships, student criteria for job selection, and a new curriculum that matched the job market's current job descriptions are under investigation. The skills students put to the test in a program capstone course and internships transpire into resume strong points that match current job descriptions. The student's general education courses and major program of study are found to be in line with job market predictions, but most importantly, the variety of skill sets from that program continue to stand the test of time and do not appear to saturate the job market in specific areas.*

Linking curricula to student learning outcomes is the goal of all programs. Measuring skill sets needed by students to list on their resume as strong points to meet the desired job descriptions are important for the future employability of graduates. This article follows sophomores completing internship resumes, internships, capstone job research projects, and final job resumes for known positions in the job market. Two-year degree program faculty planning a program review, designing program-level learning outcomes, and measuring student success after graduation must ensure a connection to career-based preparation. Job market predictions up to 2022 are shared along with the required technical skills found in current job descriptions.

### Background

The goal of most university associate degree programs has been to be more technology-based and job-focused while maintaining the inclusion of general education courses, thus ensuring a high-quality program and a well-rounded graduate. These program qualities were considerations for

redesign of an associate of applied business degree in office administration (OA). In order to achieve a level that will ensure students can apply what they learn to their generalist career paths, statistics, predictions, advisory boards, and the job market were utilized to investigate student career preparation. Measures were put in place for program-level learning outcomes, and the curriculum was compared to other similar programs, career predications, and the current job market. Next, the true measure of the program would involve examining capstone course research and internships for graduates from spring 2013. Students who were transitioning from college to different job markets and who completed many of the redesigned courses would enter into internships and examine the job market. These students were interviewed.

### **Literature Review**

Disparity between business school focus and business community needs has been ongoing and potentially problematic, at least at the institutions sampled in a study of 200 corporate job descriptions collected in fall 2009 (David, David, & David, 2011). According to this study, 140 specific license/certification/skills are commonly cited as required for candidates applying for business jobs. A content analysis of 100 business school course syllabi and 20 textbooks supported this conclusion. These authors provided suggestions for closing the gap between business school curricula and corporate needs. The old business school is compared to a vision of the new business school, where close alignment of pre-graduation training with post-graduation job requirements serves both students and practitioners well. Examination of 200 résumés of business students nearing graduation revealed low to no proficiency on the job description-derived skill sets (David, David, & David). Close alignment of pre-graduation training with post-graduation job requirements serves both students and practitioners well.

According to Cappelli (2013), students can rely on real-time information from the college career office to gauge demand, but focusing on a very specific field also means that students may miss out on courses that might broaden their abilities. For example, courses that teach hospitality management or sports medicine may crowd out or not place emphasis on a logic course that can help students learn to improve their reasoning or an English course that sharpens student written

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communications. Both of those skills can help in any field, unlike the narrowly focused ones.

The issue of employability is also more complicated. Governments and college professors *could* tell what the demand would be for a particular occupation years out. This information is available online by linking to Occupational Outlook Handbooks provided on various state and the federal sites. The problem for someone making an investment in that occupation is that everyone else has the same information. That means students will rush to train in that field, the supply of potential workers goes up, and the jobs are no longer so attractive (Cappelli, 2013).

The National Association of Colleges and Employers found that work experience tops the attributes companies look for on resumes when evaluating a recent college graduate for a job (on a scale of 1 to 100 percent). Internships have been weighted highest over relevance of coursework, grade point average, and college reputation (NACE, 2012). According to the Ohio Bureau of Labor Statistics (OBSL, 2013), these positions are in demand and “expected to grow by an average of 14 percent between 2010 and 2020 with growth expected for medical (41%) and legal (4%) secretaries as well. Job opportunities should be best for applicants with extensive knowledge of computer software and advanced communication and computer skills” (OBSL, 2013). This demand for technology-enhanced training and experiences by college graduates is an ancillary bonus point of this research. It is a challenge to OBSL to overcome or amplify the need for technological skill building and a challenge to faculty and universities to produce prepared students. It will be important for faculty who oversee the enhancement of technology programs to monitor this growth each year and be a part of making enhancements in course content a reality. Some of the challenges for regional campuses include these questions: Will their job growth predication for Ohio in this occupation hold true in southern Ohio Appalachian areas? Are these the skills employers seek?

