

Advisory Board Usage: Giving Real-World Counsel to Undergraduates for Resume Development

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Abstract

Resume development for freshmen and sophomore students can be arduous. In their very first semester, typically business students are charged with resume development. At this early stage, resumes are often underdeveloped, poorly designed, and show limited work experience. However, many resources and tools are available to assist students in developing their resumes. Freshmen are strongly encouraged to join professional organizations, urged to get involved with community service, complete service-learning projects, and obtain an internship. Following these suggestions can help improve a resume. Faculty at a Northeastern university were among the first to engage its College of Business Advisory Board to assist students with their resumes. Board members volunteered to review resumes, which provided students with real-world advice. The purpose of this research was to provide students with new, innovative tools/resources to help develop effective professional resumes. Pre- and Post-surveys were conducted and analyzed, and the study results are discussed.

Introduction

As cover letters become obsolete (Ryan, 2016; Voza, 2016) the resume will take on even more importance. Two-thirds of recruiters do not even read cover letters, according to Jobvite, a recruiting software provider, but they do look at resumes. Resumes document and present evidence of a person's development over time, focusing on the work they have completed and the competencies, abilities, and efforts they have put forth. Employers acknowledge the need for applicants to have strong resumes to obtain an interview. Many business schools task students with resume development in their first semester of college. At this early stage, resumes are often very underdeveloped, and students have limited work experience and little to add to a resume. In order to explain the development and process the students undertake, the researchers use David Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning to demonstrate an understanding and explain the students' learning behaviors.

Universities spend a great deal of money on career centers and resources and tools to assist students in developing their resumes. To help improve and expand a resume, in a first year seminar class at a mid-sized Northeastern university, students are strongly encouraged to join professional organizations, to get involved with community service, to complete service learning projects and to get an internship. They are also strongly encouraged to study abroad. Completing these activities and a trip to the career center are all part of the resources at a students' disposal. However, one resource that is often overlooked is the University's Advisory Board. Advisory boards usually consist of very successful alumni who are giving of their time, energy, and talents to current students. They are a unique, untapped resource.

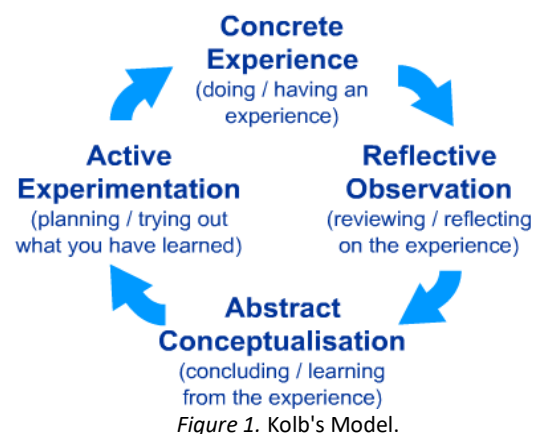
In the first year business course, providing students with access to the College of Business Advisory Board in the development and design of their resumes was the key purpose of our research. While students need guidance and instruction to design and develop an effective resume and highlight the skills they have, very few have been exposed to resumes of CEOs, CFOs, and senior level Executive Vice Presidents. Students were quite impressed and enchanted by the many accomplishments of these executives. In addition, many were amazed by how well the resumes portrayed the diversity of activities and successes achieved by their school's alumni.

To assist students in the resume development assignment, employers and managers currently serving on the College of Business advisory board were asked to conduct resume assessment sessions with students in a required business course. Pre- and post-surveys were given to 145 students about their perceptions of their own resumes. Similarly, the advisory board members were surveyed as to their perceptions on resumes they reviewed as well as the engagement activity.

Kolb's Model as Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Using David Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model provides a clear explanation of how students applied strategies learned from the advisory board to the basic construction and development of their resumes. Kolb's reflective /reflexive component (cited in Randazzo, 2012) the outcomes related to when the assignment took place.

