

What B-Schools Think of Communication Ability

Business School Surveys

Cornell (Johnson School): In 1995, the Johnson School hired a professional survey firm to do a blind survey of Fortune 1000 Human Resources and senior executives (i.e., questions were about MBAs in general, and the Johnson School was not identified). When asked about the skills most desired in new MBA hires, 75% of the 200 respondents named “communication skills” as the most important attribute.

Dartmouth (Tuck School): In 1994, all alumni from the Tuck School at Dartmouth College were surveyed on a variety of issues, with 21% of them responding. When asked to rank the importance of all the courses in the core curriculum, alumni gave management communication the highest average rating of all Tuck courses. In addition, in the fall of 1997, when returning second-year students at the Tuck School were asked about which topics from the first-year core curriculum they used the most on their summer jobs, communication skills were the most often mentioned.

Florida Atlantic University: In 1995, FAU surveyed over 2000 local employers. In answer to a question about the most important qualities for a graduate to possess, verbal communication skills ranked by far the highest.

Georgetown: In 1994, the Georgetown School of Business surveyed all MBA alumni on a variety of curricular issues, receiving responses from 35 percent of them. Among other questions, graduates were asked which courses had contributed most to the graduate's effectiveness at work. The five highest rated courses were (in order): Management Communication (first), Business Strategy, Marketing, Finance, and Organizational Behavior.

MIT (Sloan School): In the late 1970's, before Management Communication was part of the curriculum at MIT's Sloan School, alumni were surveyed about the value of various courses in the curriculum. The alumni were also asked what they would like to have learned at Sloan that was not taught. The leading response to that question was communication skills. As a result of that study, the Sloan Communication Program was established in 1980. Since then, management communication has become part of the core curriculum at Sloan.

Michigan: In 1987, the Michigan Business School surveyed about 680 business executives recently promoted to Chairman, President, or Vice President, with a response rate of 30%. Communication was ranked as the top course students should focus on for a career in general management.

Ohio State University (Fisher School): The Fisher College at Ohio State polled hundreds of alumni from the honors accounting program who graduated during the past twenty years (mid-seventies to the early-nineties). Findings from the 1994 survey indicated that alumni valued their communication training far more than any other feature of the program.

Penn State (Smeal School): In 1992, Smeal College conducted a “Build the Ideal MBA” survey of 750 leading American firms, with a response rate of 23%. Respondents were asked to select and prioritize important qualities to teach in an MBA program. Oral and written communication was the highest-ranked of all the business school skills.

University of Virginia (Darden School): In 1994, all alumni from the Darden School were polled on questions concerning their MBA experience, with 330 replying. In response to the question “List those aspects of the Darden experience that you felt best prepared you to be a manager or professional,” alumni listed Oral and Written Communication as third overall.