Keeping the needs of the job market in mind while establishing a sound academic basis for successful business programs included the following items as recommended by the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP, 2013), which is a globally known accrediting body. Their six standards lend merit to the choices made in the redesigned OA program of this research. Leadership is the first standard calling for the business unit and faculty to lead and be involved in sustaining values, business school program directions, performance expectations, student

focus, and a leadership system that promotes performance excellence (ACBSP).

The second standard is Strategic Planning (ACBSP, 2013). The business unit has a process for setting strategic directions to address key student and program performance requirements (ACBSP). The strategic development process leads to an action plan for deploying and aligning key plan performance requirements. This should ensure that there are adequate resources in the area of finance, facilities, and equipment. This should create an environment that encourages and recognizes innovation and creativity.

The third standard is Student, Stakeholder, and Market Focus (ACBSP, 2013). The business unit examines how it determines requirements, expectations, and preferences of its students and stakeholders. Also examined is how the business unit builds relationships with students and stakeholders and determines their satisfaction. Additionally, practitioners serve as role models and counselors for students regarding business careers. The ACBSP Board also provides faculty with information to update professional skills, to make curriculum changes, and to serve as classroom speakers.

Standard 4 is Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management (ACBSP, 2013). The business unit must have an outcomes assessment process for each program, correlated with initial assessment, measuring student achievement of stated learning goals in general education and in program areas. The process must be to develop, deploy, and document how the business unit collects, analyzes, and uses performance data and information to enhance and improve academic programs and student learning. Student learning outcomes will measure a specific competency attainment. Key evidence of a direct assessment of student learning attainment may include: capstone course performance, third-party examination, faculty-designed examination, professional performance, and licensure examination.

Standard 5 is Faculty and Staff Focus (ACBSP, 2013). The ability of a business unit to effectively fulfill its mission and meet its objectives is dependent upon the quality, number, and deployment of the faculty and staff. Employee qualifications and credentials are a critical foundation for business success. Qualified faculty must teach all class sections taught within the business unit. Faculty qualifications in the business unit are defined as Master's or Doctorate Degree Qualified, Professionally Qualified,

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or as Exceptions (ACBSP). Teaching excellence, in-field research and publication, and relevant additional training mark a professionally qualified faculty member. Professionally Qualified faculty possess a bachelor degree in the teaching field with documentation in two or more of the following areas: professional certification (national, regional, or state), in-field professional employment, teaching excellence, in-field research and publication, and relevant additional coursework beyond the bachelor degree (ACBSP). Each institution must have a formal system of faculty evaluation, centered primarily on the teaching function.

Standard 6 is Process Management (ACBSP, 2013). In order to prepare business graduates for professional careers, the curriculum must encompass subjects dealing with the specifics of the global work place and the more general aspects of a global society. The institution must also provide adequate support services and resources to facilitate student success. All business graduates are expected to be competent in the following: knowledge of essential elements and operations of a business, knowledge of business ethics, computer literacy, global business awareness, critical thinking and research skills.

In addition to these standards, ACBSP (2013) has required the total number of hours in degree to be broken down into a professional component, general education component, and a business major component. To ensure successful completion of these hours, comprehensive and current learning resources are made available to students and faculty which include library services, tutorial support, open labs, media services, instructional technology support, etc. Students receiving instruction at remote sites should also have access to learning and academic resources.

The program faculty following the ACBSP guidelines next need to measure individual course outcomes by applying program-level learning outcomes. The Kirkpatrick Model (Kirkpatrick, 2008) employs four levels of program evaluation: Results (internships and intern evaluations), Learning (projects, portfolios, and grading), Reaction (student testing and external certifications), and Behavior (alumni surveys).

### **Method**

This research explored an associate in applied business degree program in administrative and business support, its job market, its job market predictions, and student skill sets/resumes for internships and jobs.