Kolb's model begins with concrete experiences - students have already completed a resume, and have the concrete experience of meeting with Senior Level executives. The next piece in Kolb's model is reflective observation. This reflective piece is key to meaning making, and learning for students. They review their resumes and begin to change, update and improve their resumes. The interaction with the advisory board has allowed them to co-create and make meaning of what was socially constructed in these sessions. Then, they move to abstract conceptualization. This is a dynamic process. How can students tailor their resumes to a specific job, as instructed by the advisory board? They are shaping and incorporating their own tacit and formal knowledge into meaningful resumes. Once seeing the advisory board resumes and conceptualizing their own, they move to active experimentation, where students have a more clear and informed view of multiple perspectives - from the faculty member, career center and advisory board member. Therefore, students amalgamate and formulate more meaningful resumes than they had before.



Literature on resume development is abundant. However, literature on the use of advisory boards to aid students specifically with resumes, especially freshmen, is scarce. Advisory boards helping students directly is innovative. There is a movement in the marketplace to have more corporate –academic partnerships (Deeter-Schmelz, 2015), the literature related to using advisory boards for resume reviews. Faculty worry that skills taught in the classroom are not necessarily those needed in the workplace. Using the advisory board helps to bridge this gap. There is also research on using resumes in the classroom (Pritchard, Potter, Damminger, & Wriggins, 2004) but the study was with college juniors, not freshmen. Building a resumes have been used as a reflexive process (Randazzo, 2012) and resume writing for the minority student (Davis & Muir, 2003) have been studied. Numerous articles, books,

software and websites exist on effective resume writing (e.g., Simpson, 2016; Storey, 2016; Tilloston & Osborn, 2012; Williams, 2016). Literature on keeping resumes honest and not over-inflating or misrepresenting the work listed on the resume (Conn, 2008; Winstein & Golden, 2007) have been examined. Conn (2008) also provides communication skill proficiency and ethics training as they relate to resume writing. This paper does provide the suggestions given to students, particularly with regard to suggestions about social media. In addition, because recruiters place value on “educational background, work experience, and extracurricular activities” (Bard & McNeilly, 2002, p. 169) these are aspects the advisory board mentioned in the discussion.

Methodology

Based on the above discussion and theoretical framework, the overall research question addressed by the resume assignment may be stated as follows: ***Does the Advisory Board intervention (interaction) enhance student knowledge, understanding, and development of an effective professional resume?*** The expected results may be stated in the form of the following propositions or opinions as asserted by the authors:

Proposition 1: *Prior to the College of Business Advisory Board Intervention, student’s perceptions of their knowledge, understanding, and development of effective resumes is minimal.*

Proposition 2: *Prior to the College of Business Advisory Board Intervention, student’s perceptions of their abilities and skills to construct an effective resume is minimal.*

Proposition 3: *The College of Business Advisory Board intervention will increase the student’s perceived understanding of designing an effective resume.*

Proposition 4: *The College of Business Advisory Board intervention will increase the student’s resume building skills and their ability to develop an effective professional resume.*

One hundred forty-five students in two sections of Business Administration 101 were required to participate in a resume development exercise. Upon completion of constructing their resumes, the students were asked to fill out a 15-item online survey (pre-advisory-board interaction questionnaire). Eight items were scored on a six-point, Likert-type scale ranging from disagree strongly (1) to agree strongly (6). In addition, they supplied demographic information such as gender, age, major, email address, and class standing. Finally, two open-ended questions provided a stimulus for students to think about critical resume questions to ask business professionals later in the semester.

Once students develop a resume, they have it reviewed by the career center on campus. After the review, the draft was improved and turned in via the course management system assignment folder. The instructor then compiled the resumes and distributed them randomly to the advisory board volunteers for review and critique.

At regularly scheduled board meetings, the researchers were able to ask for volunteers. Seven board members were eager to assist and volunteered to review resumes. Each board member was emailed approximately 30 resumes. Later in the semester, each advisory board member was provided a classroom along with the selected students whose resumes he or she had analyzed. Three 50-minute sessions with approximately ten students in each session were conducted. The advisory board member then provided each student with salient feedback as to how to enhance his or her resume. One consistent theme the board gave, was telling students not to focus on the job duties and tasks that they had performed; but to translate those duties into what skill set they gained from the experience. They also tried to impress upon the students the need to leverage and express their value on a resume. As

professed by all the advisory board members, creating an effective resume is critical to securing employment.

