

## **The Marketing of P.O.W.E.R. An Innovative Approach to Student Recruitment and Performance Enhancement**

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### **Abstract**

*According to historical data, the national GPA (Grade Point Average) has shown a continuous growth since the 1960's, at a rate of about 10% to 15%, while the base of SAT does not suggest the same pattern. It indicates that the grading system of universities has contributed to such inflation for whatever reasons. The compromised inflated GPA offers no contribution to urge educators to increase education quality. Business education requires stringent and robust training on critical thinking, oral presentation and written expression. However, these skills can hardly be evaluated by just GPA, particularly the inflated GPA, which may even cause students to have the illusion that their performance is better than what it actually is. Our school has developed an evaluation scale – Progressive Oral and Written Evaluation Ranking (P.O.W.E.R.) used to measure these three important skills required in business professions for both undergraduate and graduate students. The longitudinal data showed that this method has proven to be a great evaluation tool complimentary to GPA. More importantly, the authors believe this measurement can be used to demonstrate our dedication towards business education, and suggests great marketing implications on student recruitment. For marketing events, the scale and results can be used to promote the program, as it shows our effort to perfect the evaluation system, particularly in the three key skills required in the industry. Besides, the historical data suggested the trajectory of students' improvement on these skills, which indicates a robust training for our MBA students. Further, any other disciplines that require the skills of critical thinking, oral presentation and written expression can adapt this scale for their use as well.*

### **Keywords**

P.O.W.E.R., Progressive Oral Written Evaluation Ranking, Rubrics, Tools for Measurement

### **Introduction**

Education in the United States has become an issue of consternation as the US continues to fall behind the results of other developed countries and that shortfall has accelerated over the past decade. According to the 2010 Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),

study from *The Economist*, in 2000, the United States had an average performance score of 500, roughly the average of all countries surveyed, and the United States ranked 10th behind the following nations.

- Finland
- Canada
- Australia
- Netherlands
- Japan
- Germany
- Sweden
- Britain
- France (*Transforming Britain's schools*, 2010)

At the same time, the United States ranked number 1 overall in the earnings benefit from degree level education (*Transforming Britain's schools*, 2010). In a world where education clearly leads to financial benefits, it is ironic that the United States would not lead by example from the very beginnings of the education cycle. While one sees slippage in the lower levels of our education system in math and sciences, there is now evidence of declining SAT scores within the past five years. Through the early 1990's and 2000's, average scores were actually rising (*Ventura County Star*, 2009) before they began drifting lower. First, the test has been changed and there are larger and more diverse groups of students taking these exams. Secondly, the pool of students wanting to attend college has grown steadily and our educational system has become more and more strained. In an attempt to "leave no child behind," many students are pushed through the system and arrive at higher grades unable to grasp any successful levels of comprehension. By far, the skills most mentioned often by employers are the ability to listen, write and speak effectively. Successful communication is critical in business (Hansen & Hansen, 2010).

What is the most important skill that we would like to bestow on our students in an effort to prepare them to be successful in an ever more competitive economic environment? The authors have come to some basic conclusions, all revolving around three specific and all important qualities. Educators need to strive to extend knowledge and training in the areas of critical thinking and the basic foundations of written and oral skills. In business today and indeed in a recent article in *Fortune* magazine, many Fortune 500 CEO's were bemoaning the lack of these imperative skill sets among recent college graduates. This research will delve into the changing academic environment without attempting to reason why some data are trending the way they are other than to say we have become creatures of a quest for mediocrity. No longer are the prepared rewarded as they should be, our society has taken on a "participatory view" which, while idealistic, does not promote healthy discovery or competitiveness. Educators, however, tend now to reward everyone for "participating" so as to not offend those who are unable to compete or choose not to put forth the effort.

Curriculum changes and training advances in business communication have provided students and practitioners with the opportunity to develop and improve communication skills. Despite these changes, research continues to demonstrate that communication apprehension can injuriously impede skills attainment. Yet, the measurement properties of instruments used to measure oral and writing apprehension have received limited attention (Maes, Weldy & Icenogle, 2003). There is a belief here that this lack of advocating for controlled competition leads to more apprehension when these individuals are subjected to more stressful conditions, as they most certainly will be within the confines of the business community. While supposedly protecting our children from youthful stresses, we impede their normal growth patterns to thrive in the real world. Not being prepared leads to frustration, failure and even personally imposed social stigma.