Internships as a critical factor in attaining sought after experience were examined. Sophomores preparing for internships, graduation, and the job market were interviewed and their research was examined. The overall ability for the successful student's critical thinking skills, technical skills, English and communications skills, and pre-employment experience as a recipe for career success should appear on their resume with confidence. This broad range of knowledge should stand the test of time as the job market trends fluctuate. These abilities should remain as strengths throughout the completion of the program with continual reinforcement. The job market requirements should match student resume hard and soft skills.

### *OA Degree Program*

In 2008 the Ohio Board of Regents proposed a Strategic Plan for Higher Education to convert all university academic calendars to the semester system (Ohio University, 2013). The primary goal of this consistent academic calendar was to facilitate student transfer among Ohio's colleges in an attempt to increase student retention and persistence toward degree completion. More students would be ready for the job market. After decades of functioning on the quarter system, seventeen of Ohio's colleges and universities were challenged to complete this semester transition by the fall of 2012 (Ohio University). The opportunity to examine and realign program learning outcomes and redesign all program courses at one time to better meet the needs of the job market presented itself. During the time period of this study, students were in transition or rather completing their sophomore year in the revised associate program. The late winter and early spring job market served as a basis for student job research. Resume preparation reflected the newly updated program.

The program redesign was based on many factors, including advisory board recommendations and business program accrediting body standards. The advisory board included members of the community, former graduates, and faculty experts who provided input into the curriculum design and then gave back to the university by speaking to classes with question and answer opportunities, providing tours of their places of business, hosting internships, and hiring the graduates.

The result was a program ready for measurements in quality and student success. Preparing the degree curriculum included professional expertise from the community, faculty expertise; subject matter experts, job

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market research from the Ohio Bureau of Labor Statistics, core competencies of the true university experience, and proven standards of excellence. Using every available resource, a program was delivered with a course of study designed for student success. This program needed to evolve due in large part to its technical focus, which is in a continual mode of self-study and improvement in preparation for the future of technology, communications trends, and the office environment.

### *OA Program Level Learning Outcomes*

In this study, students were held to the program's overall learning outcomes as part of the criteria for examination. The primary goal of the OA program was to prepare graduates to enter the workforce in entry-level office positions in a number of sectors including service and manufacturing settings with the potential for leadership, supervision, and administration positions. After fulfilling the degree requirements of the program, electives and track courses personalize the student experience. In order to meet the program goals, the following specific student learning outcomes were incorporated:

- Achieve competency in communication skills – oral and written (verbal and non-verbal).
- Achieve competency in quantitative skills.
- Develop analytical thinking and problem solving skills.
- Achieve a basic understanding of accounting principles for service businesses and merchandising organizations.
- Develop skills necessary to evaluate current organizational practices and institute improvements.
- Develop an understanding of the importance of ethics for organizations.
- Develop technological skills necessary to compete in today's technology-driven workplace.

There were a number of specific tasks a student was expected to master in order to successfully achieve the learning outcomes previously stated. Using a variety of assessment techniques, student learning was measured throughout their degree period to determine whether or not students were mastering the following outcomes to achieve the above cited goals. Student outcomes included: mastery of software programs used in

the business environment, basic accounting and consumer mathematical calculations, understanding of office management and supervision, stress management techniques, and communication.

Various methods and techniques were used throughout the program of study at all campuses in order to continuously obtain feedback on the course offerings and student outcomes. This program provided students with a background in many areas of business while emphasizing the use of technology in the workplace. Assessment of this program was threefold during the course of their degree and continues to be today. Those assessments included a capstone course, opportunities for self-assessment, and an internship.

These students completed a seminar capstone course for two credits in their last term. Today, students complete an entry-level seminar (primary focus on career options and understanding in addition to a mentoring environment with sophomores nearing degree completion) and an exit seminar (primary focus on reflective capstone project ePortfolio, job research, and soft skills in problem solving, interpersonal relationships, promotion, stress management, etc.). Their course combined these entry and exit goals while requiring completion of practice tests for the Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification. The ePortfolio was to be used for internship interviews and permanent employment interviews. Another expectation of the capstone course was a strengths and weaknesses evaluation. Students completed a survey at the beginning of the course which included a self-disclosure on weak points and/or a request for updates where new application versions were employed after they had completed a course.