Once the Advisory Board member interaction was complete, the researchers waited three weeks before they sent students the post survey to allow them to reflect on and absorb the session with advisory board members. Students were again requested to fill out an online post advisory board review questionnaire. This was a 17-item survey; however, the same eight Likert scale questions and demographic information were included as in the pre-advisory board survey. The increased number of items was due to more opened ended questions. These queries were designed to assess how much students perceived that advisory board members contributed to their overall resume building skills in order to develop an effective professional resume. Due to attrition and absences of students in the BSN 101 course, 118 students out of the original 145 (81%) completed the Post-Advisory Board Survey. More importantly, the researchers were able to match up (using email addresses) those students that completed both surveys, which increased the consistency and credibility of the findings.







Results

Students became acutely aware of the weaknesses and strengths of their resumes. Table 1 presents the results (descriptive) of the perceptions the 118 matched respondents had on each of the eight item Likert scales for both Pre and Post Advisory Board Surveys. Observation of the means for the eight questions seems to suggest that after the intervention by the advisory board members, students were more confident in constructing a favorable resume. The Post Survey means with a star (*) suggests student's level of confidence was enhanced by the advisory board intervention. Further, it should be noted the up and down arrows display the percentage changes from Pre to Post Survey responses (see Table 1).

The qualitative analysis section presents the results of the overall research question along with analysis of the comments by the students pertaining to their experience with the board members. In terms of the overall research questions for this project: ***“Does the Advisory Board intervention (interaction) enhance student knowledge, understanding, and development of an effective professional resume”*** it seems clear from the first question in the Post Survey when students were asked if the Advisory board members helped them create a more effective resume. The overwhelming student affirmation (Yes) as 85% (100/118) of the matched respondents stated not only in the positive, but provided relevant feedback (see Exhibit 1). Thus, the researchers suggest that having the College of Business advisory Board members participate and intervene into the educational process of these students had a significant impact on their perceptions, abilities and skills of not only building an effective professional resume, but positive interactions they had with business executives as well as a glimpse into their future employers.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Pre and Post Resume Assignments

	Pre-Advisory Board		Post Advisory Board		
Survey Questions	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	% Changes Pre-Post
Q1. I have the knowledge and skills necessary to create a professional and effective resume.	4.5931	.97537	*4.9831	.86709	.39 
Q2. I have an effective resume that will attract company recruiters in my desired career field who will want to interview me.	4.3310	.99342	*4.5847	.86059	.254 
Q3. I need further guidance and instruction to help me design and develop an effective resume.	4.0069	1.22756	*3.3305	1.24760	.672 
Q4. Effective resume writing is very easy for me.	3.9034	.90003	*4.1864	.96918	.283 
Q5. I do not know how to build a resume that stands out from other resumes.	3.2207	1.22740	*2.4576	1.04304	.763 
Q6. My current resume will obtain all the interviews I will need to be selected for a position in my desired career field.	3.5034	1.16741	*4.0085	1.05000	.505 



	Pre-Advisory Board		Post Advisory Board		
Q7. I struggle with creating and writing an effective resume.	2.5517	1.14219	*2.4576	.99266	.094 
Q8. I have a good understanding about how the job application works.	4.4648	1.03596	*4.7586	.80887	.294 

Exhibit 1

Sample Qualitative Responses to Open Ended Post Survey Question

- He gave us real life examples of what he looks for in a resume
- To keep my social media consistent and up-to-date
- Went over skills employers are looking for and how to translate that to our resumes
- She told me to add more things that would make me stand out
- They opened up my eyes to some things that were not necessarily big changes but minor changes that would make big impacts like spelling out abbreviations and making sure whatever you put on your resume you can explain it.
- He explained what I should say about my military experience in my resume
- They reminded to put an objective on my resume
- To take my GPA off my resume because it was below a 3.0
- To be more effective and precise
- Better descriptions of ideas
- Gave outside advice from those in the field
- They helped me adding references to my Resume
- Advisor board members helped me learn to make my resume look unique by improving what I already had written
- Helped me know what is good and bad to have on the resume. If there are any spelling errors, a company will immediately throw out the resume.
- The advisory board answered my questions that pertained to adding additional experience onto my resume
- To use LinkedIn

