

ESSENTIAL SOFT SKILLS FOR SUCCESS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST  
CENTURY WORKFORCE AS PERCEIVED BY ALABAMA  
BUSINESS/MARKETING EDUCATORS

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ESSENTIAL SOFT SKILLS FOR SUCCESS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST  
CENTURY WORKFORCE AS PERCEIVED BY ALABAMA  
BUSINESS/MARKETING EDUCATORS

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## VITA

Geana Maria (Watson) Mitchell, daughter of Stanley Alexander and the late Linda Jo (Fuller) Watson, was born July 28, 1971, in Haleyville, Alabama. She graduated from Haleyville High School in 1989. She married Mylan Brett Mitchell, son of Billy Charles and Peggy O'Neil (Barrett) Mitchell, on November 20, 2003. She has two children: Sarah Brett Mitchell, born February 13, 2007 and Mary Charles Mitchell, born October 3, 2008. She attended the University of North Alabama in Florence, Alabama, and graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Fashion Merchandising and Marketing in May 1994. She had a successful career in the fields of Marketing, Management, and Human Resources before deciding to pursue her business education degree. She graduated from Alabama A & M University in 2005, with a Master's Degree in Business Education. She began teaching in the Office Systems Management department at Alabama A & M University in 2005.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

ESSENTIAL SOFT SKILLS FOR SUCCESS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST  
CENTURY WORKFORCE AS PERCEIVED BY ALABAMA  
BUSINESS/MARKETING EDUCATORS

Geana Watson Mitchell

Doctor of Education, December 19, 2008  
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(B.S., Merchandising/Marketing, The University of North Alabama, 1994)

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This study was designed to determine (a) the extent to which Alabama business/marketing educators perceive the importance of specific soft skills for success in the twenty-first century workforce and the integration of soft skills into the business/marketing education curriculum; (b) whether or not differences occur between Alabama business/marketing educators perceived importance of soft skills for success in the twenty-first century workforce and the following demographics: number of years teaching, highest degree held, class of professional educator certificate, grade level taught, location of school, type of school; and (c) if there a relationship between concepts and techniques identified as important

by Alabama business/marketing educators and the extent to which these concepts and techniques are integrated into the business/marketing education curriculum. A survey was developed and distributed to Alabama business/marketing educators. Each educator was asked to assess the importance of specific soft skills, how these skills affect success in the workforce, and how often specific soft skills are integrated into the business/marketing education curriculum.

Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the sample (n=530) of business/marketing educators returned usable surveys for analysis. Each of the eleven skills yielded a mean score ( $M \geq 4.95$ ), the scale contained the following choices: (6) = Extremely Important and (1) = Not Important; indicating that Alabama business/marketing educators perceived all eleven skills to be very important. Most of the participants (77.9%) expressed that they integrate general communication into the classroom on a daily basis. Many participants (66.4%) integrate time management/organization into the classroom on a daily basis, while 62.4% integrate oral communication and 52.3% integrate written communication on a daily basis.

A significant difference was found between the perceived importance of how specific soft skills affect success in the workforce and the location of school (city, county). Overall, Alabama business/marketing educators have endorsed soft skills at a very high frequency; however, there is a low correlation between the perceived importance of soft skills and the integration of soft skills into courses. Nevertheless, many of the correlations did reach statistical significance. This indicates that the skills, concepts, and activities that did reach statistical significance are being integrated into the classroom to some extent.

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## I. NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

### Introduction and Background

The twenty-first century workforce has experienced tremendous changes due to advances in technology; consequently, the “old way” of doing things may be effective but not efficient (Redmann & Kotrlik, 2004). The National Business Education Association (NBEA) indicated that the shortage of skills confronting today’s dynamic workforce goes beyond academic and hands-on occupational skills. Therefore, the best way to prepare potential employees for tomorrow’s workforce is to develop not only technical but also human-relation abilities (Policies Commission for Business and Economic Education Statement No. 67, n.d.).

Perreault (2004) defined “soft” skills as personal qualities, attributes, or the level of commitment of a person that set him or her apart from other individuals who may have similar skills and experience. James and James (2004) agreed that soft skills are a new way to describe a set of abilities or talents that an individual can bring to the workplace. Soft skills characterize certain career attributes that individuals may possess like the ability to work on a team, communication skills, leadership skills, customer service, and problem solving skills (James & James). “Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Skills” (2004) specified that one who communicates effectively, gets along with others, embraces teamwork, takes initiative, and has a strong work ethic is

considered to have an accomplished set of soft skills. Sutton (2002) found that soft skills are so important that employers identify them as “the number one differentiator” for job applicants in all types of industries (p. 40). According to Sutton, soft skills have become extremely important in all types of occupations. Wilhelm (2004) agreed and claimed that employers rate soft skills highest in importance for entry-level success in the workplace.

The ability to assess foundation skills has become a national priority, as reflected in the following federal government initiatives. In 1998, the United States passed the Amendment to the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act–Perkins III which established accountability standards for all career and technical education programs to receive federal dollars. The SCANS (Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) report (1991) challenged schools, parents, and businesses to help all students develop fundamental skills like thinking skills and other personal qualities that are desired in the workplace. Furthermore, the No Child Left Behind “Enhancing Education Through Technology” Act of 2001 emphasized the importance of developing and implementing core standards and measures of performance in the area of foundation skills. According to Wilhelm (2004), the same employers that have encouraged the mentioned legislation and placed emphasis on soft skills and employee competencies continue to express dissatisfaction with entry-level job applicants. Wilhelm further noted that twenty-first century employers are seeking employees with polished interpersonal and foundation (soft) skills; unfortunately, the current entry-level job candidates severely lack these skills. Glenn (2003a) concluded that individuals who can successfully integrate technical (hard) skills with human relation (soft) skills have the competitive edge over other employees and will excel with ease.

## Purpose of the Study

The paradigm shift in the twenty-first century workforce has forced employees to be well armed with soft skills (Ganzel, 2001). James and James (2004) confirmed that soft skills have become extremely crucial even in technical environments. Evenson (1999) added that when students are equipped with soft skills, it could make the difference in obtaining and retaining the job for which they have been prepared.

Timm (2005) reported that the employment shift that America faces requires employees to provide more personal interaction with others than ever before; consequently, possessing only traditional technical skills will not be adequate in the new global marketplace. According to James and James (2004), hard (technical) skills were historically the only skills required to obtain and retain employment; however, recent history has shown numerous examples of how technical skills alone have failed to shelter workers from downsizing, position cuts, and lay-offs.

The NBEA stated that skills emphasized in the twentieth century must be refocused. To ensure success, students entering the twenty-first century workforce must possess non-technical soft skills along with technical competence (PCBEE Statement No. 67, n.d.). A complex labor market has been generated due to the multifaceted twenty-first century business world; therefore, organizations are seeking versatile individuals, who possess professional standards, even for entry-level jobs (Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004). According to Christopher (2006), employers want graduates with strong interpersonal abilities. Several researchers (Glenn, 2003a; Perreault, 2004; Sutton, 2002; Wilhelm, 2004) confirmed that mastery of soft

skills is instrumental to success for individuals entering the twenty-first century workforce.

The purpose of this study was to provide information that may be utilized by educators to improve the skills of students entering the workforce. This study may be valuable to business educators because the findings reported will help identify the most important workforce skills along with innovative techniques to integrate these skills. Furthermore, this information may allow educators to better plan and implement employability skills into their courses. This research is significant because it will reveal information regarding the importance of the quality of soft skills that employees in the workforce are seen to possess as perceived by Alabama business/marketing educators. Also, it will add to the existing body of information on soft skills.

#### Statement of the Problem

Effective integration of soft skills into the business curriculum can help students obtain and retain employment in the twenty-first century workforce (Glenn, 2003a; James & James, 2004; Perreault, 2004; Wilhelm, 2004). The National Business Education Association (NBEA) cited numerous challenges, but also significant opportunities, for educators to prepare students to enter the workforce. Furthermore, the NBEA stressed the importance of integrating soft skills into the business curriculum (Policies Commission for Business and Economic Education (PCBEE) Statement No. 67, n.d.).

The research problem in this study was to determine the importance of the integration of soft skills into the Alabama business/marketing education curriculum along with the concepts, techniques, and activities used to incorporate specific soft skills by

Alabama business/marketing educators. Specifically, this study was designed to determine (a) the extent to which Alabama business/marketing educators perceive the importance of specific soft skills for success in the twenty-first century workforce and the integration of soft skills into the business/marketing education curriculum; (b) whether or not differences occur between Alabama business/marketing educators perceived importance of soft skills for success in the twenty-first century workforce and the following demographics: number of years teaching, highest degree held, class of professional educator certificate, grade level taught, location of school, type of school; and (c) if there is a relationship between concepts and techniques identified as important by Alabama business/marketing educators and the extent to which these concepts and techniques are integrated into the business/marketing education curriculum.



## Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to address the statement of the problem:

1. To what extent do Alabama business/marketing educators perceive the importance of (a) specific soft skills for success in the twenty-first century workforce and (b) the integration of soft skills into the business/marketing education curriculum?
2. Do differences occur between Alabama business/marketing educators' perceived importance of soft skills for success in the twenty-first century workforce and the following demographics: (a) number of years teaching, (b) highest degree held, (c) class of professional educator certificate, (d) grade level taught, (e) location of school, and (f) type of school?
3. Is there a relationship between concepts and techniques identified as important by Alabama business/marketing educators and the extent to which these concepts and techniques are integrated into the business/marketing education curriculum?

## Definition of Terms

*Blog* - A “Web log.” In its simplest form, a Web page in the form of an online “diary.” The author writes or “logs” entries that others can read and give their reactions.

*Blogger* - (1) A person who “blogs.” (2) The name for one of the software technologies that people use to create blogs (e.g., Blogger)

*Communication* – A system of sending and receiving information, messages, or signals by talking, writing, or gesturing.

*Diversity* – The state of being different: things that are not alike, something that differs in some way from others of the same general class.

*Electronic Mail (E-mail)* – An electronic message that is distributed at the sender’s convenience to an electronic mailbox to be read at the receiver’s convenience. It facilitates the fast, convenient, flow of information among users via the Internet at various locations and time zones.

*Ethics* – A system of formal and informal standards of conduct and moral judgment that people use to guide their behavior.

*Global* – The interconnectedness of activities at home and abroad.

*Hard Skills* – The technical skills needed to perform a task or complete a job. Hard skills or technical skills are the task-oriented competencies that one acquires through education or training.

*Internet* – The vast “network of networks” that links computers throughout the world. Information in the form of text, images, audio, and video is quickly available and easily searchable.

*Instant Message (IM)* – An interactive e-mail that allows a varying number of people to log on and exchange text dialog that can be seen by all logged on participants.

*National Business Education Association (NBEA)* – The largest professional organization devoted exclusively to serving individuals and groups engaged in instruction, administration, research, and dissemination of information for and about business. The NBEA is the leading association devoted to the recognition that business education competencies are essential for all individuals in the twenty-first century's rapidly changing society.

*Podcasting* - A multimedia file that is distributed thorough the Internet or intranet. It can be audio only or include both audio and video.

*Policy Commission for Business and Economic Education (PCBEE)* – A national committee with representation from three major professional business education organizations: The Association for Career and Technical Education/Business Education Division, Delta Pi Epsilon, and the National Business Education Association. The purpose of the commission is to identify and define both existing and emerging issues in business and economic education.

*Professional Development* – The process of improving the instructional effectiveness of employees through training and enhanced institutional support structure.

*Soft Skills* – A set of personal qualities, attributes, talents, or the level of commitment that an individual can bring to the workplace that set him or her apart from other individuals who may have similar skills and experience (Perreault, 2004).

*Teamwork* – A joint action by a group of people in which individual interests are subordinated to group unity and efficiency.

*Time Management* – The ability of an individual to administer and schedule time and resources in order to efficiently complete tasks within a specified timeframe.

*Twenty-First Century Workforce* – A reference to the current working conditions of the twenty-first century's globally changing marketplace.

### Limitations

Limitations are the conditions beyond the control of the researcher that may place restrictions on the conclusions of the study and their applications to other situations.

Limitations in this study include (a) number of teachers responding to the surveys; and (b) self-reporting survey instrument. Educators in other states may have different ideas about employability skills; therefore, generalizations beyond this study must be made with caution.

### Delimitations

Delimitations are the boundaries beyond which the study is concerned. This study will only include Alabama business/marketing educators teaching grades 6-12.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature will cover the importance of soft skills, the instructional process of soft skills, and the general instruction of soft skills:

Introduction

The Importance Soft Skills

(General Communication Skills, Verbal Communication Skills, Written Communication Skills, Business Communication, Ethics, Teamwork, Diversity)

The Challenges of Instructing Soft Skills

(Diverse Learners, Transfer of Learning, Assessment)

Instruction of Soft Skills

(Communication Skills, Ethics, Teambuilding, Diversity)

Summary

### Introduction

The National Business Education Association (NBEA) believes that “Business educators have traditionally been successful in teaching the technical skills. While technical skills are effective tools to accomplish a task, they must be complemented by the soft skills to enhance

productivity. In the high performance workplace it is the human factors that impact the ability of organizations to succeed” (Policies Commission for Business and Economic Education Statement No. 67, n.d., p. 1).

