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# Bridging the Gap in Accounting Education and Application through the Development and Use of Soft Skills

Megan Gullo

*The College at Brockport*, mgullo2310@gmail.com

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Bridging the gap in accounting education and application  
through the development and use of soft skills.

A Senior Honors Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for Graduation in the Honors College

By  
Megan Gullo  
Accounting Major

The College at Brockport  
May 20, 2019

Thesis Director: Dr. Barry Hettler, Assistant Professor, Accounting

*Educational use of this paper is permitted for the purpose of providing future students a model example of an Honors senior thesis project.*

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### **Abstract**

I explore the development and use of soft skills in the accounting profession, and how these skills can bridge the education gap. Understanding the development and use of soft skills leads to conversations about the need to modernize accounting education, and how to achieve it. I focus on answering my research questions which include how to develop soft skills, and the usefulness of these skills in the accounting field. My research supports the need for change in accounting curriculum and how this curriculum is taught to students. Both professionals and educators acknowledge the gap in accounting and believe a change in how accounting is taught is necessary. Both also agree that soft skills are just as important, if not more important, than technical skills in the accounting field. My recommendation is to implement more active learning into accounting curriculum. Integrating this type of learning will better foster both the soft skills and technical skills that students need. Readers can hope to gain a better understanding of the skills necessary to succeed as an accountant, and how those skills are developed in higher education.

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## **Introduction**

Accounting is a field that is constantly changing with new ideas and technology. As these changes occur, the education needs to adapt to the changing needs of accounting professionals. Literature has supported the need for a change in the accounting education as a gap has begun to form between education and the expectation of students from employers. Accounting education needs to make an effort to fix the gap between what students learn in the classroom and what they are expected to do on the job (Denison, 2018). The events in the early 2000s called into question the competencies of accounting professionals. Current accounting students do not possess the necessary skills to be successful in this highly demanding field. As the profession continues to change and become more complex, demands for highly competent employees arise (Gary Sundem, 1992). Coming out of college, students are expected to have a certain level of competencies. Employers expect students to not only know technical skills but soft skills as well. Employers look for candidates that exemplify both set of skills. In some cases, employers put more of an emphasis on soft skills as they believe they can enhance technical skills with time (Dunbar et al.,2016).

Accountants are not just “number crunchers” anymore, they need to be able to interact with clients and their team. Over the past decade, scholars have noted the necessary changes needed to the accounting education but have done little to implement change. A few scholars have proposed changes to the curriculum, but there has been no widespread change. Scholars have proposed a change to how accounting education is taught to help students develop the necessary skills to be employable after graduation. Different learning styles can be used to develop a different understanding and set of skills in students. Choosing and implementing the right learning style could foster learning that would better prepare accounting students for work after graduation (Silvia, 2018). Educators need to set goals with fostering soft skills in mind.

Scholars have not discussed exactly how to teach these set of skills to students, but in consensus, they agree that an active learning style can improve these skills. Jason Porter argues that integrated projects could improve understanding. He states that this form of learning promotes problem-solving and flexibility. His framework suggests that this learning style can help students build upon the technical skills they have learned in earlier accounting classes and apply them to real world scenarios (Porter, 2018). Other scholars note that the use of case studies in accounting education can aide students in learning the necessary soft skills that they need for employment. They note that there is a link between the type of learning style used and different learning outcomes. Soft skills are a very necessary tool for accountants as they are used every day in the profession. Soft skills include skills such as verbal communication and interpersonal skills. The use of case studies promotes a deeper level of learning that builds upon the students' past knowledge (Boyce et al., 2001). Across the board, scholars believe that a change to the accounting education is necessary as it currently does not adequately prepare students for work life. A consensus on exactly how to change the education has not yet been reached, though different scholars have proposed ways in which it can be done.

I have a very personal motivation for this research as I am a student in an accounting program who is planning on going on to a masters in accounting. Understanding the downfalls of the current accounting education standards will help to refine it to be more beneficial for students entering the workforce. As I am going through the recruitment process for accounting positions, a criticism that is often heard suggests that some students do not have the necessary skills for employment after college. This criticism made me question the efficiency of the current accounting curriculum as I have heard this criticism from many different sources.

