An ‘audit’ of strategies successful co-operative education students employ during CPA Recruit

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CPA Recruit is increasingly competitive

Anecdotal evidence on student success factors
  • What practices are helpful/not?
  • Where might the gaps lie?

Disconnect between employer and student perceptions
How do successful co-op students differentiate themselves throughout the CPA Recruit process, resulting in job offers?

How do their attitudes, skills, and knowledge differ compared to their unsuccessful* counterparts?

Research Questions

*but almost successful
Literature Review

Professional standards = evolving curriculum

Barnett, Parry, & Coate, 2001; Bridgstock, 2009; Freudenberg, Cameron, Brimble, & English, 2011; Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008; Leong & Kavanagh, 2013

Differences in expectation between employers and students

Kim, Ghosh, & Meng, 1993

Schools to facilitate and emphasize soft skills development

Hancock, Howieson, Kavanagh, Kent, & Tempone, 2009; Leong & Kavanagh, 2013
“Leveraging knowledge requires changing the emphasis of the accounting curriculum in several aspects.

These include changing the emphasis from “knowing that” to “knowing how”, written communication to oral communication, personal to interpersonal skills, disciplinary skills to transferable skills, intellectual orientation to action orientation, problem-making to problem-solving, knowledge as process to knowledge as product, concept-based to issue-based, knowledge-based to task-based, and proposition-based learning to experiential learning.”

(Abeyssekera, 2006, p. 9)
Qualitative Research Design

Recruitment: August-October 2016

Data Collection: November 2016

Data Analysis: December 2016-January 2017

Contacted 32 co-op students who submitted at least one Recruit application*

*ethical considerations

Interviewed five students successful in the process, and five others who almost succeeded

Transcripts coded twice to differentiate between the two groups and again to uncover general themes
Successful students were...

...refined yet still fine tuning their skills.

...realistic and strategic.

...reflective.

...relationship-focused.

...resourceful & receptive to feedback.
refined yet still fine tuning their skills.
“If you’re going into business, meeting people, building the right network will actually be beneficial, who knows, maybe tomorrow, next year, five years from now. I think that’s another reason for me, besides being employed, and also learning the process of how it is in the business environment, so it’s a good way to actually build up those skills - how to interact with business people.” (Participant 5)
“I knew [this firm] was going to be my number one choice. So I was always going on [to] their website every single day and refreshing the events page so I would **be the first one to sign up** because I knew that they filled up really quick and it was kind of first come first serve. I’d always go to their tax events and those ones are really good because you know there may be like twenty, twenty-five students there and like seven or eight or nine representatives at the office. So it was a really good chance you were really able to **get to know people well** and I knew some of the people so those are the events that I really enjoyed as well.” (Participant 3)

...**realistic** and strategic.
“I read this advice somewhere that the **HR representatives and the people on the recruit team [embody] key values of their firm** and [they are] ingrained in their head. And [when] they read it in a cover letter, it ignites something in them… so I tried to put some of the values from the firm and relate it to my cover letter and **demonstrate how I practice those values.**” (Participant 3)
“I went to every event I could and made sure I stayed connected with [the firm reps I met]. By the end of the summer, I [had already] met with [these firms] over ten times so they knew I was committed and that I wanted this [opportunity to work with them]. They thought I had the passion and motivation…I think at the end of the day that may be what made me stand out over someone else; they saw that I put in the effort.” (Participant 10)
...resourceful and receptive to feedback.

“I thought it was so inappropriate for me to ask someone like [a manager] to coffee to meet up with me because I thought he’s busy. Why would he want to take the time to talk to someone like me? If everybody who wanted to work for [this firm] was asking him out for coffee he’d never get any work done! I didn’t know that was an okay thing to do but then I learned from [an alumni mentor] that people are asking him out for coffee all the time just to get insight and I guess, talk about like possible positions, so that shocked me actually quite a bit as well.” (Participant 2)
Educators

Share an initiative in your institution that helps student develop this quality (or an idea you would like to see happen)

Do you currently see this quality in action at your workplace? In what way(s)?

How might employers encourage this quality?

Employers

Discuss the relevance of this quality in your context. How important is it to have co-op students or recent graduates exhibit this quality?

How does the initiative facilitate the development of this quality?

What would enhance its success?

Successful students were:

- Refined yet still fine tuning their skills
- Realistic and strategic
- Reflective
- Relationship-focused
- Resourceful and receptive to feedback

... and be prepared to report back.
Limitations

Small sample size

Data not generalizable

CPA Recruit changes

Recommendations

Explore how students develop these qualities (and what educators can do to support their development)

Investigate the viewpoints of other stakeholders (employers, educators, CPABC)
Questions?

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Special thanks to