A qualitative analysis of the open-ended question (If the advisory board helped you create a more effective resume, then how did they help you?) yielded four categories of responses. The advisory board (1) helped with what to add and expand on the resume (2) aided with format and style (3) assisted with what to take off the resume and (4) students stating that they wanted more from the advisory board (see Exhibit 1).

Discussion of Propositions

Once the overall research question was determined, then the authors developed four propositions that expressed their opinions about how they thought the college of business advisory board intervention would affect student outcomes. Since this was a qualitative exploratory study, the implication was that these propositions or opinions of the authors would become testable hypotheses in future research. However, in Table 1 above, judgments (see change between pre- and post-responses) may be made about these assertions. Overall, observing the changes across all eight questions seemed to indicate that students after further reflection (Kolb's model) on the experience felt the advisory board intervention was positive and enhanced their *knowledge, understanding, and development of an effective professional resume* (overall research question). In addition, the open-ended responses (see Exhibit 1) from the students were extremely positive about the interaction and feedback from the board members, which supported the research question a well.

The first two propositions (see methodology section above) focused on students' perceptions of their understanding, knowledge, skills, and abilities to develop or construct an effective resume. Specifically, survey questions 1, 2, 4 and 6 found in Table 1 addressed these opinions. Therefore, the means in the pre-advisory board column in Table 1 depicted lower averages for those four survey questions. This seemed to suggest students in the sample were not as confident earlier in the resume writing process. However, when the advisory board members interfaced with them later in the course (note the arrows pointed in an upward direction after intervention for those four questions), students seemed more assured and self-confident.

The other two propositions (3 and 4) emphasized the positive increased outcomes when advisory board members intervened in the resume writing process. The survey questions three, five, and seven concentrated on these two arguments. Thus, when advisory board members were involved, the students' responses demonstrated they were more confident in constructing an effective resume. The change in means supported this assertion as noted in the post-advisory board column, which decreased substantially; especially for questions three and five (see Table 1, which displayed the arrows pointed downward after participation of the board members).

Further, the four propositions expressed by the authors seemed to be supported by the descriptive statistics and the open-ended responses from the students who participated in the exploratory study. The outcomes from this study appeared to suggest strongly the engagement of College of Business Advisory Boards bring added dimensions to the learning process of students when employed in innovative ways. Their expertise and experience are invaluable to both faculty and students alike if utilized appropriately and impactful.

Finally, if we revisit Kolb's model in reference to the propositions, students first experience the resume writing process (Concrete Experience). Then, students were asked to ponder their initial experiences with the constructing of an effective resume. At this point in the process, the students were requested to reflect on their writing experience by responding to a number of questions (the pre-advisory board intervention survey). This questionnaire focused on the first two propositions in the methodology section. Then, in the next step of the model, members of the advisory board intervened by providing feedback, insight, and constructive criticism to the students in their groups on how to write an effective resume. After the dialogue with the advisory board, the students proceeded to try out what they had learned (Active Experimentation) and rewrite, revise, and edit their respective resumes. After the students put into practice what they had learned, they were asked again to answer a post-advisory

board intervention survey. This survey focused on the final two propositions, which emphasized the perceptions of the intervention by the board members. Kolb's model was instrumental in constructing both propositions and pre and post questionnaires.

Helped With What to Add and Expand On the Resume

The advisory board members looked at the second draft of resumes, and improved and expanded each resume. Advisory board members spent time in small groups, and several went over the list of action verbs the students received in class. They elicited deeper responses getting to the crux of job duties, volunteer experiences, and educational experiences. They told students to write down everything they did and rewrite it using the stronger verbs. They did the same for extra-curricular activities and details of group projects. Several advisory board members emphasized the most important thing was to match the words in the job description with the keywords on your resume.