There are a few research questions that I will answer. The first question is, “Do students graduate with the skills necessary to succeed in the workforce?” In this question, I am inquiring about the efficacy of the current accounting education. My second research question is, “Are soft skills useful in the field of accounting?” Answering this question will assist me in what should be included in accounting education to prepare students for the workforce. In addition, I would like to answer the questions “What are the best learning/teaching styles in accounting education that can foster the development of soft skills?” and “Does the current accounting education need to be modified to better prepare students?”

My research includes a literature review and survey research that I conducted myself. The surveys were administered to both professionals in the accounting field and accounting educators. The survey includes questions that ask participants the gap in accounting education and the use and development of soft skills in the field. The results of my survey conclude that participants acknowledge the gap in accounting education and the importance of soft skills in the accounting field. What skills professionals want students to graduate with do not line up with the skills they actually graduate with. As soft skills are an important factor of success in accounting they should be fully developed when students graduate, but they are not. Integrating soft skills into the current accounting curriculum can be used to prepare students for real life experiences and help develop these essential soft skills.

## **Literature Review**

### **Active Learning vs Passive learning**

When it comes to learning styles in higher education, there are two main schools of thought. These two styles are active and passive and there are many differences between the two. These

two styles refer to how a curriculum is taught to students and what methods are used to convey the material. Each style has distinct methods that fit into one of the two categories. In addition to different methods, each learning style produces a specific outcome. Current accounting education is mainly focused on passive learning.

Active learning is a strategy that is used to better involve students in their learning process. This style aims at getting students better engaged in class and making them more present in their learning. In addition, active learning shifts some of the responsibility from the professors on to the students. This means that students have a little more control in their education and will hopefully want to be more involved as a result. Cameron et al. (2015) argues that active learning styles better foster lifetime learning as this style improves student motivation and interest. He also found that active styles optimize students' learning while in the classroom. Active learning is preferred by many scholars to prepare students for their careers post college (Cameron, 2015). For lack of better terms, active learning is the exact opposite of passive learning. Where in passive learning students are dependent on professors, in active learning students are more equal in the learning environment. Petress is of the opinion that in active learning students see professors as more a guide and resource in the learning process. Where in passive learning students are fully dependent on professors throughout the whole learning process (Petress, n.d.).

There are a few active learning methods that scholars believe will be efficient methods in accounting education. These methods include case studies, business simulations, and team-based learning. Case studies are used to have students apply what they have learned in class. This method is used in conjunction with passive learning to apply the coursework to real world situation. Case studies can either be done individually, but prove more effective when done in a group setting. This method can also be used to enhance classroom discussion. Boyce et al. study notes that among

different learning methods, case studies were the most effective when attempting to fostering soft skills (Gordon Boyce S. W., 2001). In addition to case studies, business simulations can be an effective strategy for students to apply the content they previously learned in the classroom (Eison, 2010). Team-based learning involves students forming groups to complete a certain task. With this strategy, students are able to work on teamwork which is an important skill in the accounting field. Eison (2010) believes that this form of cooperative learning fosters a “deep learning.”

As noted above, there are many benefits to active learning, but in turn, there are also obstacles. The first is that active learning does not allow for all of the material to be covered in the curriculum. Accounting classes are very content heavy and the major complaint that professors have is that active learning takes time away from learning all of the material they need. Eison (2010) noted that integrating small amounts of active learning can enhance the material without taking time away from the actual content. Another complaint about active learning is that professors have a lot of preparation to do when implementing active learning. Preparation time is needed to create whole new lectures that include active learning instead of reusing the old passive lectures. Professors must spend time before the semester starts to create new methods such as cases studies and business simulations to use in the classroom. In addition, students are resistant to active learning styles as it is vastly different from the passive styles they have seen in the past. Students need to learn and adapt to this new form of learning and many students do not want that challenge (Eison, 2010).