The NBEA stated that skills emphasized in the twentieth century must be refocused. To ensure success, students entering the twenty-first century workforce must possess non-technical soft skills along with technical competence (PCBEE Statement No. 67). A complex labor market has been generated due to the multifaceted twenty-first century business world; therefore, organizations are seeking versatile individuals, who possess professional standards, even for entry-level jobs (Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004). According to Christopher (2006), employers want graduates with strong interpersonal abilities.

Berkseth (2004) reported that many industries are starting to initiate industry-based certifications that help identify the skills that individuals need for success. Examples of industry-based certifications include: the Certified Professional Secretary (CPS) exam, the Certified Administrative Professional (CAP) exam, and the Certified Management (CM) exam. Mastery of written, verbal, listening, presentation and communication skills along with basic business etiquette and diversity are required in order to pass these exams. Some of the benefits of achieving certification status include greater respect from colleagues and more confidence to assume additional responsibilities. In today’s workplace, obtaining these credentials can improve job retention and advancement opportunities (Schroeder, Graf, & Mull, 2005).

James and James (2004) asserted that soft skills are becoming extremely important to employers. Many researchers agree that twenty-first century employers are

seeking soft skills in potential employees. Some of these skills include effective communication, honesty and integrity, ability to work on a team, interpersonal skills, initiative, strong work ethic, creative thinking, strong self-esteem, leadership abilities, and basic business etiquette (Evenson, 1999; Glenn, 2003a; Hall, 2003; Perreault, 2004; Wilhelm, 2004). While these skills are considered extremely important, Wilhelm noted that employers find these soft skills most lacking in entry-level employees. Glenn (2008) added that even though most new hires possess exceptional information technology skills, the same individuals severely lack communication and leadership skills.

The 1990s produced two reports which placed emphasis on the skills needed for success in the high-tech workplace. The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) report in 1991, *What Work Requires of Schools*, emphasized increasing high-tech skills in order to make Americans more competitive for higher wages. In addition, this report emphasized the importance of soft skills, like the ability of employees to communicate. Studies of the findings from the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS 1991, 1992) are still used when defining competencies needed to be productive in the workforce. According to the report, the integration of academic subjects with career and technical skills will show students how academic knowledge can be applied to work situations. The skills and competencies reported in SCANS (1991, 1992) are regarded by twenty-first century employers as "necessary for success in the high performance workplace" (p. 105). Regardless of this acceptance, the same employer groups remain dissatisfied and disenchanted with the skills of job applicants (Kilcoyne & Redmann 2006; Wilhelm, 2004).

## The Importance of Soft Skills

According to Timm (2005), the advent of technology and globalization in the twenty-first century workforce commands a new type of employee. Kilcoyne and Redmann (2006) concurred that the emergence of technology, globalization, and flattening organizational hierarchy are all factors that have modified traditional employment. Timm reported that digitalization has complicated the U.S. economy and the constantly changing workforce. Kilcoyne and Redmann revealed that employers have voiced concern about the lack of skills possessed by the current workforce; furthermore, traditional skills needed by yesterday's workers are inadequate in today's workforce.

In a survey of the training priorities of senior training professionals conducted by Training Magazine as cited in Hall (2003), soft skills training is a key business issue. The NBEA stated that simply being technically competent is no longer sufficient in today's workforce; additionally, students must not only be aware that soft skills can enhance their careers and personal lives, but also be willing to apply these skills to appropriate situations (PCBEE Statement No. 67, n.d.). According to Glenn (2008), hiring individuals who possess soft skills is instrumental for high-performing organizations to retain a competitive edge. Hemby and Crews (2005) observed that when the economy is slow, employers are able to be very selective in hiring procedures. The best and brightest employees will be sought. Therefore, it is important for students entering the job market to know what employers are looking for. Additionally, they must ensure that their skills match the skills needed by employers. Timm (2005) agreed that traditional mediocrity will no longer be accepted for employees in today's society. Furthermore, without the



crucial viable skills that separate an individual from other employees, it may be difficult for him or her to earn a secure living.

In the past, analytically minded employees were able to complete their responsibilities by using hard skills and with little or no interaction with others. However, the paradigm shift in the twenty-first century workforce has forced employees to be well armed with soft skills (Ganzel, 2001). Evenson (1999) added that when students are equipped with soft skills, it could make the difference in obtaining and retaining the job for which they have been prepared.

Glenn (2003a) discussed that the high-performance twenty-first century workplace requires workers not only to be able to do basic tasks like improve processes and solve problems, but also to interact professionally and effectively with others. Employers are now focused on the demonstration of interpersonal skills; therefore, technical ability alone no longer ensures obtaining the best job (Towner, 2002). Moreover, Timm (2005) found that in order to attain the competitive edge, businesses want to attract and retain paramount employees, even if they must recruit worldwide. Twenty-first century job candidates are still judged on experience and technical abilities; however, attributes like being able to work with others on team projects and good communication skills are very important, as well (Towner). Timm concluded that individuals who are willing to adapt will be highly sought after; likewise, average employees will have average employment opportunities. Because individuals with the right mix of skills can make a real difference to the bottom line in business, companies are desperately seeking these candidates (Towner).

James and James (2004) defined hard skills as the technical skills needed to perform a task or complete a job and noted that hard skills or technical skills are the task-oriented competencies that one acquires through education or training. Likewise, Glenn (2003a) reported that more than just technical proficiency is needed in the high-performance workplace. Today's workforce requires an orientation and an attitude about work that takes the place of task performance.

The NBEA specified that in order to succeed in the current results-oriented, high-performance workplace students need a variety of skills (PCBEE Statement No. 63, n.d.). James and James (2004) noted that hard skills were historically the only skills required to secure and retain employment. While hard skills will improve an individual's employment search, they no longer protect employees from an altered economy, advances in technology, or more efficient production (James & James). According to the NBEA, business-related, non-technical soft skills along with technical competence are essential for success in the twenty-first century workforce. Further, students must possess human relation skills and self-management skills in addition to workplace enhancement skills to be successful in their careers (PCBEE Statement No. 67, n.d.). Hemby and Crews (2005) concluded that students can be well prepared technically and academically, yet lack "polish" (p. 4).

#### General Communication Skills

James and Lippe (2005) reported that employment opportunities for millions of workers in the United States have been impacted by the continued growth of the Internet and new technologies. Jobs have been eliminated due to outsourcing, downsizing, plant

closings, mergers and acquisitions, and other cost-cutting measures that businesses practice (Abbasi, Hollman, & Hays, 2007). Jaderstrom and Schoenrock (2008) noted that clear, concise communication is vital for success in the global business environment. According to Davis and Brantley (2003), the ability to effectively communicate permeates every aspect of life and applies to all disciplines. Lehman and DuFrene (2008) defined communication as “the process of a common system of symbols, signs, and behavior. Other words used to describe the communication process include expressing feelings, conversing, speaking, corresponding, writing, listening, and exchanging” (p. 4). Davis and Brantley (2003) agreed that essential basic communication skills include the ability to speak, signal, listen, write, and read. Further, Lehman and DuFrene stated that attending meetings, writing reports, presenting information, explaining and clarifying management procedures, coordinating the work of various employees, and promoting the company’s image are all described as ways to communicate.

Communication skills are listed by numerous executives as prime requisites for obtaining and retaining employment (Hartman & LeMay, 2004). Davis and Brantley (2003) concurred that the ability to communicate is essential for success in career growth and personal relationships. Lehman and DuFrene (2008) asserted that regardless of the field, communication skills are important to all twenty-first century job applicants. Twenty-first century businesses have placed enormous emphasis on the ability to communicate (Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004). Communication-based interactions promote personal and work-related associations (Job Market for the Class of 2002, 2002). In the business arena, employers rate communication skills as the number one attribute for recruits. Davis and Brantley

indicated that basic communication skills are key to success in the twenty-first century workforce. Hoggatt (2003) revealed that twenty-first century businesses and companies are adamant that “the value of good communication skills is no longer a matter for debate” (p. 30).

Studies over the years repeatedly indicated that business communication is a skill needed for business graduates. Rader and Wunsch (1980) surveyed recent business graduates to ascertain qualifications that they considered important for success in the workforce. Ninety percent of the graduates identified oral and written communication skills as essential skills for the workforce. Current studies yielded similar results. In a 2003 study of employers, 94% of the respondents listed oral communication skills and 89% listed written communication skills as crucial skills for employees (Hoggatt, 2003). Moss (1995) found that “High-level communication skills are crucial! Recently, we have seen college graduates trying to perform routine work but lacking various grammar and clarity skills. Please raise standards and professional levels” (p. 70). In a survey of recent college graduates conducted by James and Lippe (2005) business communication skills are rated as *essential* or *important*. Furthermore, despite the constant evolution of technology and the globalization of the marketplace, communication skills provide a foundation for graduates to obtain and retain employment. Sutton (2002) affirmed and stated: “right now if you have two candidates, both technically sound – even if one person is ahead in technical skills – the person with the better communication skills will get the job” (p. 20).

While communication skills are one of the most sought after characteristics in potential employees; it is also the most lacked skill (Employers Value Communication

and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004). Quibble (2004) agreed that many recent college graduates have difficulty communicating. A respondent in the Moss study (1995) said “Our experience with college grads concerning communication has been poor. They cannot write, they cannot speak, and generally have poor communication skills” (p. 74).

Although there is an enormous emphasis placed on the ability to communicate, many job applicants entering the workforce do not possess the needed skills to be successful. Twenty-first century employees must be able to not only write clearly, but also be able to speak appropriately in various situations including oral presentations, phone etiquette, and communicating with others on team projects (Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004). According to Lehman and DuFrene (2008), one of the most needed and least practiced communication skills is listening: “Listening commonly consumes more of business employees’ time than reading, writing, and speaking combined” (p. 53). Consequently, listening is an inter-personal skill that is as important, if not more so, than speaking. Hoggatt (2003) found that it is essential for business students to develop and refine communication skills before they enter the workforce. Communication skills are crucial for success; in fact, students who have mastered communication skills will surpass others when seeking a job (Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004).

### Verbal Communication Skills

Verbal communication is listed as a skill that potential job applicants severely lack (Hartman & LeMay, 2004). Hoggatt (2006) agreed that oral communication skills are an extremely important attribute for graduates entering the workforce. James and

Lippe (2005) affirmed that verbal communication skills and interviewing skills are crucial for an individual's success. Smart (2004) noted the importance of students having the ability to respond adequately to questions and concerns while under pressure. Hoggatt (2003) added that oral and written communication skills are reported most essential for success in the workforce.

There is an increased need for excellent communication skills in students entering the workforce. As an individual advances in his or her career, there is a greater demand for public speaking and the delivery of presentations (Stowers, 2004). Many anxiety-ridden students shutter at the thought of making oral presentations. Published reports cite the fear of public speaking as the single greatest fear in men and women (Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004; Hartman & LeMay, 2004; Stowers, 2004). Communication apprehension is the fear of public speaking, stage fright, or speech anxiety. Many individuals have a fear of public speaking (Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004). This fear does not simply go away and should not be ignored nor overemphasized (Stowers). Smart (2004) revealed that the characteristic of being able to accurately respond to complicated questions in a timely manner is an essential communication skill for business managers; moreover, it is paramount to maintaining strong public relations for an organization. Stowers indicated that business educators at all levels struggle to improve presentation skills in students. There is no easy solution to this problem. The idea that effective verbal communication skills are needed for success in the workforce must be reinforced continuously.

## Written Communication Skills

Written communication skills are considered to be important to the success of graduates in business programs. Christopher (2006) noted that the ability to write clearly and to critique, evaluate, and synthesize information is essential for success. Research studies (Christopher, 2006; Glenn, 2005a; Moss, 1995; Robles, 2005) indicate that students are deficient in business writing skills. Glenn (2005a) reported that twenty-first century businesses want employees with good writing skills. Christopher agreed and revealed that more companies are requiring job applicants to submit writing samples during the interviewing process. Moss (1995) cited that human resources managers and directors of training typically report that “there is a huge deficiency in proper grammar, punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure for most college graduates today” (p. 69). According to Christopher, poor business writing causes waste, errors, and lost productivity in the workplace. In addition, many reports are disorganized, use unnecessary words and are hard to understand. Glenn (2005a) concurs and reported that poor writing affects all professionals, including government, business, legal, and health; further, the lack of clear and concise writing creates unhappy customers while costing organizations time and money. Christopher pointed out that spelling errors, the use of poor grammar, and the inability to express clear and concise thoughts are characteristics that employers use to describe “bad” documents (p. 40). Robles (2005), agreed that grammatical errors reflect poorly on the person or company associated with the mistake. Glenn concluded that paying attention to content, style, structure, and design of written communication are tactics that put the reader first and help ensure understanding of the material. The goal is to write correctly in a way that makes sense.

## Business Communication

In the past, business communication skills encompassed business letters, memos, reports, and the telephone. With the advent of new technology, today's business communication includes cell phones, e-mail, text messaging, instant messaging, voice-mail, and faxes (Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004). Truell, Zhao, Alexander, & Whitesel (2005) observed that the advent of the Internet and e-mail directly affects how twenty-first century employees and companies communicate. Alexander, Zhao, Truell, & Whitesel (2005) affirmed that the establishment of the Internet has changed the twenty-first century workforce. Websites, e-mail, Blogs, Podcasts, and text messages are all important communication tools in the twenty-first century workforce.

