

Employers' 'skills list' goes outside basic college classes

Groups help guide OCC on what a degree should mean

By Tom Richard
Staff Writer

For many jobs, communication is the most needed skill, say people who do the hiring. That covers listening, speaking, reading and writing.

"People coming from school can execute job skills," said restaurateur Matt Prentice, "but the ability to deal with an angry guest is more important than dealing with a happy guest. Culinary grads have culinary skills, but they also need the ability to deal with subordinates."

Prentice was summing up a Feb. 9 group discussion at Oakland Community College's Business and Community Alliance. The group — composed of people who do hiring in industry, government, services and commerce — meets quarterly on OCC's Orchard Ridge Campus.

Prentice is a chef who turned his tiny deli into a chain called Unique Restaurant Corp. headquartered in Bingham Farms.

"Confrontation is the most difficult situation," Prentice said. "If they (employees) can't deal with confrontation in a management situation, they're dead meat."

"The biggest problem I have is they'd rather go before a firing squad than get up before a group and speak. Many are good loners, but they can't delegate. They need to supervise groups of eight, 10, 20 or more employees."

"Understanding the global environment isn't an employability skill, but it's an attribute of an educated person."

— Bruce McIntyre
Great Lakes Media Inc.

Ability to work in a group and solve problems also was near the top of the employers' wish list for new hires.

Teamwork or collusion?

"Most people have difficulty working as part of a team," Prentice said. Another member said the school culture emphasizes individual learning, and "collaboration is considered cheating."

Purpose of the group discussion was to guide OCC administrators and faculty on what to teach to make their graduates not only educated but employable.

Judith Eaton, Oakland County personnel director, summed up another group's views on what made people employable: "flexibility, customer service for the client, a positive attitude, active learning, a strong work ethic and personal honesty."

"We do listen," said OCC Chancellor Richard T. Thompson. After earlier sessions, he said, English instructor Suba Subbarao proposed a new course to be called "Writing and Reading for Problem Solving."

The employers were impressed with OCC's 10 "core attributes of OCC graduates" list, saying it matches employability skills at many points. Observed Bruce McIntyre, of Great Lakes Media Inc., in Birmingham: "Understanding the global environment isn't an employability skill, but it's an attribute of an educated person."

Prentice pointed to OCC's core attributes list and said, "This sheet is really well done. Has this been shown to every student? If you show them a bar, they'll jump across it. Just expose them (students) to it."

Eaton's group said OCC should consider an "employability seminar" for students.

What employers want

Here are what many employers considered the top three core attributes for employability:

1. "To communicate effectively. Listens effectively; emphasizes listening, critical and reflective thinking and responding; able to locate, evaluate and synthesize information; selects appropriate communication choices for specific audiences;

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— Matt Prentice
restaurateur

2. "To learn independently constructs logical and coherent arguments; is clear and cogent in presentations."

- and collaboratively. Demonstrates self-initiative and self-discipline; can share and delegate responsibility; can resolve

conflict; sets, pursues and achieves goals; takes and gives effective feedback.

3. "To appreciate diversity and commonality. Aware of the similarities and differences that comprise the human experience; aware of the need for international understanding of global interdependence; can analyze personal attitudes; understands and knows how to get along in diverse environments."

Also on the OCC core attributes list were:

- "To think critically and creatively; to acquire interpersonal and personal development skills; to be technologically and scientifically literate; to solve problems, analytically, systematically and insightfully; to develop a strong commitment to social responsibility; to understand the global environment; to develop an aesthetic awareness."

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