A field trip was also incorporated into the spring semester, which acted as a self-assessment of their preparedness. Students attended a conference or visited a place of business to see and hear firsthand the expectations of the workplace. They then could determine their degree of readiness and address any concerns as part of any class discussion or advising meeting.

Also in the last term was an internship in which employers (site supervisors) evaluate student skills through daily tasks, a project, and interviewing skills and materials. A final evaluation was provided, which was in the form of a letter of recommendation in most cases.



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## The Job Market

It was important for this research to begin by first ensuring that graduates in this area would find a lucrative job market of internships and jobs. Student success in obtaining and completing internships and becoming gainfully employed is important not only to the student but to the institution in which the degree is earned. This OA program graduates approximately 16 students each year from the three regional campuses offering the degree and courses. In the past five years, all have obtained employment or opted to continue their education.

Primarily in Ross County (also Pickaway, Pike, Highland, and Vinton counties) in Ohio during the third quarter 2012 over 900 job contacts came in to the regional campus Coordinator of Student Support: Forty-eight jobs matched the OA program skill sets. There were 15 postings from July 2011 through December 2011 and 33 open positions for graduates from January through December 2012. In 2013 (January to September) 40 jobs coincided with the OA program. In addition, nearly a dozen local internships were available to students nearing program completion in the spring and summer of 2013. The forty plus jobs included descriptions with ten common terms for required skills: receptionist, computer skills, customer service, team player, files management, communications skills, MS Office Suite, scheduling, typing, and MS Excel. Outlier skills were noted as accounting, marketing, medical billing/coding, and sales for administrative support position titles.

A look at both internal and external job contacts included a review of local job and internship descriptions, university contacts, Ohio Job Bank descriptions, and other popular job search sites for the area. These locations and resources provided these specific program questions related to job titles and matching skill sets: Does the curriculum match the job market? Will student strengths/skills match? Matching program course curricula to job skills is critical for student success. Job titles found in job listings in the Ohio Job Bank from January 2013 through June 2013 included Legal Secretary, Administrative Specialist, Office Assistant, Switchboard Receptionist, Business Office Manager, Records Management, Bookkeeper/Secretary, Medical Billing/ Receptionist, and Office Support Professional. Required skills associated with those job titles included but were not limited to the ten common skills identified: scheduling, filing, faxing, typing (forms, letters, and memos), data entry, legal/medical terminology; medical insurance billing, spreadsheets and word processing,

communication, customer service, problem solving, teamwork, dependable, and reliable. These job titles match the OA curriculum and the Ohio United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics' skills as listed in the Office and Administrative Support Occupations' job descriptions (BLS-OOH-OA, 2012). Required attributes of dependability and reliability may be measured by attendance and successful completion of the capstone course. The student's transcript is also thought to provide proof to the employer of the student's commitment.

Looking back to the curriculum exacted other questions about student preparation for certain careers such as: Is the student prepared for on-the-job technical training and skills not found in the program with learning and adaptability skills? Can students overcome obstacles like minimum wage starting pay and adding external certificates with preparation for credentials to enhance the associate degree? This is part of the new design. The program curriculum for many office administration programs and tracks have evolved to include courses and course topics with the latest software applications (word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, and databases); business communications; desktop publishing; administrative, medical, and legal office procedures; Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification preparation; first aid and CPR; and preparation for notary public commission; civil service examination preparation in a variety of areas; medical coding; internships; speakers; networking assignments; and field trips in addition to consumer mathematics, English, public speaking and communications, business law, and economics.

### **Market Predictions and Employer Requirements**

Market predictions for this study were based on many factors including trends and employer needs. Two-year degree programs strive for a level of academic excellence believed to be missing from technical school programs. However, there is no denying that employability ranks high in desirable student outcomes. With this in mind, programs must meet the needs of employers and job market trends. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2012), the ability to work in a team structure; make decisions and solve problems; plan, organize, and prioritize work; and verbally communicate with persons inside and outside of the organization rank the highest among desired qualities by employers. Other attributes completing the top ten list included obtaining and

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processing information, analyzing data, technical knowledge as related to the job, proficiency with computer software programs, creating and editing reports, and the ability to sell or influence others (NACE).