The advent of the Internet has placed enormous emphasis on e-mail and Websites to be used as communication tools. E-mail provides two-way communication opportunities between users while web sites enhance the competitiveness and images of companies Truell et al. (2005). The website of a company reflects its ability to influence customer perceptions about company creditability and reputation. According to Alexander et al. (2005), companies use the Internet and/or Websites for advertising, job postings, and general communication. Organization, ease of navigation, balance, graphics, interactivity, functionality, and up-to-date content are qualities that contribute to a high-quality Website. Blogs or Web logs are becoming popular communication tools in the twenty-first century workforce. Blogs are effective means for an individual to participate in conversation about topics that are relevant to him or her (Glenn, 2004c).



A blog is a Web page that consists of brief, time stamped posts that are typically arranged in reverse chronological order. Posts often contain hyperlinks to other topics of interest. Furthermore, Glenn noted that Blogs are different from Web pages because they contain writer's opinions and solicit comments of readers. Blogs are much easier to create and maintain than Web pages; consequently, some educational consultants believe that blogs will eventually become a more effective method of teaching than Web pages.

The use of text messaging has grown tremendously over the past several years. According to Flatley (2004), an individual can send messages between cell phones or through e-mail. Although these messages are abbreviated, if they are used in a business context, they should be composed in a clear, concise, complete, and correct format. Further, Flatley stated that if text messaging is used efficiently in business, it can give employees another option for communicating at work.

Since first appearing in 2001, podcasting has grown very popular. Perreault (2007) defined a podcast as "a multimedia file that is distributed thorough the Internet or intranet" (p. 59). It can be audio only or include both audio and video. Organizations are increasingly creating podcasts to communicate messages and reach new audiences. In addition, Perreault noted that podcasts can be used in business to share meeting agendas, conference highlights, or breaking news stories.

## Ethics

Businesses organized within the United States are subject to laws and governed by a code of ethical standards. Ethics are a very important aspect of professionalism and

key to success in business. Lehman and DuFrene (2008) cited that legal and ethical issues are major strategic forces in business. Glenn (2004a) reported that corporate social responsibility has experienced tremendous growth during the last decade; in addition, many companies are now engaging in sober efforts to incorporate social responsibility into every facet of business.

Cheeseman (2007) specified that business professionals or fiduciaries owe a duty to society to act ethically while conducting business affairs; furthermore, there is a social responsibility not to harm society. Jennings (2006) defined company fiduciaries as the officers and directors of the corporation, who act in the best interest of the organization at all times and do not try to profit at the corporation's expense. Rice (2006) concurred that fiduciaries are corporate representatives who occupy positions of trust and confidence granted by the organizations and shareholders they represent.

Ethics are closely aligned with the concept of honesty, integrity, and morals. Ethics are about moral choices (Teaching Ethics in the Business Education Classroom, 2005). The Secretary's Commission for Achieving Necessary Skills (1992) defined integrity/honesty as the ability of an individual to choose an ethical course of action when making decisions or displaying behavior that affects the organization, self, or others. Carnes and Awang (2004) defined ethics as behaving in a "right and fair" fashion (p. 33). Jennings (2006) conveyed that ethical standards are higher than legal standards and defined ethics as "generally accepted rules of conduct that govern society" (p. 35). Cheeseman (2007) agreed that although much of the law is based on ethical standards, not all ethical standards have been enacted as law. The law establishes a minimum degree of conduct expected by people and businesses in society—ethics demands more.

Cheeseman (2007) attested that Immanuel Kant is perhaps one of the best known proponents of duty ethics or Kantian ethics. Kantian ethics is a moral theory that declares that one has moral duties that are based on universal rules, such as the golden rule. Religion and some of the great philosophers of history contributed greatly to ethical thinking (Cheeseman). The roots of ethics can be traced back thousands of years ago to the days of Plato, when Socrates asked the profound question in *The Republic of Plato* “What is justice?” Socrates taught that virtue and ethical behavior are associated with wisdom (Plato, 1945). In addition, many of the major religions of the world are in basic agreement of the fundamental principles of ethics.

In corporate America, ethical scandals are at an all-time high. High profile cases like Enron, Tyco, Arthur Anderson, Martha Stewart, and Coca-Cola reinforce the need for ethics in all business practices. In response to the high-profile accounting scandals, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002. Carnes and Awang (2004) reported that the Sarbanes-Oxley Act required publicly traded companies to disclose their codes of ethics and furthermore, report any changes or amendments to the code. Glenn (2004b) agreed that recent scandals are more about moral misconduct than making morally ambiguous choices. Many times it may seem that “the end is justifying the means;” however, a variation of the “golden rule,” put simply, is how business professionals should view ethics. The Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” is common to most world religions and a universal ethical principle. Wilhelm (2006a) affirmed that an example of a universal rule of ethics in our society is the Golden Rule.

In addition to economic decision making tools, organizational leaders need ethical decision making skills to evaluate daily dilemmas that occur in the business environment (Wilhelm, 2006b). Oftentimes people think only about lofty issues associated with ethics; however, ethics includes basic values like showing up for work on time and actually working, honesty and integrity, and completing the difficult jobs along with the simple ones (Glenn, 2004b). Carnes and Awang (2004) revealed that the following issues were present when ethical programs failed in business: inconsistent standards, lack of power given to ethics officers, poor communication, weak company systems, and a lack of ethical conduct by management. Glenn concluded that ethical dilemmas encompass the decisions that one must make throughout the course of an ordinary day like returning change when undercharged, falsifying resumes and work experience, refrigerator theft, covering-up for others, and misappropriation of company property. In addition, exaggeration on resumes is very common; further noted, it is much better to admit to weaknesses and frame them in the best possible light than to falsify information (Abbasi, Hollman, & Hayes, 2007). In order to be ethical in business, individuals and organizations must recognize that in the term “business ethics,” there is not separation in business and ethics (Glenn).

According to Carnes and Awang (2004), business professionals should be aware that there is not a universal standard for ethical behavior; furthermore, many companies develop their own code of ethics based on accountability, moral principles, and environmental issues. Glenn (2004b) asserted that the dilemma most employees face is having the moral courage to do the right thing even if it is an unpopular choice, earns them less money, or slows down their opportunities for advancement.

According to Glenn (2004b), some of the top ethical problems faced by organizations in America today are employee theft, discrimination, harassment, misuse of company information, misuse of company assets, and expense account abuse. Glenn added that companies now want stakeholders to know that they have standards; therefore, codes of ethics are posted in public places. Many companies also provide employee ethics training and require employees to sign ethics statements as a condition of employment. Carnes and Awang (2004) concurred that having a clearly articulated code of ethics, superior communication, empowered ethics officers, strong systems of reporting misconduct, and upper management who uphold ethical standards will facilitate ethics in the workplace.

#### Teamwork

According to Lehman and DuFrene (2008), the integration of teams, committees, and groups is vitally important to the twenty-first century workforce. Dupin-Bryant (2008) added that the use of groups or teams has become fundamental in today's business world. Winter, Neal, and Waner (2005) concurred that the use of teams and group work in business is extremely important. Lehman and DuFrene asserted that teams are able to achieve more collectively than they could individually by combining efforts and expertise. One of the most desired skills in potential employees is the ability to work on a team (Good for the Workplace and the Classroom, 2004). Olivio and Kuschke (2008) added that it is essential for individuals to possess the interpersonal skills to work well with others and to be able to function competently as a member of a group or team.

Lehman and DuFrene (2008) defined team as “a small number of people with complementary skills who work together for a common purpose” (p. 32). Teams can be formed to solve particular problems, or as permanent groups; regardless, they play a key role in the twenty-first century workforce (Good for the Workplace and the Classroom, 2004). According to Lehman and DuFrene, different types of teams can be formed that are specific to the task; some teams are permanent, high-powered, and self-managed, while other teams meet only long enough to solve specific problems. Teams generally form to accomplish tasks; therefore, there is a knack to creating a successful work environment for a group of employees that otherwise would not collaborate (Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004). Lehman and DuFrene reported that the use of teams has increased in recent years. Winter et al. (2005) observed that many times team members have different ideas and different personalities.

Employers are seeking workers that can effectively manage teams with diverse characteristics (Winter et al., 2005). In fact, companies scrutinize potential employees by having them simulate team experiences during interviews (Good for the Workplace and the Classroom, 2004). According to Lehman and DuFrene (2008) a group must go through a developmental process, sometimes involving conflict, in order to function as a team. Furthermore, Winter et al. found that if conflict is handled appropriately, it can be an effective tool for the development of the team. According to Lehman and DuFrene, (2008) organizations are prevalently utilizing teams to solve problems more so than ever before.

The four stages of team development are: *forming, storming, norming, and performing*. *Forming* is when team members become acquainted with each

other and the assigned task. *Storming* is dealing with conflicting personalities of different team members and creating new ideas. *Norming* involves developing strategies to promote team goals and achievement of those goals. *Performing* is when the team is working together at optimal performance and achieving goals (Lehman and DuFrene, 2008, p.60).

## Diversity

According to Glenn (2007), “the global economy is the new reality and the world is the new workplace” (p. 9). The NBEA maintained that global issues have exaggerated almost every aspect of life (PCBEE Statement No. 74, 2004). Statz (2005) reported that business graduates must understand how to function in the global marketplace. Dlabay (2003) defined globalization as “the process of expanding business activities in order to gain a worldwide perspective” (p. 251). Cook, Cook, and Yale (2005) contended that the globalization of the twenty-first century marketplace has created a blending of cultural customs and practices that makes exact rules for business etiquette impossible.

According to Scott (2002), culture is composed of the learned, shared, inter-related, and unifying beliefs, values, and assumptions that guide the beliefs and behavior of a group of people. Successful business people recognize the uniqueness of international settings and embrace the idea that many organizations are now part of a global economy (Cook et al., 2005). Differences like culture, age, gender, and education are all factors to consider. Furthermore, labor statistics report growing proportions of minorities and women in the workforce, while the proportion of white males declines (Leman & DuFrene, 2008). The NBEA contended that in order to be successful in the

global business environment, a multi-cultural perspective is crucial (PCBEE Statement No. 74, 2004).

Many companies from the United States have begun to conduct business with international companies; therefore, understanding how to effectively communicate with people from other countries is fundamental for success (Lehman & DuFrene, 2008). According to Statz (2005), business transactions across borders, direct foreign investments, licensing, franchising, and management contracts are some of the international business issues that twenty-first century employees will encounter. Glenn (2007) contended that ethics are an important aspect of conducting international business. Cook et al. (2005) reported that it is important to realize that not all people from the same country or culture act the same. Dupin-Bryant (2008) assessed that as companies continue to expand internationally, they will face major challenges.

According to Lehman and DuFrene (2008), a major strategic force that influences communication in the global marketplace is diversity. Glenn (2005c) concurred and added that because it is multi-generational, multi-cultural, and multi-national, diversity is not always immediately obvious. Lehman and DuFrene defined diversity as “your ability to communicate effectively with both men and women of all ages and with people of other cultures or minority groups” (p. 23). As the population of the United States becomes more diverse, it is particularly important to relate well to people of different cultures (Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004). Amyx, Bristow, and Luehlfing (2005) claimed that diversity is continuously growing and changing; consequently, customer needs, behavior, and values must be addressed by successful companies. Diversity has impacted the United States as a world leader because



changing demographics require businesses to face ethnic diversity in the workplace (Lehman & DuFrene). The United States, once defined as a *Melting pot*, according to Lehman and DuFrene is now better described as a *mosaic* where “small distinct groups combine to form the U.S. population and workforce” (p. 24).

### The Challenges of Instructing Soft Skills

Changing workplace environments and changing accreditation standards are forces that drive the need for educators to assess the labor market skills requirements (Kilcoyne & Redmann, 2006). According to McEwen (2008), twenty-first century teachers are surrounded by electronics; furthermore, they must be prepared to utilize these technologies to reach and stimulate their students. Hemby and Crews (2005) indicated that in order to stay abreast of what employers are seeking in potential employees, business educators must constantly adapt to relentlessly changing technology and a transformed job market. Establishing a relationship with local businesses is an effective way for business educators to stay abreast of appropriate skills needed for the workforce (Teaching the New Workplace Skills, 2003). The NBEA supports business educators possessing the abilities to learn, adapt, and change in order to successfully meet the needs of students, business, and society (PCBEE Statement No. 68, n.d.).

According to Wiedmaier (2003), one of the most important steps in teaching is planning for instruction. Planning includes systematic processes where instructional materials are created that are effective and beneficial for both students and the teacher. Furthermore, planning ensures the organization and readiness to teach for students. Wiedmaier discussed that planning for instruction includes various aspects of planning,

some of these are course planning, syllabi, unit plans, individual lesson plans, and lesson activities. Glenn (2003a) specified that business educators have a responsibility to create circumstances that will improve the interpersonal skills of students' thereby producing employees that businesses are seeking. Instructional attributes like teaching diverse learners, providing transfer of learning, and assessment of instruction are critical considerations when teaching soft skills.