Advisory board members told students to emphasize the positive and show their teamwork. One board member discussed the online submission process and that if your resume does not have keyword matching, then your resume would not pass through to the hiring manager.

Many students had initially followed a resume outline, listing their educational experience near the top of the resume, which include the fact that the school was AACSB accredited. Advisory Board members asked students to explain that those initials meant. Many students could not answer the question.

Format and Style

Almost all responses included comments about making the resume look better aesthetically. Because most resumes are uploaded to Human Resource sites, the advisory board recommended never using resume templates on Microsoft Word. Once uploaded, the formatting would be compromised. They advised to make the resume look as attractive as possible.

What to Take Off the Resume

The advisory board was strict with students...if students could not explain what acronyms or abbreviation stand for, then board members suggested removing them from the resume. Then, came the objective statement. The advisory board had a consensus that they liked objective statements, but the objective statement has to state how the individual can add to, or help their company or organization. If the objective statement was about fulfilling personal career goals or matching skills to our company...then take it off. Objectives should not be personal; they should be about the organization. One key point made to students: does the resume match the job I am seeking?

Board Members were quick to remind students to be careful with ethics: no overstating accomplishments or inflating a job title. They emphasized to be honest and true on the resume. They warned students about making misrepresentations and falsifications...that these things, if uncovered would lead to being disqualified and fired.

Advisory board members told students that most companies would not send them a letter via "snail mail" anymore, and instead of a street address under their name, to add their LinkedIn or Twitter accounts. Several freshmen were not familiar with LinkedIn and surprised by how much content was available to them via the site.

Wanting More From the Advisory Board

Each advisory board member reviewed every students' social media sites. These executives stressed they would not make any job offers based on some of the questionable pictures and content they viewed on these sites. The advisory board members strongly suggested to students that their social media sites, especially LinkedIn, needs to be more professional as well as kept up-to-date. Several students had changed their majors, but left their old majors on their social media site. One advisory board member said "I need an accounting major intern, but your social media site says you're a biology major; if I have a question about you, I have about 50 other resumes to look through...so I would put your resume in the "no" pile and move on."

Most students appreciated this "tough love" and "tell-it-like-it is" approach from the advisory board. Several students wanted the advisory board to come back and discuss networking opportunities, interview tips, and perhaps mock interviews.

Future Research

Since many students wanted to interact more with the advisory board, other direct student contact should be explored for advisory boards. Members of the advisory board for this assignment found it rewarding and were open to having additional sessions with students. Later in the business curriculum, students are assigned the more popular Professional Online Portfolio (POP) project, of which the resume is just one piece. However, as freshmen, they are given templates, classroom lectures and workshops to help them achieve successful resume development. Perhaps advisory board members could review the online portfolios as well.

Conclusion

The board helped students to understand that each resume is a personal and powerful marketing tool, and emphasized keeping it as up to date as possible. Students worked toward applying the information given by the advisory board; it required them to work collaboratively with the advisory board. Students found that the advisory board helped them to assess their strengths and weaknesses. The advisory board becoming involved demonstrated the importance to taking time to perfect the resume. The advisory board was engaging as they assisted with evaluations of student resumes. They made a coordinated effort to help students produce a polished and professional resume. Faculty recognized the need to teach relevant skills and demonstrate real-world applications. Students were engaged in and out of the classroom, and they appreciated the advisory board. More specifically, having advisory board members reviewing their resumes, to some, was more meaningful than being merely an assignment. This engaging and impactful assignment aided students to recognize their own weaknesses and methods to address them. It is the desire of the board members and faculty that students will look for opportunities to present themselves and highlight their skills more effectively. This entire process demonstrates Kolb's model in action. First, the students begin with their concrete experiences, and reflect on the duties they have completed and conceptualize how to demonstrate in writing that they have gained skills and knowledge from those duties. They were able to use their experience with the advisory board as experimentation, then begin the concrete experience again and start the Kolb's cycle over. Students were able to connect with many different board members and these connections and networking opportunities could contribute to their future success. Relationships were established during this assignment, which are continuing today.

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