To go a step further, employers look for specific items on resumes. In *Job Outlook 2012*, published by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, employers rated the importance of candidate skills/qualities on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being not at all important and 5 being extremely important. Most of the technology skills and qualities were rated 3.54 and above in importance to employers. It is important to keep in mind that these items transcend multiple career paths and degree programs. NACE also rated attributes employers seek on a resume. The following items were reported by over 50 percent of employers: teamwork, leadership, written communication skills, problem solving, strong work ethic, analytical/quantitative skills, verbal communications skills, initiative, technical skills, detail-oriented, flexibility/adaptability, computer skills, interpersonal skills, and organizational ability (2012). These are a combination of hard and soft skills.

In the study, students often did not pull words directly from the job description for inclusion in resumes, thus keeping the resume a living document that matched their chosen job posting. Specificity in wording is a must in today's online job market. Applying online is a challenge for most people, especially the older student with fewer technology skills. The biggest hurdle for students came *after* finding a position that matched desired criteria and skill sets. The application and resume to be evaluated by a computer program needed their attention to this detailed skills alignment, which was important for the employer.

Some skills were unique and required on-the-job training or unique experience. In most cases, program certificates combined with the degree would replace desired experience if the employer agrees. Many employers will still use a temporary or hiring agency to easily dismiss poorly-prepared employees, outsource hiring, and maintain a balanced workforce in an unbalanced workload setting. Temp-to-hire methodology with part-time postings and low to minimum wages appeared in the jobs attained by the regional campus Coordinator of Student Support in this study. It is the trend for employers as evidenced by the positions identified in this study. Students could make good connections in temporary placements. Getting students to take advantage of these opportunities and to see the benefit was a challenge for university placement and program coordinators.

Predictions reflective of past trends found most annual job openings to be replacement positions for general office clerks with an average number of 3,294 open positions nationwide per year offering \$13.71 per hour (BLS-OOH-OA, 2012). Secretaries and Administrative Assistants earn on average \$35,330 per year or \$16.99 per hour (median pay as of 2012) with an entry level education or high school diploma and on-the job training (BLS-OOH-OA). There were 3,947,100 job openings for Office and Administrative Support positions in the U.S. as of 2012, which is the base year of the 2012-2022 projections (BLS-OOH-OA). A 12 percent growth is expected (BLS-OOH-OA).

According to the United States Department of Labor – Bureau of Labor Statistics report for May 2013, state occupational employment and wage estimates for Ohio show a potential employment rise for telephone operators, financial/brokerage clerks, correspondence clerks, library assistants, loan interviews/clerks, new accounts clerks, reservations and transportation ticket clerks and travel agents with job growth predicted to be between 10 and 35 percent (BLS-OOH-OA, 2013). Medical secretarial positions are expected to grow 31.3 percent offering \$14.16 per hour as of May 2011. Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks positions will earn an average of \$16.85 per hour based on May 2011 findings by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS, 2011). These occupational employment and wage estimates are calculated with data collected from employers in all industry sectors in metropolitan and nonmetropolitan (Appalachia included) areas in Ohio.

Positions for customer service representatives are projected to grow 13 percent between 2012 and 2022, about as fast as the average for all occupations (BLS-OOH-CS, 2012). Those with good customer-service and computer skills should have the best job prospects with hour pay at \$14.70 as of May 2012 (ODJFS, 2011). Secretaries and administrative assistants today perform fewer clerical tasks and are increasingly taking on the roles of information and communication managers. This occupation is expected to be among those with the largest number of new jobs. Opportunities should be best for applicants with extensive knowledge of software applications. (OBLS, 2013). Clerical tasks in these descriptions were defined as answering phones, typing, and making appointments otherwise known as receptionist skills. In addition to new administrative support expectations of spreadsheets and database management, business support personnel are

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expected to move information and communicate using a variety of methods and technologies (ODJFS).

### **Internship Requirements**

Students who were interviewed posed several questions to themselves as they were seeking internships and subsequently permanent employment.