### Diverse Learners

Differences in learning styles make teaching to a diverse group of students challenging (Glenn, 2005c). In addition, student differences can stem from cultural diversity, ethnic background, language barriers, learning style preferences, advanced readiness (gifted children), or neurological factors that affect learning (Glenn). According to Amyx et al. (2005), understanding the values and needs of students is important for recruiting and retaining minority students. In order to create a climate that promotes the success of students, differentiated instruction should be fair, appropriate, and accommodating to the student (Glenn).

### Transfer of Learning

Glenn (2005b) asserted that students are more likely to develop the skills needed to be successful in the workforce if the connection is made between the business world and the classroom. The NBEA affirmed that many students are not able to transfer the material learned in the classroom to workplace settings (PCBEE Statement No. 77, 2005). *Learning a Living; A Blueprint for High Performance*, was issued in 1992 and

emphasized the importance of educators teaching in context so that learning to “know” would not be separated from learning to “do.” Further, delivery methods of instruction should be changed to teach in context in order to provide students with skills and knowledge that the twenty-first century workforce demands. These reports provided a pathway for Congress to enact legislation incorporating the recommendations of the Commission. According to the PCBEE, work-based learning includes case-studies, simulations, and makes deliberate use of the workplace in instruction. Workplace learning links material that students learn in the classroom with the workplace. The goal is to challenge the student to transfer what they learn in the classroom to the workplace (PCBEE Statement No. 77).

Business educators must take the lead in integrating new practices, skills, and trends into the classroom in order to help students meet the challenges of the new economy (Teaching the New Workplace Skills, 2003). The NBEA believes that

business educators must embrace new paradigms, tools, and methods. It is paramount; however that effective learning remains the focus. Business educators must assure that professional performance in the emerging roles meets the needs of students, business, and society (PCBEE Statement No. 68, n.d, p.2.).

This can be achieved by acting as a facilitator to allow students to become independent learners, designing effective delivery methods of materials, collaborating with the community and businesses, acting as a mentor to students, and becoming a political advocate for educational initiatives (PCBEE Statement No. 68, n.d.). Meggison (2006) reported that business educators must continuously evaluate the methods used to respond

to the needs of students. “Teaching the New Workplace Skills” concluded that educators must create and reinforce a mind-set in students that recognizes the need to stay abreast of new concepts in order to be successful in their professional and personal lives.

## Assessment

Assessment is about evaluating student growth and achievement (Zeliff, 2007). Balachandran, Blair, and Lewis (2007) cited that twenty-first century educators and administrators are more accountable than ever before to students, parents, and the community to conduct effective assessment. Feedback offers students the opportunity to successfully achieve learning objectives. Further noted, feedback should be specific, relevant, and continuous (Briggs, 2007). Likewise, Zeliff believed that business educators should use a variety of assessment tools to determine student achievement. Briggs asserted that students should be made aware of teacher expectations prior to assessment.

Some effective assessment tools that can be integrated into business education instruction include checklists, journals, rubrics, reflections, and portfolios (Williams, Wattman, & Evans, 2007). Bush and Henderson (2003) agreed that rubrics and checklists are effective methods of assessment for projects and presentations. Williams et al. (2007) contended that rubrics are one of the most effective assessment tools. Further, portfolios, a newer type of assessment tool is good for the business education classroom because it can be made applicable to any subject and assessment purpose.

Bush and Henderson (2003) concluded that an essential component in evaluating student performance is assessment. Furthermore, effective assessment plans should be comprised of various measures that support overall goals, objectives, curriculum, and

instruction. According to Wilkinson (2007), whether assessment is formal or informal, it is an important aspect of student learning. Assessment can be considered “a roadmap for success” in instruction, and it ensures productive student learning (p. 88).

### Instruction of Soft Skills

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime” (Chinese proverb, n.d.). This adage supports the integration of soft skills into the business education curriculum. According to Perreault (2005), individuals who seek to acquire new skills and in turn take the initiative to apply those skills in a productive way will be highly desired in the twenty-first century workforce. The NBEA agreed and reported that graduates who can communicate, collaborate, value diversity, and harness the effectiveness of technology will be in great demand (PCBEE Statement No. 68, n.d.). Perreault specified that businesses are seeking employees who can make sound decisions while adapting to constantly changing conditions. Glenn (2003b) asserted that educators who seek to better prepare students for the workforce can integrate many methods and strategies, in turn, creating employees who possess an extraordinary combination of technical skills blended with interpersonal skills. Technical skills are effective for accomplishing tasks; however, they must be complemented by soft skills in order to enhance efficiency (PCBEE Statement No. 67, n.d.).

Businesses expect educational institutions to produce graduates who are prepared for the workforce (Kilcoyne & Redmann, 2006). Hara and Ono (2006) discussed that proactive business education programs must make the appropriate changes to meet the demands of the constantly changing workforce. It is sound educational practice to

integrate business principles, skills, and practices into the traditional academic curriculum (Yopp, 2003). Kilcoyne and Redmann suggested that in order to reflect the most important skills needed, the latest trends and information on employment and workplace competencies should be considered by curriculum planners when updating the curriculum. Glenn (2005b) concurred and asserted that when the training that educational institutions provide differs from the skills that potential employers are seeking, a skills gap is created. Business educators are in an excellent position to develop soft skills and teach them within business programs (Perreault, 2004).

When soft skills are improved even at the high school level, it better prepares students to enter the workforce (Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004). According to Rucker and Reynolds (2002), technology is advancing relentlessly; consequently, business educators are challenged to present quality lessons to integrate soft skills into the curriculum. Bennett (2006) agreed and added that the emergence of technology in the classroom has left little time for learning soft skills and basic business etiquette instruction. Evenson (1999) reported that it is hard for some educators to integrate soft skills into an already mired curriculum. Ganzel (2001) discussed that sometimes soft skills are the most difficult skills for individuals to learn. Employers reported soft skills hard to teach to new employees; therefore, business educators should be placing more emphasis on these skills (Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004).

The SCANS report (1992) listed critical skills and urged educators to incorporate workplace readiness skills into existing academic programs. Some of the skills listed include personal qualities like decision-making, responsibility, reasoning, initiative, self-

management, honesty, and integrity in addition to communication and computation. Evenson (1999) suggested introducing students to basic human relations skills, teaching critical customer service skills, facilitating critical-thinking discussions based on real workplace scenarios, and role playing exercises to demonstrate skills that have been learned. Bennett (2006) reported that knowledge of basic business etiquette is imperative in order to make students feel comfortable communicating and interacting with others in any type of corporate environment. Building and maintaining positive relationships should be another main focus of instruction (Crews, North, & McCannon, 2002). Perreault (2004) encouraged educators to prepare students to meet the challenges and contribute positively to the global marketplace. Using employee manuals in the classroom will give students a better understanding of what employers expect (Professional Demeanor and Personal Management, 2004). Furthermore, treating students more like employees can help promote workforce competencies. Ganzel (2001) noted that being able to converse with customers and work with others as a team are important concepts for individuals to master. According to Bennett, business etiquette activities help students become more comfortable in business and social situations, and they can easily be integrated across the business curriculum. The NBEA suggests professional mentors, community partners, civic organizations, and the business community can help students learn about soft skills (PCBEE Statement No. 67, n.d.). Comparing assignments to business demands, expecting students to meet deadlines, having students contact the teacher before missing class, and having students dress in business attire while making presentations are a few additional ways to treat students more like employees (Professional Demeanor and Personal Management, 2004).

## Communication Skills

Today's students live in a fast-paced age of technology and the Internet that is inundated with information (Braathen & Prigge, 2003). Children learn to speak at early ages; however, the ability to effectively communicate has to be learned (Employers Value Communication and Interpersonal Abilities, 2004). According to Hoggatt (2006), business educators should not wonder if they should be teaching oral and written communication skills; the question is how can they best be taught? Christopher (2006) found that there is now a greater emphasis on communication skills across the business curriculum. Jaderstrom and Schoenrock (2008) added that strategies for teaching communication skills are changing continuously to meet the needs of students and businesses.

Hoggatt (2003) claimed that communication skills are essential for success; consequently, students should be provided with skills that prospective employers are seeking. Wilson (2003) agreed and observed that business courses should provide students with the necessary skills to conduct business research while developing the analytical thinking and communication skills of students. Hoggatt (2003) stated that the lack of emphasis placed on communication skills is alarming; hence, there is a valid concern for improving the communication skills of twenty-first century students.

Robles (2005) found that it is imperative for students to understand the importance of effective writing across the disciplines and that their writing serves a specific purpose; in addition, students must analyze the intended audience and make the message applicable. Plutsky and Wilson (2004) suggested alternative methods of



instruction that shift the process of reviewing and evaluation to the students. Robles concurred that it is essential for business educators to make editing and proofreading a relevant and appealing way for students to enhance their writing skills. Plutsky and Wilson defined peer review as having students critique the work of other students. This process is effective because students become more perceptive of mistakes and pay better attention to details.

Wilson (2003) pointed out that the opportunity for students to explore multiple options and perspectives in communication can be achieved by creating a critical thinking culture in business courses. Further, business courses should strive to engage students in activities that promote critical thinking patterns. Braathen and Prigge (2003) concurred and contend that traditional teaching methods should be made more self-centered and hands-on to make the learning modules fun. When these activities are incorporated into the business classroom, students are better able to connect with the intended lesson topic. Hoggatt (2003) attested that it is extremely important for students to have the opportunity to acquire the essential communication skills needed for success; therefore, business educators must promote these critical skills.

## Ethics

According to Wilhelm (2006a), the call for ethics education is more pronounced now than ever. Theriot (2004) reported that corporate America's scandals have provided poor examples to students; subsequently, the scandals are a disgrace and have not contributed to strengthening the character of students. Wilhelm (2005) affirmed and

established the idea that the recent scandals in the business world have articulated the need for ethics in schools today.

The high profile ethical failures of businesses prevalent in today's news create the possibility of alienating students from careers in business (Wilhelm, 2005). Carnes (2007) discussed that the Association to Advance Collegiate School of Business (AACSB) along with business stakeholders have encouraged business educators to integrate innovative ethics education at all levels. Some school districts are using character education to address moral and ethical issues (Making the Case, 2005). Theriot (2004) affirmed and stated that in order to encourage the development of students that will reject unethical behavior, values education should be integrated across the curriculum. Perreault (2004) defined character education as the support of ethical, responsible decision-making. Additionally, character education concentrates on the community, civic responsibilities, cooperation with others, and self-respect. Glenn (2004b) believed that role models are very important in moral and ethical development. Theriot agreed and suggested that moral and ethical education should be incorporated into the regular coursework of students even if strong integrity policies are in place.

While ethics cannot be taught, ethical reasoning and business ethics can and should be taught. When students are taught to reason through ethical dilemmas, they are more likely to take ethical action. Many times ethical choices involve a choice between two goods or the lesser of two evils (Teaching Ethics in the Business Education Classroom, 2005). Glenn (2004b) noted that business educators are expected not only to instill an awareness of ethics in students, but also to convey ethical and social responsibility. What twenty-first century students consider "unethical" is generally

classified as illegal (Teaching Ethics in the Business Education Classroom, 2005). Carnes (2007) cited that the goal is for students to be aware of how ethical issues can affect organizations as well as individuals.

Schulte and Carter (2004) discussed the idea that learning atmospheres should promote respect for others; moreover, initiatives should be nurtured by administration, teachers, and students. An effective method of teaching ethics in the business education classroom is through the use of cases. The cases provide a framework for making decisions (Making the Case, 2005). Spain and Carnes (2005) agreed that case studies are an effective method of teaching ethical decision making to students. Carnes (2007) stated that real-world case scenarios give students the opportunity to identify ethical dilemmas and should be integrated across the curriculum.

Carnes and Awang (2004) indicated that one idea for producing ethical employees is to have students conduct investigations of companies to learn about important ethical standards. In addition, students should receive instruction on ethical dilemmas and the morally correct solutions to problems. Having students assess the issues, facts, alternatives, and consequences of a situation is a good way to teach students to reason through ethical dilemmas (Glenn, 2004b). Wilhelm (2005) reported that the use of established ethical reasoning methods have the potential to deflect cynical views of business as a career choice, while positively affecting the moral reasoning abilities of students. Schulte & Carter (2004) pointed out that when students are educated in environments that characterize positive ethical climates, there is a better likelihood that they will demonstrate ethical behavior in the business world.

## Teambuilding

Team-based learning helps students develop interpersonal skills; therefore, they will be more productive and effective upon entering the workforce (Good for the Workplace and the Classroom, 2004). Crews, North, and McCannon (2002) reported that preparing students to interact with others, solve problems, think independently, and to work as team members are certain soft skills that all students should know. Roach, Bevill, and Valentine (2005) agreed and claimed that team projects will help promote student learning in business as well as non-business courses. Large and small team projects that provide students the opportunity to collaborate can be integrated into the classroom (Timm, 2005). Timm further noted that this type of instruction is crucial for students to examine multiple viewpoints in accomplishing objectives. According to James and James (2004), an effective way to teach teamwork skills is to integrate teambuilding activities along with role playing into the curricula. Once the teacher provides the initial instructions, he or she then becomes a facilitator, leaving the team to take the lead (Good for the Workplace and the Classroom, 2004). Advantages of integrating team projects and presentations into the curriculum include students in the audience having the opportunity to learn about the topic being presented (Roach et al., 2005). When teamwork is effectively integrated into instruction, team-based learning can result in more academic success than individuals working alone (Good for the Workplace and the Classroom, 2004).