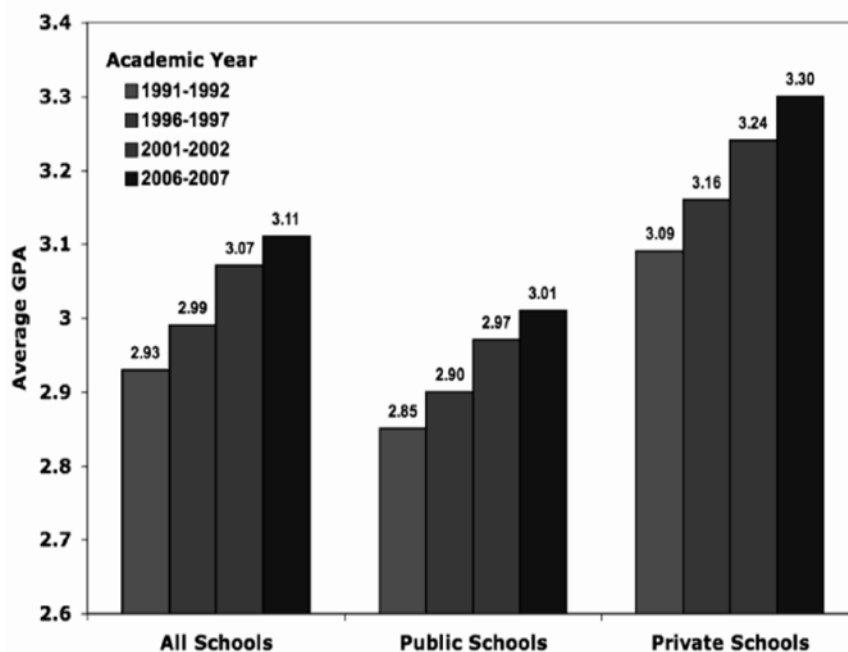
There has been a ratcheting up of GPA over the past few decades that do not compliment SAT (Scholastics Aptitude Test) scores over the same time period. From 1991-2007 there has been an overall increase in GPA of 9.4%, consistent across all types of schools public or private. All Schools in the study showed average increases from 2.92 to 3.11, public schools 2.85 to 3.01 and private schools from 3.09 to 3.30 (*Grade inflation at American colleges*, 2010). Are these results indicative of an overall increase in the ability of our students as evidenced by SAT scores over the same time period, not exactly? Average SAT scores, for all participants was 500 for verbal and 501 for math in 1992 and 508 for verbal and 520 for math in 2005 an increase of less than 1.5% for verbal and less than 4% for math [Infoplease.com]. However, if present trends continue, only limited by perfect 4.0 GPAs, we will continue to see a growing discrepancy between the potential and the fruition. Are our students becoming more astute throughout their college years or are our ranks of academia less inclined to give a student a more realistic if lower grade? Has this come about by professors hoping to please their students or administrations attempting to maintain high retention levels, one does not know? Countless studies and surveys, employers, graduate students, academicians and others continue to list oral and written communication among the most critical skills needed by business students today (Hynes & Bhatia, 1996; Maes, Weldy, & Icenogle, 1997; Plutsky, 1996; Wardrope, 2002). AACSB International (The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) (2004) continues to recognize the importance of communication skills in its latest standards. Not surprisingly, Wardrope (2002) found that a communication course was required at 76% of the institutions surveyed. The authors will not debate the value of communication skills but need to delve into the effectiveness of delivery and ability of the students to acquire better and more dominant skills.