Passive learning differs from active learning as during passive learning students are not actively engaged. This is the current and main style in accounting education as it is the traditional style. Passive learning involves professors conveying their knowledge to their students and is the basis of learning. This style focuses on students learning from their professor’s knowledge rather

than learning the information directly themselves. The most basic form of active learning is lecture notes. This method consists of educators verbally conveying the information to students without any student participation (Cameron, 2015). Hosal-Akman et al. states that passive learning is nothing more than the exchange of knowledge from the professor to the student's notes. Passive learning does not require a higher level of thinking as students only listen to lectures and are not actively engaged in the information (Hosa-Akman et al., 2010).

In a study conducted by Cameron et al. (2015), they found that active learning was a more effective style in the classroom. Not shockingly, students did prefer active leaning to passive when it was conducted in a classroom setting. This is unsurprising as many students believe that passive learning is easier as students are not actively involved in learning. They also note that a good way to structure accounting curriculum is to start with passive learning in the beginning of the curriculum and then shift into active learning as the courses get more advanced as passive learning is a good prerequisite for active learning. Wingfield (2005) conducted a study that compared student outcomes based on active and passive learning styles. He notes that students who learned through active methods believed that what they learned will be more useful in their work after college. These students did not show more mastery in the subject but believed active styles were more effective (Wingfield and Black, 2005).

### **Soft Skills vs Discipline Specific/Technical Skills**

There are many different types of skills and attributes that are discussed throughout literature. Most of these skills can be grouped into two main categories which are soft skills and technical skills. These skills have distinct characteristics including how they are developed, how they are used, and how important they are. This section will outline the differences in these skills and hoy they specifically relate to the accounting field.

The main difference between soft skills and technical skills is how they are developed and how they are used. One of the differences between the two types of skills are how they are learned. As noted above, active learning styles better promote the development of soft skills. Technical skills can be developed mainly using passive learning but active learning may be beneficial as well. In the current educational curriculum, educators only focus on the development of technical skills. This means that technical skills are currently predominately learned in school, while soft skills are mainly learned through experiences. Soft skills are currently developed on the job and are not fully developed when students graduate, which is the opposite of technical skills. Next has to do with the fluidity of the skills. Technical skills are transferable from job to job, while some soft skills change depending on the work place. Technical skills such as GAAP regulation or the creation of financial statements are the same process no matter where you work. Soft skills such as interpersonal skills and communication can vary from company to company. These soft skills needed to be modified to fit the situation. There is also a correlation between intelligence and certain skills. Technical skills usually go hand in hand with a high intelligence quotient, while soft skills are related to a person's emotional quotient. There is normally an inverse relationship between a person's EQ and IQ. This means that if a person has a high IQ, they may have a lower EQ, and vice versa. As soft skills and technical skills are centered around different parts of the brain, one could say that they are developed differently (Hajar, n.d.).

Depending on what source used, there are different definitions for soft skills and technical skills. All of these definitions vary slightly, but there is a common theme between all of them. When describing technical skills, a definition that I found the most accurate is as follows. Technical skills are knowledge or skills that are related to the line of work. These types of skills are measurable and easily identified. These skills in the field of accounting include GAAP

regulation, financial statement analysis, journal entries, and valuation. Technical skills are transferable and are learned through education (What are Hard Skills?, n.d.). Soft skills on the other hand have a very different definition. These skills are personality traits or habits that are developed over a person's life. These skills include different habits or routines that a person uses in every day life. These skills include empathy, problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking (Hard Skills vs. Soft Skills, 2019). These two skills differ in many ways but they are both essential to being successful in a persons' line of work. Using both technical skills and soft skills hand in hand can be vital to a persons' success.

### **The Gap in Accounting Education**

In the field of accounting, there is a gap between education and application. This means that there is a disconnect between the expectation of students and their performance results. In the accounting field, companies expect students to graduate with certain competencies. When these competencies are not met, there is a gap between the company's expectations and the student's actual performance. With the current shift in the accounting field, stakeholders have shown concerns for the quality of new students entering the field. These students lack the certain skills that employers are looking for as they are not currently taught in school. Researchers have also labeled this as the "expectation-performance gap." To look deeper into this, scholars must examine the skills necessary for the accounting field and if students actually have these skills upon graduation (Thanh Ha et al., n.d.). Students graduate without the correct competencies to be successful in the accounting field. There are few universities in the U.S. that have implemented programs to access this gap and the progress of soft skills through education (Beard et al., n.d.).