## Diversity

The literature increasingly supports the need to integrate international business into the business education curriculum. The Policies Commission for Business and Economic Education believes that the curriculum should encompass knowledge of the functional areas of business along with a global perspective (PCBEE Statement No. 74, 2004). According to the *National Standards for Business Education*, global issues have impacted almost every aspect of life. Dlabay (2008) reported that because of the cross-cultural interactions that now occur frequently in business, there is a significant need for international business education. Furthermore, as these factors continue to grow, the challenge for business educators to prepare students to compete and thrive in a global society also grows.

Scott (2002) revealed that when educators plan for instruction of diversity and communication, special consideration should be given to instructional objectives and approaches. This will help students understand how to communicate globally. Dlabay (2003) concurred that students must be fluent with global business activities because economic interdependence is now commonplace. Students should be made aware of the demographics of today's global market place, as well as the future trends for even more diversity (Statz, 2005). According to Dlabay, international trade concepts, the global business environment, techniques for conducting international business, global marketing activities, international finance, and global risks are all topics that help ensure that business students are prepared to function in a global society. Glenn (2007) concluded that in order to better prepare students to succeed in the workplace, business educators

must understand the reality of the global marketplace; and furthermore, find out what employers expect of employees in the twenty-first century marketplace.

### Summary

The literature reviewed indicates that soft skills will and should play a vital role in the success of individuals in the twenty-first century workforce. Since the 1990's, business education research studies have been examining soft skills. According to Perreault (2004), *Soft Skills* are a set of personal qualities, attributes, talents, or the level of commitment that an individual can bring to the workplace that set him or her apart from other individuals who may have similar skills and experience. James and James (2004) agreed that soft skills are a new way to describe a set of abilities or talents that an individual can bring to the workplace. According to Sutton (2002), soft skills have become extremely important in all types of occupations, even in the technical environment. Wilhelm (2004) agreed and claimed that employers rate soft skills highest in importance for entry-level success in the workplace. As the business world changes relentlessly, graduates entering the workforce must recognize the importance of soft skills in finding employment and advancing in their careers.

Hemby and Crews (2005) indicated that in order to stay abreast of what employers are seeking in potential employees, business educators must constantly adapt to the changing job market. Teaching the New Workplace Skills (2003) agreed that establishing relationships with local businesses is an effective way for business educators to stay abreast of appropriate skills needed for the workforce. The NBEA believed that business educators must possess the ability to learn, adapt, and change in order to

successfully meet the needs of students, business, and society (PCBEE Statement No. 68, n.d.). Glenn (2003a) specified that business educators have a responsibility to create circumstances that will improve the interpersonal skills of students; therefore, producing employees that businesses are seeking.

Timm (2005) reported that the employment shift that America faces requires employees to provide more personal interaction with customers than ever before; consequently, possessing only traditional technical skills will not be adequate in the new global marketplace. This study will be valuable to business educators in planning and implementing employability skills into the curriculum. Research findings may be integrated into the classroom so that business educators can better prepare students for success in the twenty-first century workforce.

The literature supported the conclusion that soft skills proficiency is important to potential employers. However, many employees in business are reported to be deficient in soft skills. Furthermore, the literature revealed that research is needed in the area of soft skills so that improved instructional methodology may be developed and applied by business educators.

### III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

#### Introduction

The focus of this study was to determine the perceived importance level of specific soft skills that exists in business/marketing educators in the state of Alabama. This study also examined the perceived importance of the integration of soft skills into Alabama business/marketing education courses. Furthermore, the study clarified how often specific skills were integrated into the classroom by Alabama business/marketing education teachers.

Permission to conduct this study was granted from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). Researchers at Auburn University, where the study was conducted, must obtain permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to use the response of human subjects. Protocol, a request for exempt status, an information letter, and a copy of the survey instrument were forwarded to the IRB for approval prior to the survey being sent. Permission was also granted by the participants who returned a completed survey.

#### Sample

The Alabama secondary business/marketing educators were the population for this study. These teachers can provide current and relevant information concerning their perceptions of skills needed to succeed in the workforce. The Alabama Department of



Education 2007-2008 Business/Marketing Education Directory provided the roster of names from which the sample was taken. The directory is available from the State of Alabama Department of Education. The population included Alabama secondary business/marketing education teachers listed in the directory.

A systematic sample was taken from the population, spreading the sample more evenly. Every other name was selected from an alphabetized listing of 1061 secondary business/marketing educators. This population ( $n = 530$ ) included business/marketing educators listed in the directory.

Each business/marketing education teacher selected received a survey. In order to maximize the number of surveys returned, half of the population was surveyed. The sampling unit was each individual respondent to the survey that was used to collect data. It is reasonable to consider each respondent a sampling unit, because the respondents answered the surveys individually and not as a group.

### Research Design

A quantitative research study was conducted by surveying all of the Alabama business/marketing educators that were selected. According to Creswell (2003),

A quantitative approach is one in which the investigator primarily uses post positivist claims for developing knowledge (i.e. cause and effect thinking, reduction to specific variables and hypotheses and questions, use of measurement and observation, and the test of theories), employs strategies of inquiry such as experiments and surveys, and collects data on predetermined instruments that yield statistical data (p. 18).

A survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell, 2003). A purpose of survey research is to collect primary data, specifically, data gathered and assembled for the research project at hand (Emory & Cooper, 1991; Minium, King, & Bear, 1993). Surveys are very flexible and extremely valuable for obtaining information (McCall, 1990). The development of a survey for this study was driven by the research objectives. According to Dillman (2000): “(1) responding to a self-administered questionnaire involves not only cognition, but also motivation, and (2) multiple attempts are essential to achieving satisfactory response rates to self-administered surveys regardless of whether administered by e-mail, the web, or postal delivery” (p. 13). The researcher’s goal was to develop and administer a survey instrument which meets these two fundamental assumptions. The survey was sent, by mail, to all Alabama business/marketing educators participating in the quantitative research study. Once the responses were received, the data were analyzed, and the results reported.

### Instrumentation

Data were collected through a researcher-designed survey (Appendix C) entitled Twenty-First Century Workforce Soft Skills Assessment (TCWSSA). The TCWSSA is comprised of five sections: Section 1: Teacher Background/Demographics – which included demographic data; Section 2: Importance of Soft Skills – which revealed specific soft skills perceived to be most important; Section 3: Teaching Concepts/Activities – how often specific concepts and activities are integrated into the classroom; Section 4: Integration – the educators’ perception of importance of the

incorporation of skills identified; and Section 5: Opened-ended Questions – respondents had the opportunity to list other skills that they feel are essential to success in business, other methods or techniques used to integrate soft skills into the business education curriculum, and/or any additional comments that the respondent felt would be pertinent to this study.

The demographic data in section one included the number of years the educator has been teaching, highest degree held, highest certification held, grade levels taught, the location of school, the type of school, and classes that are currently taught. In Sections 2 and 4 of the survey instrument, a six-point Likert-type scale was provided for each section. Respondents were instructed to rate the level of importance of each soft skill: (6) = Extremely Important and (1) = Not Important. In Section 3 of the survey instrument, respondents were instructed to rate how often listed skills are integrated into courses that they are currently teaching (4) Daily, (3) Weekly, (2) Periodically, or (1) Never.

An explanation of the purpose of the survey and the importance of each Alabama business/marketing educator responding completely and to the best of his or her ability was provided in the information letter. The instrument used a readable font style and format; further, it included specific instructions for responses that preceded each section. Dillman (2000) indicated that instructions should be placed on the questionnaire; further, specific instructions should be given for every section.

## Validity and Reliability

The basis for the items on the survey was derived from the research objectives of this study and the review of literature. The areas included in the review of literature focused on such topics as soft skills, communication skills, ethics, diversity, teambuilding, time management/organization skills, problem solving/critical thinking skills, customer service, leadership, business etiquette, and instruction of these topics. The most prominent internal validity concern in designing the survey was the presence and degree of measurement error. Developing instructions and questions that were worded clearly in the survey instrument controlled the degree and presence of measurement error. Furthermore, directions were used in all related correspondence to facilitate response. Questions not clearly stated leading to individual respondent interpretation and speculation, ambiguous questions, and unclear instructions could lead to some degree of systematic or non-random error. Minimizing or eliminating these sources of error, to the extent possible, was addressed during the development of the survey.

Content validity, and usability of the survey instrument were determined through a panel of expert judges. Based on knowledge and experience in descriptive survey research design, survey instruments, and/or data collection, a selected group of educators and researchers were asked to review the survey instrument for clarity of directions, concepts, and definitions. The panel was asked to assist in developing an instrument which accurately represented the area and domain of interest in this study as well as the perception that the instrument will measure what it purports to measure. The comments,

input, and recommendations of each panel member were considered and incorporated into the final instrument. Packets were then mailed to the sample for data collection.

Rating scales can assume different formats; however, they share a common approach because respondents are instructed to indicate their position or attitude. The reliability of any measurement instrument needs to be assessed (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). According to Shannon and Davenport (2001), the more consistent the results from a measurement instrument are, the more reliable they will be. Cronbach's Alpha was used to estimate the internal consistency of the Twenty-First Century Workforce Soft Skills Assessment (TCWSSA). Section 2: Importance of Soft Skills consisted of items scored with a Likert-type scale using six possible values. Respondents were instructed to rate the level of importance of each soft skill: (6) = Extremely Important and (1) = Not Important. In Section 3: Teaching Concepts/Activities of the survey instrument, respondents were instructed to rate how often listed skills are integrated into courses that they are currently teaching (4) Daily, (3) Weekly, (2) Periodically, or (1) Never. Section 4: Integration also consisted of items scored with a Likert-type scale using six possible values. Respondents were instructed to rate the level of importance of integration for each skill: (6) = Extremely Important and (1) = Not Important.

According to Pedhazur and Schmelkin (1991), in order for a scale to be reliable, it should have an alpha of .70 or higher. Results of Cronbach's Alpha for the scales used to determine Section 2: Importance of Soft Skills was .87. Cronbach's Alpha for the scales used to determine Section 3: Teaching Concepts/Activities was .92. In section 4: Integration, Cronbach's Alpha was .88. Therefore, the results of Cronbach's Alpha for each scale analyzed indicated acceptable levels for research purposes.

## Data Collection

Each member of the sample received a packet including (a) an information letter (Appendix B) describing the study and outline of the procedures to be followed; (b) a survey instrument (Appendix C); and a pre-addressed stamped envelope. The respondents were asked to return the survey within two weeks utilizing the pre-addressed, stamped envelope. To preserve confidentiality of the participants, each return envelope was assigned a code number to be used only for follow-up purposes. During the data collection process, only the researcher had access to the code numbers. As the surveys were returned, the participant's names were removed from the list and the coded, returned envelopes were destroyed. The information letter explained the purpose of the code.

Follow-up procedures were conducted with subjects who did not return the survey. Initially, follow-up e-mails were sent to the subjects with a valid e-mail address listed in the 2007-2008 Alabama Department of Education Business Education Directory. Phone calls were also utilized for further follow-up; however, respondents were only contacted once for follow-up. At the conclusion of the data collection, one hundred fifty-three (153) surveys were returned and four (4) surveys were returned either blank or were not usable. There were one hundred forty-nine usable surveys, which resulted in a 29% participation rate.

## Data Analysis

Statistical treatment of the data included the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to organize, summarize, and

describe the collected data and to provide an indication of the relationship between variables.

A Pearson product-moment correlation (Pearson  $r$ ) was used where the independent variable was continuous and the dependent variable was continuous. This is the most frequently used bivariate correlational procedure and is an acceptable method of data analysis (Huck, 2000; Shannon & Davenport, 2001). A Pearson  $R$  was used to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship between/among the perception of the importance of soft skills and the number of years that the educator has been teaching business education.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to evaluate quantifiable responses where the independent variable is categorical and the dependent variable is continuous. According to Emory & Cooper (1991), McCall (1990); and Minium, King, & Bear (1993), this is an acceptable method. ANOVA was used to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between/among the perception of the importance of soft skills and the number of years that the educator has been teaching.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were used also to determine the relationship between the perception of the importance level of soft skills by Alabama business/marketing educators *AND*: the highest degree held (Bachelor, Master, Specialist, Doctorate); the highest certification level held (B-Bachelor, A-Master, AA-Post Master); grade levels taught (6-8, 9-12); the location of the school (city or county); and the type of school (Comprehensive High School, Junior High school, Middle School, Intermediate School, Vocational Center, Schools Including Grades 7-12, Schools Including Grades 1-12). A value above the critical level for the appropriate degrees of freedom indicates

significance. This level was the .05 level of probability. In other words, if differences occurred less than 95% of the time, the difference was significant.