Longer term trends show the following results which add to the credibility and corresponding confusion of the direction of SAT scores and GPA, a true juxtaposition. In the 1930's, the average GPA at American colleges and Universities was about 2.35, a number that corresponds with data compiled by W. Perry in 1943. By the 1950's, the average GPA was about 2.52. GPA took off in the 1960's with grades at private schools rising faster than those in public schools, receded throughout into the 1970's, and began to rise again in the 1980's at a rate of about 0.10 to 0.15 in GPA per decade to the present. The grade inflation that began in the 1980's has yet to end (*Grade inflation at American colleges*, 2010). It is commonly accepted that business students need effective communication skills to be successful professionals. Consequently, many universities have instituted curriculum and pedagogy changes to provide students with the opportunity to develop those skills. Common changes include opportunities for group work, oral presentations, writing assignments, as well as critical thinking and unstructured problem solving (Blaine, Lowe, Meixer, & Nouri, 2003). However, research in communication and psychology demonstrates that apprehension affects skills attainment and performance (Bennett & Rhodes, 1988; Bourhis & Allen, 1992; Daly 1978; Freimuth, 1976; McCroskey, 1984). The intent of this study is not to solve this riddle, but to propose a way to better prepare our students and establish a metric by which to measure this improvement and aid in remediation where needed. The proposal to be discussed will revolve around two separate rubrics, extensive videotaping of all oral presentations and critical evaluation by peers and professor. The students will be able to hear the positive and critical responses of their peers and in return learn to accept this criticism as valid improvement incentives. The students will be provided with copies of their own presentations so they may ascertain those areas that need the most improvement.

As the authors believe that the P.O.W.E.R. scale can facilitate the evaluation system in business education, being equipped with this tool allows the students to be graded based on skills in demand. That being said, the authors shall be able to present this tool at student recruitment events to show our dedication toward the students' practical skill improvement. The longitudinal study results over the past 6 years showed that the college has achieved steady growth on student performance in both oral and written skills. The assessment results have proved this evaluation scale to be successful.

The authors also encourage any other disciplines which require these skills to try our scale in their educational practice.

**Figure 1: Recent GPA Trends Nationwide**



Source: [www.gradeinflation.com](http://www.gradeinflation.com)

**Table 1: Average SAT Scores, 1980–2014**

| Year | Verbal Score |        |       | Mathematical Score |        |       |
|------|--------------|--------|-------|--------------------|--------|-------|
|      | Male         | Female | Total | Male               | Female | Total |
| 1980 | 506          | 498    | 502   | 515                | 473    | 492   |
| 1984 | 511          | 498    | 504   | 518                | 478    | 497   |
| 1988 | 512          | 499    | 505   | 521                | 483    | 501   |
| 1990 | 505          | 496    | 500   | 521                | 483    | 501   |
| 1992 | 504          | 496    | 500   | 521                | 484    | 501   |
| 1994 | 501          | 497    | 499   | 523                | 487    | 504   |
| 1996 | 507          | 503    | 505   | 527                | 492    | 508   |
| 1998 | 509          | 502    | 505   | 531                | 496    | 512   |
| 2000 | 507          | 504    | 505   | 533                | 498    | 514   |
| 2002 | 507          | 502    | 504   | 534                | 500    | 516   |
| 2004 | 512          | 504    | 508   | 537                | 501    | 518   |
| 2005 | 513          | 505    | 508   | 538                | 504    | 520   |
| 2006 | 505          | 502    | 503   | 536                | 502    | 518   |
| 2007 | 503          | 500    | 501   | 532                | 499    | 514   |
| 2008 | 502          | 499    | 500   | 532                | 499    | 514   |
| 2009 | 502          | 497    | 499   | 533                | 498    | 514   |
| 2010 | 502          | 498    | 500   | 533                | 499    | 515   |
| 2011 | 500          | 495    | 497   | 531                | 500    | 514   |
| 2012 | 498          | 493    | 496   | 532                | 499    | 514   |
| 2013 | 499          | 494    | 496   | 531                | 499    | 514   |

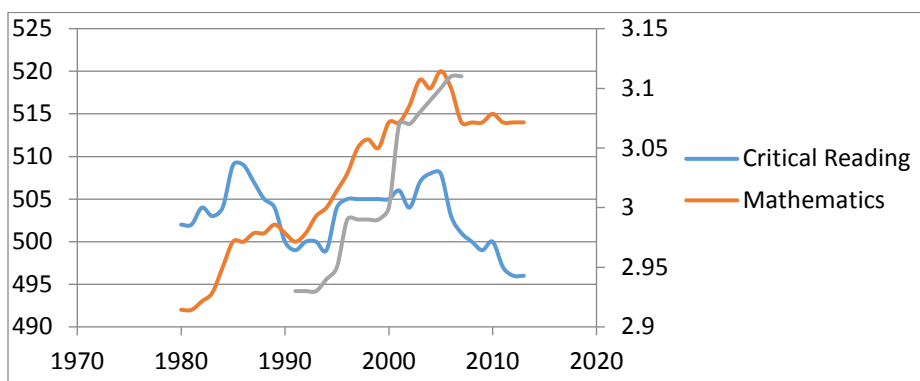
Source: <http://www.erikthered.com/tutor/historical-average-SAT-scores.pdf>