- What jobs am I interested in and in what area (medical, legal, service, manufacturing)?
- What is most important to me (salary, benefits, location, position)?
- Do I want to do what I love or work with a great employer over other factors?
- Will I be willing to accept entry-level pay (getting my foot in the door) from employers that offer the potential for advancement?

Internships with the local Veterans Administration and a long-standing manufacturing company with a large accounting department were popular locations for internships. However, these did not translate into jobs, with the exception of one of the 2013 graduates. A pattern of local business seeking interns for primarily unpaid positions was emerging. Consequently, internships did not lead to permanent positions. Recently, a grant program in Ohio aided employers in paying interns. Still the positions did not lead to employment for the students in the grant paid positions with the exception of one part-time job offer. It is important to note that unemployment rates in Ohio and the United States were between seven and eight percent in July and August of 2013 and had been at that level since August of 2012 (OBLU, 2013). This is the time period that students were looking for internships and jobs.

Important factors for faculty looking to assist students to become career ready are: satisfaction with job skills as expressed by 100 percent of internship employers during the study and satisfaction with internship performance (percentage of employers satisfied with critical thinking skills and percentage of students demonstrating proficiency in job skills by scoring 90 percent on the internship evaluation). Faculty interactions with employers have been an asset to the creation of internship sites. For example, an increase in employer participation at the regional campus job fair led to an increase in employer involvement with internships.

**Student Resumes (noted skill sets of graduates)**

Required skills listed in descriptions for jobs and internships did not factor into the creation of resumes as reported by sophomores in the OA program. Students interviewed had examined their prior coursework, evaluated their success rate in all areas, and placed both strong skills and those they perceived as desirable to employers overall on their resumes. Once the resume was created for the internship, students were reluctant to seek input from site supervisors regarding their interviewing skills and resume content. As a requirement of the internship course, this process was completed with the employer. Per the student, changes were not required in most cases. At this point the resume was written in stone. No need to adjust it to preferred job postings was necessary.

Skills typically omitted from the resume were spreadsheets (possibly due to students' low levels of understanding with regard to the creation of formulas) and accounting (the majority of students were not strong in this skill set or area of expertise). If these skills were listed on a student resume, it was viewed by the student to be a lucrative skill to have, but they did not necessarily gravitate toward those positions in their capstone course career research. The perception of the creation of complicated spreadsheet formulas or difficult bookkeeping decisions took precedence over actual expectations for administrative support positions.

**Student Reflections**

In the design of every program curriculum faculty may find evidence of input from advisory boards, professionals from the community, and faculty subject matter experts. The true test comes when graduates seek internships and permanent employment. As the transition from the OA quarters' curriculum took place and students began utilizing the newly updated semesters' program, students from the OA program began to test the job market to see if they were prepared for employment.

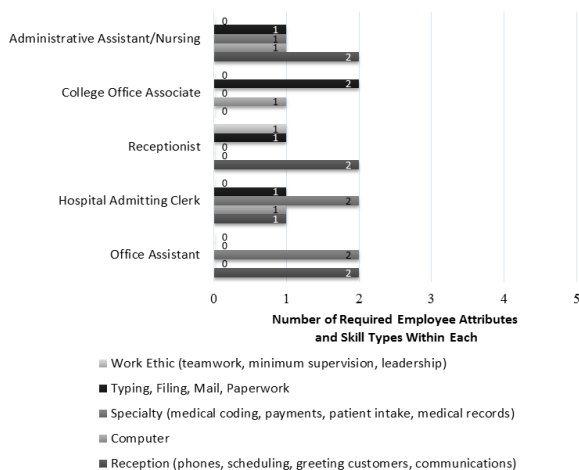
Spring 2013 graduates were seeking viable employment and researching required job skills in the current job market. Their focus was primarily on the southern Ohio area. In their research, they discover information on the state of the economy in relation to the job market for OA graduates. The primary area of interest was in the medical sector. They studied salary, benefits, location, and overall quality of the positions found. They chose employers with a sound hiring practice and a perceived low to no layoff potential. These factors coincided with salaries above minimum,

close proximity in most cases, good benefits, and excellent working conditions. The problem arose in competition for those jobs. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services reports several job titles typical to OA graduates including medical secretaries positions as among those positions with the most annual job openings for 2010 through 2010. However, the report further states that these annual job openings primarily result from replacement needs. These are not new jobs and turnover is an issue. Students find the medical sector very appealing and often have a distorted view of the competition and reasoning for the number of openings, especially when the openings are listed by employers they consider very lucrative in the areas of salary and prestige. (ODJFS, 2011).