A Spearman rank-order correlation (Spearman rho) was used where the independent variable was continuous and the dependent variable was continuous. This correlation is similar to a Pearson Product-Moment Correlation; however, in this type of correlation, the variables are measured in a way as to produce ranks (Huck, 2000). The Spearman rho was used to determine if there was statistically significant relationship between skills reported to be important and the integration of concepts and activities related to those skills into the business/marketing education curriculum.



## IV. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### Introduction and Restatement of the Problem

This research study was designed to determine the perceived importance of specific soft skills among business/marketing educators in the state of Alabama. This study also examined the perceived importance of the integration of soft skills into Alabama business/marketing education courses, as well as how often these specific skills are integrated into the classroom by Alabama business/marketing education teachers. Reviewed literature in Chapter II revealed the necessity for business/marketing education to include soft skills training and integration of soft skills into the business/marketing education classroom in order to better prepare students to enter the workforce. This chapter presents the analysis of the data collected from Alabama business/marketing education teachers utilizing the researcher-developed Twenty-First Century Workforce Soft Skills Assessment (TCWSSA) instrument.

### Descriptive Data Analysis and Results

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were run in SPSS to summarize, analyze, organize, and describe the data and to provide an indication of the relationships between variables. The Twenty-First Century Workforce Soft Skills Assessment (TCWSSA) instrument was designed to collect demographic information from the respondents. One hundred forty-nine (149) survey instruments were used to

compile data in this study. Table 1 presents the demographic information related to grade level taught, highest degree held, and highest certification level held. The largest percent of respondents taught 9 – 12 grades (87.9%), held a master’s degree (68.5%), and held a class A (master’s level) certification (47.7%).

Table 1

*Demographic Data of Respondents*

Categories	<i>n</i>	Percent
<b>Grades Taught (<i>n</i>=148)</b>		
6-8	17	11.4
9-12	131	87.9
<b>Highest Degree (<i>n</i>=149)</b>		
Bachelor	28	18.8
Masters	102	68.5
Specialist	14	9.4
Doctorate	5	3.4
<b>Highest Certification (<i>n</i>=133)</b>		
B (Bachelor)	19	12.8
A (Master)	71	47.7
AA (Specialist)	30	20.1
Alternative	12	8.1
Emergency	1	0.7

Table 2

*Type of School of Respondents*

(*n*=148)

Type of School	<i>n</i>	Percent
Comprehensive High School	98	65.8
Junior High School	3	2.0
Middle School	15	10.1
Intermediate School	1	0.7
Vocational Center	10	6.7
School Including Grades 7-12	11	7.4
School Including Grades K-12	10	6.7

The descriptive statistics also identified the various types of schools in which respondents taught. Table 2 reflects the collected data. Most of the respondents (65.8%) taught at a comprehensive high school.

Table 3

*Years of Teaching Experience*

(n=148)

Number of Years	<i>n</i>	Percent
1 – 5 years	46	31.0
6 – 10 years	39	26.3
11 – 15 years	23	15.5
16 – 20 years	14	9.4
21 – 25 years	11	7.4
26 – 30 years	8	5.4
Over 30 years	7	4.7

Table 3 details the years of teaching experience as reported by respondents. The majority of respondents (31.0%) have been teaching from 1 – 5 years. The average years teaching business education reported by the respondents was 11.7. The majority of the respondents (56.4%) taught in a county school system. While many respondents, 43.6% taught in a city school system. These findings are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Location of School of Respondents*

(n=149)

Location of School	<i>n</i>	Percent
City School	65	43.6
County School	84	56.4

Research Questions

Research question 1: To what extent do Alabama business/marketing educators perceive the importance of: (a) specific soft skills for success in the twenty-first century workforce and (b) the integration of soft skills into the business/marketing education curriculum? Part (a) of this research question was addressed by survey questions 8 – 18, Section 2: Importance of Soft Skills on the Twenty-First Century Workforce Soft Skills Assessment (TCWSSA). The majority of the respondents (75.2%) reported general ethics as an extremely important skill that students need for success in the twenty-first century workforce. Many respondents (73.2%) reported general communication skills as extremely important, while 57.0% reported written communication as extremely important and 56.4% reported time management/organization skills as extremely important. Table 5 reflects the frequency and percentages of specific soft skills important to success in the workforce as perceived by Alabama business/marketing educators. Table 6 details the mean and standard deviation of each skill relating to the respondent's perceived degree of importance.

Table 5

*Ranking of Specific Soft Skills for Success in the Workforce*

(n=149)

Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
<b>General Communication</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	0	00.0
4	3	2.0
5	37	24.8
6	109	73.2
<b>Oral Communication</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	3	2.0
4	18	12.1
5	60	40.3
6	68	45.6

(Table Continues)

(Table 5 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
<b>Written Communication</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	1	00.7
4	7	4.7
5	56	37.6
6	85	57.0
<b>General Ethics</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	2	1.3
4	2	1.3
5	33	22.1
6	112	75.2

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(Table Continues)

(Table 5 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
<hr/>		
Diversity		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	4	2.7
4	14	9.4
5	55	36.9
6	76	51.0
Teamwork		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	0	00.0
4	15	10.1
5	55	36.9
6	79	53.0

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(Table Continues)



(Table 5 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
Time Management/Organization		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	0	00.0
4	5	3.4
5	60	40.3
6	84	56.4
Problem Solving/ Critical Thinking		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	0	00.0
4	16	10.7
5	67	45.0
6	66	44.3

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(Table Continues)

(Table 5 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
<b>Customer Service</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	1	0.7
3	1	0.7
4	12	8.1
5	64	43.0
6	71	47.7
<b>Leadership</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	6	4.0
4	43	28.9
5	53	35.6
6	47	31.5

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(Table Continues)

(Table 5 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
<b>Business Etiquette</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	0	00.0
4	12	8.1
5	69	46.3
6	68	45.6

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Likert-type scale for each category under degree of importance:

(6) = Extremely Important (1) = Not Important.

*Note:* Data and information obtained from questions 8 - 18 on TCWSSA survey

(Appendix C).

Table 6

*Importance of Specific Soft Skills*

(n=149)

Category	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
General Communication	5.71	.497
Oral Communication	5.30	.758
Written Communication	5.51	.622
General Ethics	5.71	.561
Diversity	5.36	.764
Teamwork	5.43	.670
Time Management/ Organization	5.53	.564
Problem Solving/ Critical Thinking	5.34	.664
Customer Service	5.36	.719
Leadership	4.95	.876
Business Etiquette	5.38	.631

Likert-type scale for each category under degree of importance:

(6) = Extremely Important (1) = Not Important.

Survey questions 19 – 51, Section 3: Teaching Concepts/Activities on the TCWSSA was used to address part (b) of this research question. The majority of the participants (77.9%) expressed that they integrate general communication into the

classroom on a daily basis. Many participants (66.4%) integrate time management/ organization into the classroom on a daily basis, while 62.4% integrate oral communication and 52.3% integrate written communication on a daily basis. Table 7 presents the frequencies and percents of the findings in part (b) of this research question.

Table 7

*Integration of Soft Skills into the Business/Marketing Education Curriculum*

Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
General Communication ( <i>n</i> =149)		
Daily	116	77.9
Weekly	28	18.8
Periodically	5	3.4
Never	0	0.0
Oral Communication ( <i>n</i> =149)		
Daily	93	62.4
Weekly	27	18.1
Periodically	28	18.8
Never	1	0.7

(Table Continues)

(Table 7 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
Written Communication ( <i>n</i> =149)		
Daily	78	52.3
Weekly	52	34.9
Periodically	19	12.8
Never	0	0.0
General Ethics ( <i>n</i> =147)		
Daily	71	47.7
Weekly	52	34.9
Periodically	24	16.1
Never	0	0.0
Diversity ( <i>n</i> =145)		
Daily	35	23.5
Weekly	40	26.8
Periodically	68	45.6
Never	2	1.3

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(Table Continues)

(Table 7 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
Teamwork ( <i>n</i> =148)		
Daily	35	23.5
Weekly	62	41.6
Periodically	51	34.2
Never	0	0.0
Time Management/ Organization ( <i>n</i> =149)		
Daily	99	66.4
Weekly	37	24.8
Periodically	13	8.7
Never	0	0.0
Problem Solving/ Critical Thinking ( <i>n</i> =146)		
Daily	74	49.7
Weekly	59	39.6
Periodically	13	8.7
Never	0	0.0

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(Table Continues)

(Table 7 – Continued)

Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
Customer Service ( <i>n</i> =146)		
Daily	14	9.4
Weekly	28	18.8
Periodically	85	57.0
Never	19	12.8
Leadership ( <i>n</i> =145)		
Daily	35	23.5
Weekly	50	33.6
Periodically	57	38.3
Never	3	2.0
Business Etiquette ( <i>n</i> =148)		
Daily	39	26.2
Weekly	51	34.2
Periodically	56	37.6
Never	2	1.3

Research question 2: Do differences occur between Alabama business/marketing educators perceived importance of soft skills for success in the twenty-first century workforce and the following demographics: (a) number of years teaching, (b) highest



degree held, (c) class of professional educator certificate, (d) grade level taught, (e) location of school, (f) type of school?

Survey questions 8 – 18, Section 2: Importance of Soft Skills, on the Twenty-First Century Workforce Soft Skills Assessment (TCWSSA) were used to address the respondent's perception of the importance of how specific soft skills affect success in the workforce. A six-point Likert-type scale was used for analysis. The scale consisted of the following choices: (6) = Extremely Important and (1) = Not Important. Table 5 reflects the frequency of specific soft skills that were ranked extremely important to success in the workforce as perceived by Alabama business/marketing educators and Table 6 reflects the mean and standard deviation of each category relating to the respondent's perceived importance of specific skills.

Survey question 1 and the sum score from questions 8 - 18 on the Twenty-First Century Workforce Soft Skills Assessment (TCWSSA) were used to address part (a) of this research question. To determine if there is a statistically significant difference between the perceived importance of how specific soft skills affect success in the workforce and the number of years that the educator has been teaching business education, a Pearson product-moment correlation design was utilized. The Pearson correlation coefficient indicated that the relationship between the respondent's perceived importance of soft skills and the number of years that they have been teaching business education was not a statistically significant linear relationship:  $r = .095$ ,  $p = .125$  ( $p < .01$ ). Therefore, the number of years that the educator has been teaching does not affect their perceived importance of soft skills. In terms of the strength of the relationship, the Coefficient of Determination adjusted  $r^2 = .009$  indicates that 9% of the variance in the

perceived importance of soft skills can be accounted for by its linear relationship with the number of years the business educator has been teaching.

Survey question 5 and questions 8 – 18 Section 2: Importance of Soft Skills on the TCWSSA survey instrument were used to address part (e) of this research question. An ANOVA design was used to determine if a statistically significant difference was found in the perceived importance of how soft skills affect success in the workforce and the location of the school (City, County). With an alpha level of .05, the omnibus test yielded statistically significant results,  $F(1, 147) = 4.885, p = .029$ , indicating that the location of the school in which the educator teaches does affect their perceived importance of soft skills. An ANOVA design was also utilized for parts (b), (c), (d), and (f) of this research question. Survey questions 8 – 18, Section 2: Importance of Soft Skills on the TCWSSA survey and survey questions 2, 3, 4, and 6 were analyzed to determine if significant differences existed in the perceived importance of how specific soft skills affect success in the workforce and these demographic factors. With an alpha level of .05, statistical significance was not reached. No further tests were necessary. Table 6 details the findings for parts b-f of research question 2.

According to Gall, Gall, & Borg (2005), in the treatment of meta-analyses, the most important variable is the standardized difference between group means; this is known as the effect size. As shown in table 4, the mean difference was not very large in the perceived importance of soft skills. This could explain why statistical significance was not reached for parts (b), (c), (d), and (f) of research question 2. Power can be defined as the probability of detecting a significant effect when the effect truly exists in nature (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). Lower power is related to the small mean difference,

within group variance, and sample size. In this study, power was not very strong and could have also affected results. These are important factors to consider, because soft skills are important to individual success in the workforce. Table 8 displays the effect size for b-f of research question 2.

Table 8

*Difference between the Perceived Importance of Soft Skills and Demographic Factors*

Category	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	$\eta^2$	<i>p</i>
Highest Degree Held	3, 145	1.438	.029	.234
Certification Level	4, 128	1.153	.035	.335
Grade Level Taught	1, 146	1.169	.008	.281
Location of School	1, 147	4.885	.032	.029*
Type of School	6, 141	1.559	.062	.164

\*Statistically Significant ( $p < .05$ )

*Note:* Data and information obtained from questions 2 – 6 and the sum score Section 2: Importance of Soft Skills, on the TCWSSA survey (Appendix C).

Research question 3: Is there a relationship between concepts and techniques identified as important by Alabama business/marketing educators and the extent to which these concepts and techniques are integrated into the business/marketing education curriculum? The importance of the integration of soft skills into the Alabama business/marketing education curriculum was addressed by survey questions 52 – 62, Section 4: Integration on the Twenty-First Century Workforce Soft Skills Assessment (TCWSSA). Table 9 reflects the frequency and percentages of the importance of the integration of specific soft skills into the business/marketing education curriculum. Table 10 reflects the mean and standard deviation of each skill relating to importance of integration.