**Table 2: SAT Reasoning Test Scores, 2013**

| Self-Identified as                         | Reading | Math | Writing |
|--------------------------------------------|---------|------|---------|
| American Indian or Alaskan Native          | 480     | 486  | 461     |
| Asian, Asian-American, or Pacific Islander | 521     | 597  | 527     |
| Black or African-American                  | 431     | 429  | 418     |
| Mexican or Mexican-American                | 449     | 464  | 442     |
| Puerto Rican                               | 456     | 453  | 445     |
| Other Hispanic, Latino, or Latin American  | 450     | 453  | 445     |
| White                                      | 527     | 534  | 515     |
| Other                                      | 492     | 519  | 490     |
| No Response                                | 448     | 508  | 453     |
| Total                                      | 496     | 514  | 488     |
| Male                                       | 499     | 531  | 514     |
| Female                                     | 494     | 499  | 493     |

Source: <http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/research/2013/Tot>

**Figure 2: SAT Score vs. GPA**



## 2. P.O.W.E.R

The authors propose to initiate a system wherein professors and institutions can make students aware of how they will be graded and measured. The first attempt to achieve this requires the development and refinement of rubrics in order for results to be tabulated for further evaluation on which points need to be focused and improved upon. Any successful study begins with the ability to listen to many people and absorb input from various sources. The constituents in our study are not the students, but the audience of intended potential future employers. The authors canvassed numerous business leaders from among Wagner College's Business Advisory Council and gleaned all results refining and condensing to the most readily replied 10 points to measure. The director of the college's writing center then refined the topics and categories further to simplify the process keeping it simple and riveting. The result was a 10 point rubric which was presented to the students at the beginning of the semester so they can arm themselves with the knowledge of what is expected of them and the weighting of the scale. This rubric acts as a guide for them as they move forward from

research to thought process to the writing of a paper. The College follows the APA Style format which is the most readily accepted style in the professional business community. Each paper is then graded by the professor with accompanying remarks to help the student improve. The rubric is returned to the student with his/her paper for further reflection by the student and private counseling if appropriate. These scores, on a scale of 1-10, are then recorded to develop a P.O.W.E.R. ranking that is combined with a similar Oral Rubric to reside with and complement the GPA score. The oral rubric, in like manner, was developed with input from more than 100 business leaders and is distributed to the students at the beginning of each semester. The Oral rubric will contain extensive critical review by the professor and again a private consultation can be ordered to remedy and alter behavioral traits. Once the authors have compiled the raw data from the Oral rubric, the college will construct the Oral Evaluation Score (O.E.S) as well. The written work will result in the construction of the Writing Evaluation Score (W.E.S.). By isolating these two scores the college will be able to ascertain irregularities between the two. Both are kept in isolation, and then compared and combined to arrive at a comprehensive Oral/Written metric in two of the most important aspects of professional development and success. Video recording was added to cement in the students mind what other people are seeing and hearing. This immediate feedback and then ensuing self-study of the rubrics add to the tools the student has at his/her disposal to better hone his/her oral and writing skills. This allows the college's educators to track both the program and students on an individual basis to better assess the success of a program and make alterations on the fly. Trends are very important and the data points will provide assessment metrics for accreditation purposes. It is also the intent to measure success of P.O.W.E.R. against GPA data to determine the complement or distance between the two in an effort to provide an ongoing implementation of new skill set activities.

In an effort to improve this evaluation tool, the authors have used the assessment results from the past 6 years from 2009-2014 to support our argument. In the period of 2009-2010, the college struggled with consistency throughout all courses and for all faculty members. The results may not be the actual reflection of the students' performances, but the authors worked out protocols to standardize the grading. The results did show a pattern of growth in written and oral skills at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