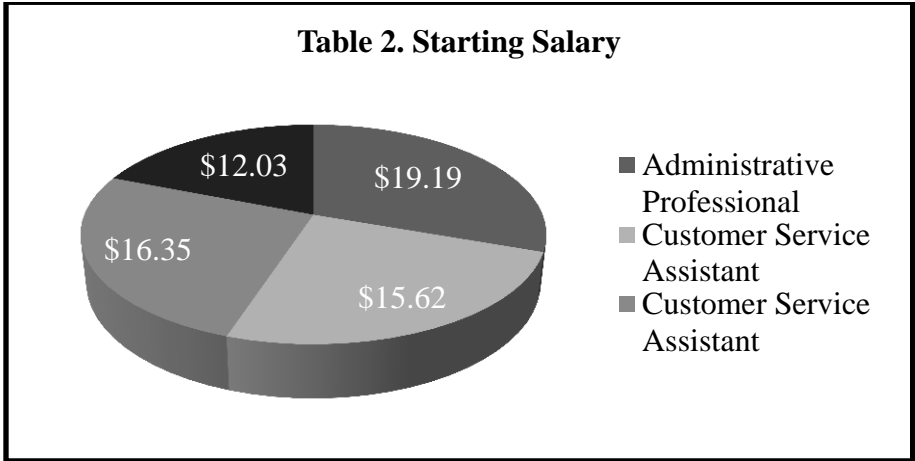
Additional findings from their reflective capstone projects and career research gave both the instructor and the student a measure of student needs and perceptions. Some students reported salary considerations trumped the other factors for employment goals, while others are set to be a medical coder or legal secretary regardless of salary, the boss, or location. Three of the students who completed the new seminar course as sophomores offered their research papers, which served as examples from students who completed this course.

As part of the career research paper, students were required to make charts as visual evidence of findings. One example of a visual chart constructed by a student is Table 1. In Table 1 Student A looked at job descriptions for skills matching hers in an analysis of required job responsibilities (Dixon, C., Love, B., & Love, H., 2013).

Table 1. Job Responsibilities Analysis - Medical Setting

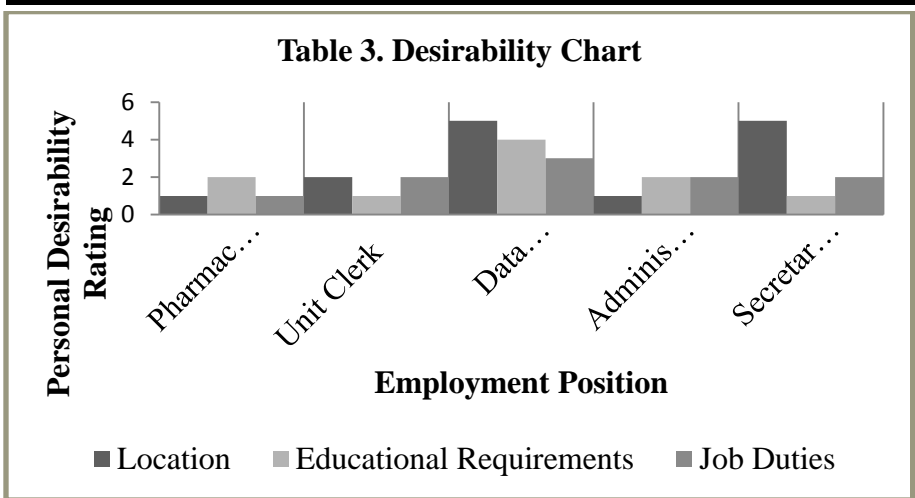


Skills required for these jobs were part of the program curriculum and matched the skills Student A had successfully mastered. She completed an internship at the local hospital which translated into her research agenda. However, she was unable to find permanent employment there, as tracked for one year after graduation. A six-month delay in completing one final program course is a contributor.