Table 9

*Ranking of the Importance of the Integration of Specific Soft Skills by Alabama*

*Business/Marketing Educators*

(n=148)

Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
<b>General Communication</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	0	00.0
4	2	1.3
5	42	28.2
6	104	69.8
<b>Oral Communication</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	0	00.0
4	8	5.4
5	46	30.9
6	94	63.1

(Table Continues)

(Table 9 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
<b>Written Communication</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	1	0.7
4	4	2.7
5	47	31.5
6	96	64.4
<b>General Ethics</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	0	0 0.0
4	5	3.4
5	45	30.2
6	98	65.8

---

(Table Continues)

(Table 9 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
<hr/>		
Diversity		
1	0	00.0
2	2	1.3
3	2	1.3
4	18	12.1
5	66	44.3
6	60	40.3
Teamwork		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	0	00.0
4	13	8.7
5	62	41.6
6	73	49.0

---

(Table Continues)

(Table 9 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
Time Management/Organization		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	0	00.0
4	4	2.7
5	45	30.2
6	99	66.4
Problem Solving/ Critical Thinking		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	1	0.7
4	14	9.4
5	50	33.6
6	83	55.7

---

(Table Continues)



(Table 9 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
<b>Customer Service</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	1	0.7
3	4	2.7
4	20	13.4
5	68	45.6
6	55	36.9
<b>Leadership</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	1	0.7
4	25	16.8
5	67	45.0
6	55	36.9

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(Table Continues)

(Table 9 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
<b>Business Etiquette</b>		
1	0	00.0
2	0	00.0
3	0	00.0
4	12	8.1
5	64	43.0
6	72	48.3

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Likert-type scale for each category under degree of importance:

(6) = Extremely Important (1) = Not Important.

*Note:* Data and information obtained from questions 52 - 62 on TCWSSA survey

(Appendix C).

Table 10

*Importance of Integration of Soft Skills into the Business/Marketing Education*

*Curriculum*

(n=148)

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Category	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
General Communication	5.69	.493
Oral Communication	5.58	.595
Written Communication	5.61	.579
General Ethics	5.63	.551
Diversity	5.22	.813
Teamwork	5.41	.648
Time Management/ Organization	5.64	.535
Problem Solving/ Critical Thinking	5.45	.693
Customer Service	5.16	.809
Leadership	5.19	.732
Business Etiquette	5.41	.637

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Likert-type scale for each category under degree of importance:

(6) = Extremely Important (1) = Not Important.

*Note:* Data and information obtained from questions 52 - 62 on TCWSSA survey

(Appendix C).

To assess whether or not there is a relationship between the perceived importance of specific soft skills and the extent to which concepts and activities relating to soft skills are integrated into the business/marketing education curriculum, question 8 was compared with questions 19, 30, and 31; question 9 was compared with questions 20, 33, and 33; question 10 was compared with questions 21, 34, and 35; question 11 was compared with questions 22, 36, and 37; question 12 was compared with questions 23, 38, and 39; question 13 was compared with questions 24, 40, and 41; question 14 was compared with questions 25, 42, and 43; question 15 was compared with questions 26, 44, and 45; question 16 was compared with questions 27, 46, and 47; question 17 was compared with questions 28, 48, and 49; and question 18 was compared with questions 29, 50, and 51 on the Twenty-First Century Workforce Soft Skills Assessment (TCWSSA). Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation was utilized to determine if there was a relationship between concepts and techniques reported to be important and the integration of those concepts and techniques into the business/marketing education curriculum. Table 11 details the results.

Table 11

*Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Skills Identified as Important and the Extent to which they are Integrated into the Business/Marketing Education Curriculum*

Category	Spearman's Rank-Order Coefficients
<b>Concepts</b>	
General Communication	.056
Oral Communication	-.199**
Written Communication	-.173*
Ethics	-.047
Diversity	-.261**
Teamwork	-.091
Time Management/ Organization	-.127*
Problem Solving/ Critical Thinking	-.297**
Customer Service	.252**
Leadership	-.461**
Business Etiquette	-.327**
<b>Activities</b>	
Discussing Effective Communication for the Workforce	.094

(Table Continues)

(Table 11 – Continued)

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Category	Spearman's Rank-Order Coefficients
Reinforcing the Need for Concise Correct Communication	-.003
Students Presenting a PowerPoint to the Class	-.148*
Students Presenting Completed Projects to the Class	-.145*
Editing and Proofreading Exercises	-.078
Students Reviewing Each Other's Written Work for Errors	.178*
Reasoning through Ethical Dilemmas in Case Studies	-.003
Investigating Companies to Examine Ethical Standards	-.127
Techniques for Conducting International Business	-.037
Discussing Future Trends for a more Diverse Marketplace	-.040
Team Projects	.057
Student Collaboration	-.053
Requiring Students to Complete Work by a Deadline	.034
Having Students Organize Work into a Portfolio	-.066

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(Table Continues)

(Table 11 – Continued)

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Category	Spearman's Rank-Order Coefficients
Students Brainstorming to Problem Solve	-.219**
Identifying Problems and Reasoning through Issues	-.210**
Discussing "Customer Value"	-.317**
Identifying Ways to Make Customers Happy	-.336**
Discussing Techniques for Effective Leadership	-.392**
Encouraging Leaders to Emerge in Group Situations	-.230**
Basic Social Skills in Business Situations	-.233**
Respect for Others and Conflict Resolution	-.234**

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\*\*Statistically Significant ( $p < .01$ ) (1-tailed) for each concept or activity.

\*Statistically Significant ( $p < .05$ ) (1-tailed) for each concept or activity.

The Spearman's rho yielded results indicating that there is not a strong correlation between the perceived importance of specific soft skills and the extent to which concepts and activities relating to soft skills are integrated into the business/marketing education curriculum. Overall, Alabama business/marketing educators have endorsed soft skills at a very high frequency; however, there is a low correlation between the perceived importance of soft skills and the integration of soft skills. Nevertheless, many of the correlations did reach statistical significance. This indicates that the skills, concepts, and activities that did reach statistical significance are being integrated into the classroom to some extent. Table 12 reports how often teaching concepts and activities are being integrated into the business/marketing education curriculum.



Table 12

*Integration of Activities into the Business/Marketing Education Curriculum*

Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
Discussing Effective Communication for the Workforce ( <i>n</i> =145)		
Daily	38	25.5
Weekly	62	41.6
Periodically	44	29.5
Never	1	0.7
Reinforcing the Need for Concise, Correct Communication ( <i>n</i> =145)		
Daily	77	51.7
Weekly	44	29.5
Periodically	24	16.1
Never	0	0.0
Students Presenting a PowerPoint to the Class ( <i>n</i> =147)		
Daily	1	0.7
Weekly	37	24.8
Periodically	105	70.5
Never	4	2.7

(Table Continues)

(Table12 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
Students Presenting Completed Projects to the Class ( <i>n</i> =146)		
Daily	7	4.7
Weekly	38	25.5
Periodically	101	67.8
Never	0	0.0
Editing and Proofreading Exercises ( <i>n</i> =148)		
Daily	67	45.0
Weekly	55	36.9
Periodically	23	15.4
Never	3	2.0
Students Reviewing Each Other's Written Work for Errors ( <i>n</i> =149)		
Daily	10	6.7
Weekly	31	20.8
Periodically	79	53.0
Never	29	19.5

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(Table Continues)

(Table 12 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
Reasoning through Ethical Dilemmas in Case Studies ( <i>n</i> =146)		
Daily	4	2.7
Weekly	34	22.8
Periodically	86	57.7
Never	22	14.8
Investigating Companies to Examine Ethical Standards ( <i>n</i> =147)		
Daily	2	1.3
Weekly	11	7.4
Periodically	86	57.7
Never	48	32.2
Techniques for Conducting International Business ( <i>n</i> =147)		
Daily	0	0.0
Weekly	6	4.0
Periodically	75	50.3
Never	66	44.3

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(Table Continues)

(Table 12 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
Discussing Future Trends for a More Diverse Marketplace ( <i>n</i> =145)		
Daily	4	2.7
Weekly	26	17.4
Periodically	85	57.0
Never	30	20.1
Team Projects ( <i>n</i> =146)		
Daily	4	2.7
Weekly	40	26.8
Periodically	99	66.4
Never	3	2.0
Student Collaboration ( <i>n</i> =146)		
Daily	29	19.5
Weekly	68	45.6
Periodically	48	32.2
Never	1	0.7

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(Table Continues)

(Table 12 – Continued)

Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
Requiring Students to Complete Work by a Deadline ( <i>n</i> =148)		
Daily	101	67.8
Weekly	44	29.5
Periodically	3	2.0
Never	0	0.0
Having Students Organize Work into a Portfolio ( <i>n</i> =148)		
Daily	29	19.5
Weekly	45	30.2
Periodically	65	43.6
Never	9	6.0
Students Brainstorming to Problem Solve ( <i>n</i> =147)		
Daily	28	18.8
Weekly	50	33.6
Periodically	65	43.6
Never	4	2.7

(Table Continues)

(Table 12 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
Identifying Problems and Reasoning through Issues ( <i>n</i> =147)		
Daily	18	12.1
Weekly	55	36.9
Periodically	69	46.3
Never	5	3.4
Discussing “Customer Value” ( <i>n</i> =147)		
Daily	7	4.7
Weekly	23	15.4
Periodically	88	59.1
Never	29	19.5
Identifying Ways to Make Customer Happy ( <i>n</i> =147)		
Daily	8	5.4
Weekly	25	16.8
Periodically	83	55.7
Never	31	20.8

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(Table Continues)

(Table 12 – Continued)

Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
Discussing Techniques for Effective Leadership ( <i>n</i> =147)		
Daily	15	10.1
Weekly	42	28.2
Periodically	83	55.7
Never	7	4.7
Encouraging Leaders to Emerge in Group Situations ( <i>n</i> =147)		
Daily	11	7.4
Weekly	47	31.5
Periodically	83	55.7
Never	6	4.0
Basic Social Skills in Business Situations ( <i>n</i> =148)		
Daily	30	20.1
Weekly	52	34.9
Periodically	65	43.6
Never	1	0.7

(Table Continues)

(Table 12 – Continued)

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Category	<i>n</i>	Percent
Respect for Others and Conflict Resolution ( <i>n</i> =149)		
Daily	90	60.4
Weekly	40	26.8
Periodically	19	12.8
Never	0	0.0

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## V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

Soft skills are necessary for employees in the twenty-first century workforce to be successful and to be able to compete with other employees who possess similar training and abilities. The importance of soft skills will continue to grow as the number of qualified individuals vying for employment increases. Business educators can play a key role in preparing students to enter the twenty-first century workforce. A research survey instrument was developed to assess Alabama business/marketing educators' perceived importance of soft skills and the extent to which Alabama business/marketing educators are integrating concepts and activities related to these skills into the curriculum. Analyses were conducted to determine the perceived degree of importance of eleven specific soft skills, whether or not opinions differ based on demographic factors, and how often concepts and activities related to the soft skills and reported to be important are integrated into the classroom.

In the previous chapter, data collected from Alabama business/marketing educators utilizing the researcher-developed Twenty-First Century Workforce Soft Skills Assessment (TCWSSA) survey instrument were presented and analyzed. This chapter includes discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

## Summary of Findings

The majority of respondents taught grades 9 – 12 grades (87.9%), held a master's degree (68.5%), and held a class A (master's level) certification (47.7%). The largest percent of the respondents (65.8%) taught at a comprehensive high school. The mean number of years teaching business education of the respondents was 11.7. Further, most of the respondents (56.4%) taught in a county school system, while 43.6% of the respondents taught in a city school system.

Alabama business/marketing educators were asked their perceived levels of importance of specific soft skills for success in the twenty-first century workforce and the integration of soft skills into the business/marketing education curriculum.

The majority of the respondents (75.2%) reported general ethics as an extremely important skill that students need for success in the twenty-first century workforce. Many respondents (73.2%) reported general communication skills as extremely important, while 57.0% reported written communication as extremely important and 56.4% reported time management/organization skills as extremely important. Each of the eleven skills yielded a mean score ( $M \geq 4.95$ ), the scale contained the following choices:

(6) = Extremely Important and (1) = Not Important); indicating that Alabama business/marketing Educators perceived all eleven skills to be very important.

Most of the participants (77.9%) expressed that they integrate general communication into the classroom on a daily basis. Many participants (66.4%) integrate time management/ organization into the classroom on a daily basis, while 62.4% integrate oral communication and 52.3% integrate written communication on a daily basis.