**Figure 3: Undergraduate Writing Rubrics have a Scale of 1-5**

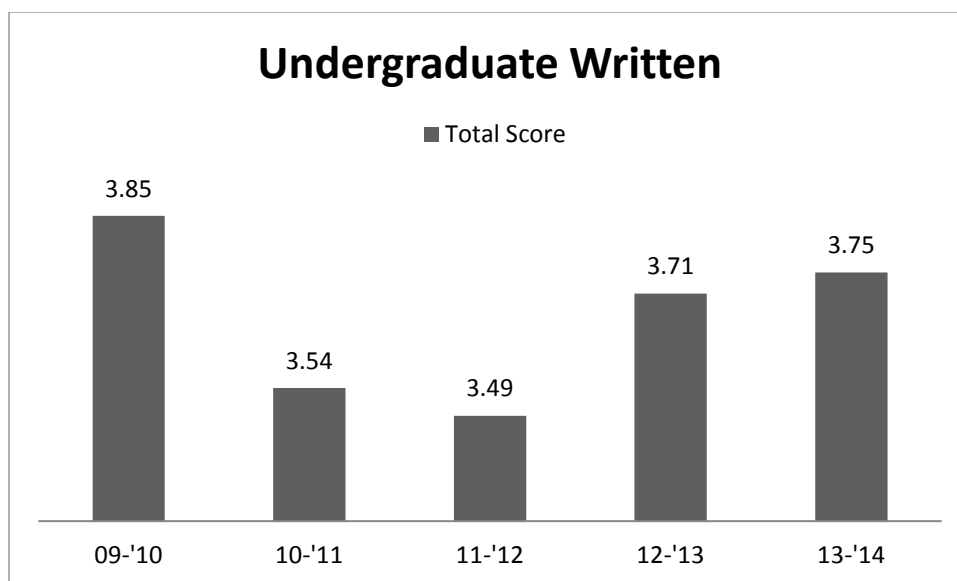


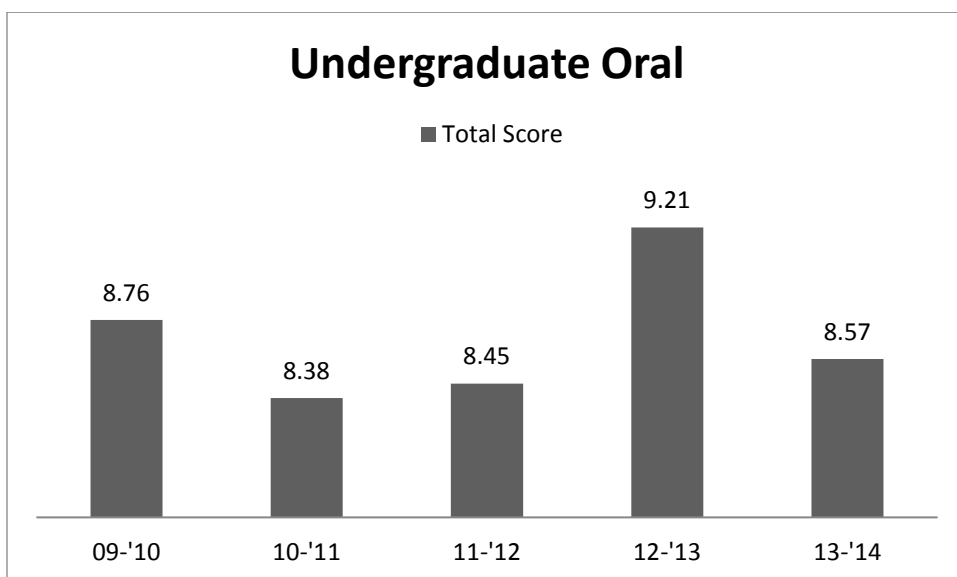
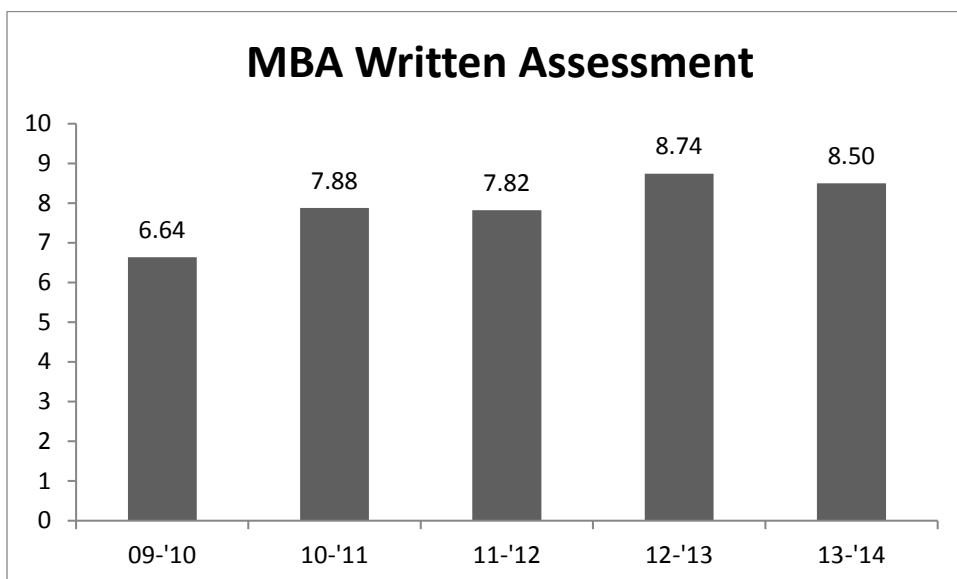
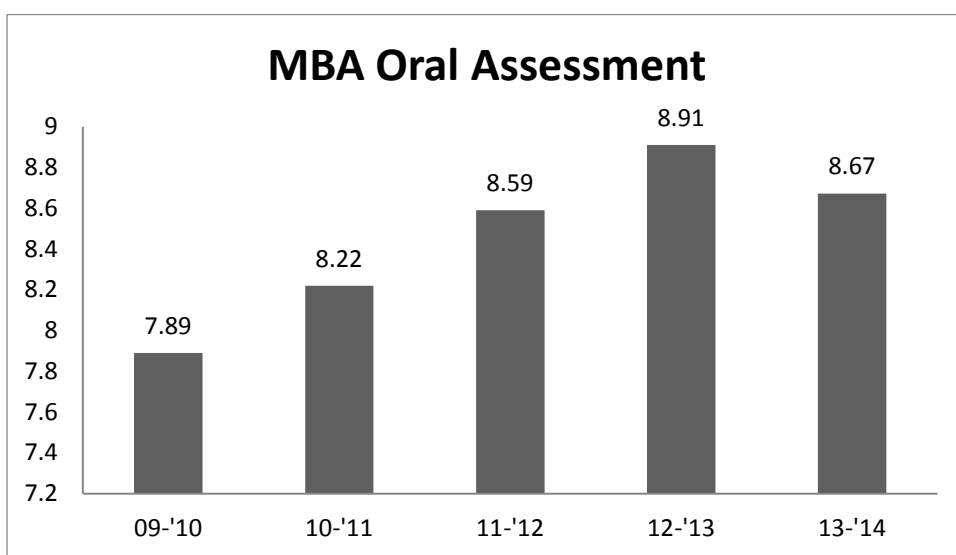
**Figure 4: Undergraduate Oral Rubrics have a Scale of 1-10****Figure 5: MBA Writing Rubrics have a Scale of 1-10**

**Figure 6: MBA Oral Rubrics have a Scale of 1-10**

### 3. Summary

This study was intentionally kept short to reflect an executive summary format as students learn to come to grips with shortcomings and attack them in a straightforward manner. Evaluation and grading of all Oral and Written Presentations will be on a competitive skill basis with the intent of rewarding effort, focus, intensity and adaptability in the form of dominant improvement. When the students embark upon their chosen careers, they will have but one chance to make that favorable first impression---just one. By structuring a challenging, yet supportive environment, the college strives and hopes to produce a better prepared student with an instilled sense of confidence. With the longitudinal study, the authors further proved that this method can enhance students' abilities to directly apply their academic knowledge in the real world. The improvement on speaking and written will definitely make the students more competent in the job market.

Another important contribution of this study resides in the rubrics' marketing implications on student recruitment. As the authors argued, the function of GPA on evaluating students' oral and written skills has been weakened; this grading method sufficiently complemented the regular grading system. Students would like to be graded on something they will use in the future. Pragmatically, the utilization of this rubric urges students to particularly develop skills required for business professionals. At recruitment events, the college can present its rubric, the assessment data results and skills sought by employers to students and parents. The seamless integration between our educational service and the industry needs signals our dedication to making students successful in the job market. Beyond that, the tool also indicates our compulsiveness to deliver a quality educational service.

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