In Table 2 Student B compares pay rates between her top five positions. Salary is important to her. It was interesting to see that she had just completed an internship as an administrative assistant with a local law firm, but she did not choose legal positions for her research (Dixon, C., Love, B., & Love, H., 2013). Comparing these job titles and salaries to the ODJFS data for 2010 through 2020, the ODJFS rate is \$13.71 for Office Clerks and \$16.67 for Customer Service Representatives (ODJFS, 2011). Since the ODJFS rates are averages and the job titles closely match, this is good news about the data, predictions, and the career field itself.





In Table 4 Student C creates a chart for the positions he found that represents desirability in three categories: location, educational requirements, and job duties. The lower the number in the category the more desirable the position. For example, on educational requirements, the lower the number is the more qualified he is for that position as an undergraduate pursuing an associate’s degree. Desirability can seem more subjective than objective until the factors are quantified by an individual. Jobs with all three areas rated under a two have a close proximity to home, matching education, and matching skill sets. As a veteran, he was looking for a position in the medical area within the government. He completed an internship with a Big Brothers/ Big Sisters (BB/BS) Association (Dixson, C., Love, B., & Love, H., 2013).

Desirability may sound like job satisfaction potential for Student C. The Bureau of Labor Statistics states that secretaries, clerks, and administrative assistants are all similarly categorized (BLS-OOH, 2014-15). These are job titles found by Student C to have desirable position descriptions. Salary, benefits, promotion potential, and work conditions were not factored into this student’s model. Job satisfaction is defined as “an individual’s reaction to the job experience” (Berry, 1997). Without having had any experience in these positions, the student has predicted job satisfaction potential with his three desirability factors. Job satisfaction is clearly an individual’s perception as shown here by Student C.

### Conclusions and Future Research Goals

The OA program offers a core program that will see students prepared for a variety of positions with hard and soft skill sets which meet employer requirements across the board. This variety coupled with a quality program offering a well-rounded university experience assures the OA program will stand the test of time without saturating a market.

Skills evidenced in the student seminar course projects and reviewed in student resumes addressed the questions of outdated skills or technology knowledge. These skills were addressed in seminar course content and applied in internships. Students' skills will transcend from the start of the degree to the completion and beyond the entry-level position. Job market predictions from 2012 to 2022 assure graduates of employment opportunities that will utilize their technical and communications skills.

Observation of student career paths is not easy as students become out of touch with the university. A follow-up study of graduate employment and longevity and its relationship to successful internships is in progress. Areas of success or failure need to be identified and measured. For instance, the percentage of graduates employed within a six month period could be learned in a formal graduate survey. A goal would be at least 90 percent of available students will become employed within six months.

Student skills matched jobs sought, but are the best jobs (as measured by availability, salary, and benefits) more than 60 miles away? Continued studies will monitor job postings and major local employer sites. Graduates obtaining jobs and retaining them will be tracked.

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### **Personal Biography**

Allison White is an Assistant Professor and Office Technology Regional Program Coordinator at Ohio University. She began her education at OUC obtaining an Associate in Applied Business. She later obtained her Bachelor's in Marketing and Business Administration at Franklin University and her Master's degree in Technology Education at Wright State University. During her career she has taught at multiple levels from K-12 substitute teaching to high school business teacher. Her higher education experience includes community college and university instruction. She spent nearly fifteen years with American Electric Power in their Marketing and IT departments as a customer service rep and a business analyst. She also spent six years as an administrative assistant, counselor, and teacher in a youth detention center serving the Ohio Department of Youth Services. Teaching across the curriculum in the OTEC program, White is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in the Patton College of Education at Ohio University. Her research interests include technology-rich instruction, ergonomics in the office, interdisciplinary teaching, and career choices/the job market for OTEC majors in administrative support positions.