A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation design was utilized to determine if there is a statistically significant relationship between the perceived importance of how specific soft skills affect success in the workforce and the number of years that the educator has been teaching business education. The Pearson  $r$  Correlation yielded results,  $r = .095$ ,  $p = .125$  ( $p < .01$ ) indicating that there is not a strong statistically significant correlation.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to evaluate quantifiable responses where the independent variables were continuous and the dependent variables were categorical. The dependent variables were operationalized by TCWSSA. No statistically significant difference [ $F(3, 145) = 1.438$ ,  $p = .234$ ] was found between the perceived importance of how specific soft skills affect success in the workforce and the highest degree held (Bachelor, Master, Specialist, Doctorate). In addition, no statistically significant difference was found [ $F(4, 128) = 1.153$ ,  $p = .335$ ] between the perceived importance of how specific soft skills affect success in the workforce and the class of professional educator certificate (B-Bachelor, A-Master, AA-Specialist, Alternative, Emergency). Furthermore, no statistically significant difference [ $F(1, 146) = 1.169$ ,  $p = .281$ ] was found between the perceived importance of how specific soft skills affect success in the workforce and the grade level taught (6-8, 9-12). No statistically significant difference [ $F(6, 141) = 1.559$ ,  $p = .164$ ] was found between the perceived importance of how specific soft skills affect success in the workforce and the type of school (Comprehensive High School, Junior High School, Middle School, Intermediate School, Vocational Center, School Including Grades 7-12, School Including Grades 1-12). However, statistically significant difference was

found [ $F(1, 147) = 4.885, p = .029$ ] between the perceived importance of how specific soft skills affect success in the workforce and the location of school (city, county).

Alabama business/marketing educators were asked how often concepts and activities related to specific soft skills were integrated into the business/marketing education curriculum and those responses were compared with specific soft skills identified as important by Alabama business/marketing educators to determine if a relationship exists.

To assess whether or not there is a relationship between the perceived importance of specific soft skills and the extent to which concepts and activities relating to soft skills are integrated into the business/marketing education curriculum three separate analyses were run for each of the eleven soft skills. Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation (Spearman's rho) was utilized to determine if there was a relationship between concepts and techniques reported to be important and the integration of those concepts and techniques into the business/marketing education curriculum. The Spearman's rho yielded results indicating that there is not a strong correlation between the perceived importance of specific soft skills and the extent to which concepts and activities relating to soft skills are integrated into the business/marketing education curriculum. Overall, Alabama business/marketing educators have endorsed soft skills at a very high frequency; however, there is a low correlation between the perceived importance of soft skills and the integration of soft skills. Nevertheless, many of the correlations did reach statistical significance. This indicates that the skills, concepts, and activities that did reach statistical significance are being integrated into the classroom to some extent.

## Conclusions

The following conclusions were based on the findings of the study:

1. The majority of Alabama business/marketing educators supported the integration of soft skills into the business/marketing education curriculum. This study indicated that respondents perceived all eleven soft skills analyzed to be very important ( $M = \geq 4.95$  on a 1-6 scale) to success in the twenty-first century workforce.
2. An opportunity exists to train and prepare business/marketing education teachers to instruct courses utilizing soft skills instruction. Although a majority of respondents think soft skills are important, the data revealed that the concepts and activities related to soft skills are not being integrated into the business/marketing curriculum on a consistent basis.
3. When analyzing demographic information, the data revealed that the number of years teaching, degree held (Bachelor, Master, Specialist, Doctoral) certification held, (B, A, AA, or ABC) grade level taught, (6-8, 9-12) or type of school (Comprehensive High School, Junior High School, Middle School, Intermediate School, Vocational Center, School Including Grades 7-12, School Including Grades 1-12) were found to have no significant effect on the respondent's perception of the importance of soft skills. However, the location of school (City or County) did have a significant effect on the respondent's perceived importance of soft skills.
4. Not all soft skills were perceived by Alabama business/marketing educators as being equally important. For example, business/marketing educators identified

general communication skills and general ethics as the most important skills for success in the twenty-first century workforce. Written communication and time management/organization skills were ranked as more important than business etiquette, diversity, customer service, problem solving/critical thinking skills, oral communication skills, and leadership skills.

### Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Consideration should be given to implementing a plan to prepare both pre-service and in-service Alabama secondary business/marketing educators to successfully deliver soft skills instruction. With training, more teachers would integrate soft skills into the curriculum; therefore, increasing students' knowledge of soft skills.
2. Alabama educational leaders should play a vital role in preparing business educators to effectively integrate soft skills into the business/marketing education curriculum. The Alabama Department of Education, school systems, and colleges providing teacher education should provide training in the area of soft skills instruction to future and current Alabama business education teachers.
3. Universities should design and implement soft skills instruction into business/marketing education programs to enable Alabama business/marketing educators the opportunity to enhance their knowledge of soft skills instruction.

4. Online modules and summer workshops should be designed to assist Alabama business/marketing educators in the areas of soft skills and the instruction of soft skills.
5. A follow-up study should be conducted in two years to determine progress toward the goal of preparing Alabama business/marketing education students to enter the twenty-first century workforce with a better understanding of soft skills.
6. This study should be repeated in other states.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

AUBURN INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



AUBURN  
UNIVERSITY

Office of Human Subjects Research  
307 Sanford Hall  
Auburn University, AL 36849

Telephone: 334-844-5966  
Fax: 334-844-4391  
hsubjec@auburn.edu

April 24, 2008

MEMORANDUM TO: Geana Mitchell  
Curriculum & Teaching

PROTOCOL TITLE: "Essential Soft Skills for Success in the Twenty-First Century Workforce as Perceived by Alabama Business/Marketing Educators"

IRB AUTHORIZATION NO: 08-088 EP 0804

APPROVAL DATE: April 21, 2008  
EXPIRATION DATE: April 20, 2009

The above referenced protocol was approved by IRB Expedited procedure under 45 CFR 46.110 (Category #7):

"Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

You should report to the IRB any proposed changes in the protocol or procedures and any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or others. Please reference the above authorization number in any future correspondence regarding this project.

If you will be unable to file a Final Report on your project before April 20, 2009, you must submit a request for an extension of approval to the IRB no later than April 6, 2009. If your IRB authorization expires and/or you have not received written notice that a request for an extension has been approved prior to April 20, 2009, you must suspend the project immediately and contact the Office of Human Subjects Research for assistance.

A Final Report will be required to close your IRB project file. You are reminded that you must use the stamped, IRB-approved information sheet when you consent your participants.

If you have any questions concerning this Board action, please contact the Office of Human Subjects Research at 844-5966.

Sincerely,

Kathy Jo Ellison, RN, DSN, CIP  
Chair of the Institutional Review Board  
for the Use of Human Subjects in Research

cc: Dr. Nancy Barry  
Dr. Leane Skinner

APPENDIX B  
INFORMATION LETTER





COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

CURRICULUM & TEACHING

INFORMATION SHEET FOR

Essential Soft Skills for Success in the Twenty-First Century Workforce as Perceived by Alabama Business/Marketing Educators

Dear Professional Alabama Business/Marketing Teacher:

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to determine which soft skills Alabama Business/Marketing educators perceive to be the most essential for success in the 21st century workforce...

As the business world constantly changes, graduates entering the workforce are recognizing the importance of soft skills in finding employment and advancing in their careers. Soft Skills are a set of personal qualities, attributes, talents, or the level of commitment that an individual can bring to the workplace...

If you decide to participate, it will take approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey. You are receiving a survey and a return envelope that is preaddressed and stamped. There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

Your input, as a professional Business/Marketing teacher, is very important to the success of this research. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information collected through your participation may be used as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctorate of Education and future publications.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable.

If you have questions, you may contact Geana W. Mitchell at (256) 476-8419 or (256) 974-4272 (mitchgw@auburn.edu) or Dr. Leane Skinner at (334) 844-3800 (skinnal@auburn.edu).

For more information regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Human Subjects Research by phone (334) 844-5966, or e-mail at hsubjec@auburn.edu, or IRBchair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

Geana W. Mitchell
Geana W. Mitchell
Doctoral Candidate
Principal Investigator

4.23.08
Date

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 4/21/08 to 4/26/09 Protocol # 08-C8-8 SEP 08/09

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APPENDIX C

RESEARCHER-DEVELOPED SURVEY INSTRUMENT

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WORKFORCE SOFT SKILLS ASSESSMENT

## Twenty-First Century Workforce Soft Skills Assessment

*Soft Skills* are a set of personal qualities, attributes, talents, or the level of commitment that an individual can bring to the workplace that set him or her apart from other individuals who may have similar skills and experience.\* The purpose of this study is to provide information that may be utilized by Business/Marketing educators to improve the skills of students entering the workforce.

### Section 1: Teacher Background/Demographics

*Please provide your response to the following questions. Check the appropriate box and/or respond in the space provided.*

- 1) How many years have you been teaching Business/Marketing Education? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What is your highest degree held?  
 Bachelor    Master    Specialist    Doctorate
- 3) What is your highest certification level?  
 B    A    AA    Alternative    Emergency   Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Please indicate the grade levels of the majority of students in your courses. (Check all that apply)  
 6- 8    9-12    Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Is your school a city or county school?  
 City    County
- 6) What is the type of school in which you are teaching?  
 Comprehensive High School  
 Junior High School  
 Middle School  
 Intermediate School  
 Vocational Center  
 School Including Grades 7-12  
 School Including Grades 1-12  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Please list the classes that you are currently teaching and the number of times you teach that class each day:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\*Source: Perreault, H. (2004, October). Business educators can take a leadership role in character education. *Business Education Forum*, 59(1), 23-24.

**Section 2: Importance of Soft Skills**

*In your opinion, how important are the following soft skills in AFFECTING SUCCESS IN THE WORKFORCE? Please circle the appropriate number.*

8) General Communication (the ability to communicate with clients, colleagues, and the general public)

<b>Not Important</b>					<b>Extremely Important</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

9) Oral Communication (the ability to present information to a group or speak in public)

<b>Not Important</b>					<b>Extremely Important</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

10) Written Communication (the ability to write business correspondence like memos, letters, and reports using correct grammar and format)

<b>Not Important</b>					<b>Extremely Important</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

11) General Ethics (the ability to do "the right thing" in business situations)

<b>Not Important</b>					<b>Extremely Important</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

12) Diversity (the ability to work with and appreciate differences in others)

<b>Not Important</b>					<b>Extremely Important</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

13) Teamwork (the ability to work effectively with a group in order to achieve team goals)

<b>Not Important</b>					<b>Extremely Important</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

14) Time Management/Organization (the ability to effectively manage time and complete tasks within a specified time frame)

<b>Not Important</b>					<b>Extremely Important</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

15) Problem Solving/Critical Thinking (the ability to find effective solutions to problems)

<b>Not Important</b>					<b>Extremely Important</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

16) Customer Service (the ability to make customers happy without costing the company money)

<b>Not Important</b>					<b>Extremely Important</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

17) Leadership (the ability to emerge as a leader and effectively lead others)

<b>Not Important</b>					<b>Extremely Important</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

18) Business Etiquette (the ability to apply basic social skills in business situations)

<b>Not Important</b>					<b>Extremely Important</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6

**Section 3: Teaching Concepts/Activities**

How often are the following teaching concepts/activities integrated into THE COURSES THAT YOU ARE CURRENTLY TEACHING? *Please indicate how often you integrate the concept/activity by placing a checkmark in the appropriate column.*

Teaching Concepts/Activities	Daily	Weekly	Periodically	Never
<b>Concepts:</b>				
19) General communication				
20) Oral communication				
21) Written communication				
22) Ethics				
23) Diversity (different cultures & minorities in business)				
24) Teamwork				
25) Time management/organization				
26) Problem solving/critical thinking				
27) Customer service				
28) Leadership				
29) Business etiquette				
<b>Activities:</b>				
30) Discussing effective communication for the workforce				
31) Reinforcing the need for concise, correct communication				
32) Students presenting a PowerPoint to the class				
33) Students presenting completed projects to the class				
34) Editing and proofreading exercises				
35) Students reviewing each other's written work for errors				
36) Reasoning through ethical dilemmas in case studies				
37) Investigating companies to examine ethical standards				
38) Techniques for conducting international business				
39) Discussing future trends for a more diverse marketplace				
40) Team projects				
41) Student collaboration				
42) Requiring students to complete work by a deadline				
43) Having students organize work into a portfolio				
44) Students brainstorming to problem solve				
45) Identifying problems and reasoning through issues				
46) Discussing "customer value"				
47) Identifying ways to make customers happy				
48) Discussing techniques for effective leadership				
49) Encouraging leaders to emerge in group situations				
50) Basic social skills in business situations				
51) Respect for others and conflict resolution				

**Section 4: Integration**

In YOUR OPINION, how important IS THE INTEGRATION of the following skills into the business/marketing education curriculum? *Please circle the number that corresponds with your opinion.*

	Not Important			Extremely Important		
52) General Communication	1	2	3	4	5	6
53) Oral Communication	1	2	3	4	5	6
54) Written Communication	1	2	3	4	5	6
55) General Ethics	1	2	3	4	5	6
56) Diversity	1	2	3	4	5	6
57) Teamwork	1	2	3	4	5	6
58) Time Management/Organization	1	2	3	4	5	6
59) Problem Solving/Critical Thinking	1	2	3	4	5	6
60) Customer Service	1	2	3	4	5	6
61) Leadership	1	2	3	4	5	6
62) Business Etiquette	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Section 5: Opened-ended Questions**

*The back of this page may be used if you need additional space for the following questions.*

63) Please list any other concepts, methods, or techniques that you use to integrate soft skills into the business education curriculum.

64) Please list and/or explain any other soft skills that you feel are essential to success in business.

65) If you have ever had soft skills training, please describe.

*Thank you for participating in this study! Your assistance in providing this information is greatly appreciated! Please place the completed survey in the return envelope and place in the mail by May 12, 2008.*