In a study completed by Thanh Ha et al. they examine the mismatch between what employers expect from students and what students are actually able to do. They note that one of

the main reasons the gap exists is that there has been a shift in the role of an accountant. As the role of an accountant has moved to more of an advisor position, the skills necessary to do the job has changed as well (Denison, 2018). This change in the labor market requires a change in education to put more of an emphasis on preparing students for life after graduation and not just teaching for the CPA exam. Scholars note that educators must form a balance between these two main objectives. Currently, the focus of accounting curriculum is to prepare students to take the CPA exam. The focus needs to shift more to preparing students for real life experiences after college. Not all accounting students will take the CPA exam, but all of them will eventually need to work in a company setting and will need the necessary skills to do so. During the past decade, the list of skills that employers require is growing and includes more soft skills than generic skills. Thanh Ha et al. notes that students should develop soft skills and technical skills simultaneously to give students a solid base for both when they graduate (Thanh Ha et al., n.d.).

The Accounting Education Change Commission is charged with pushing for change in accounting education. This commission has specifically called for changes in both what is taught in accounting curriculum and how the information is taught. They have issued multiple positions on what they believe needs to be changed in accounting education and their new objectives. Seeing as the accounting field has had major changes in the past 20 years, the AECC has worked with public accounting firms to gain support for changes in the education. The Commission wants to implement changes to prepare students for the new and ever-changing accounting field. Sundem and Williams (1992) note that many accounting programs have not adapted with the growth and expansion in recent years. They also acknowledge that students spend too much time focusing on just learning and memorizing facts rather than on how to apply what they have learned to real life situations. One of the opinion statements of the AECC is that students need to be prepared to

become successful accountants in the workforce. They believe that education should focus on lifetime learning that extends past college and they professors should be teaching students to learn how to learn. This skill will help students to be successful in the workforce as they will be able to quickly adapt to changes in the accounting field in the future (Sundem and Williams, 1992).

Sundem and William propose a way to bridge that gap that follows the objectives of the AECC. Their proposal includes changing how accounting information is taught. They acknowledge that students do need a base of technical knowledge, but beyond that, they must have strong developed soft skills. To create this balance between technical and soft skills, a change in how accounting education is necessary. Silva (2018) adds that there is a certain set of knowledge and skills that future accountants need to be successful. The knowledge component refers to the technical accounting skills a student should learn throughout the curriculum. The skill set refers to the soft skills that a student needs to operate in the workplace (Silva I. L., 2018). Integrating interactive learning techniques can be beneficial to promote lifelong learning in students. Even more support for this idea is shown by the AECC funding projects to test out different changes that can be made to accounting education. In all, they funded 10 different initiatives (Sundem and Williams, 1992).

### **Skills Required for Accountants**

There are many skills that employers expect students to graduate with. These expected skills have expanded as the accounting field has changed. A few different studies investigate what skills are required to students entering the workforce. There is a different emphasis put on soft skills and technical skills. In a study conducted by Dunbar et al., they investigate the skills required for students to be successful in the accounting field. The results of the study conclude that employers put more of an emphasis on soft skills than technical skills. The study also notes that a

change in accounting education may be needed to concentrate more on the development of soft skills in school. Both employers and educators need to work together to make sure that students are adequately prepared to enter a career in accounting (Dunbar et al., 2016).

As the accounting field has become more competitive, a greater emphasis has been put on the employability of graduating students. For a student to be considered highly employable, they must have the skills required to get a job. This study focuses on what specific skills can make a student more employable. Professional bodies create specific requirements that are required for accreditation. In Australia there are three main bodies that set these requirements. These three bodies are the Australian Qualifications Framework, Australian Teaching and Learning Council, and Chartered Accountants Australia. All three of these bodies list different soft skills as the main requirements for accreditation. Some of these requirements include personal skills, organizational skills, and judgement and application skills. When analyzing the skills required in different job requirements, it was found that communication skills were ranked first for all accounting positions. The next two skills listed were interpersonal and proactive skills. This means that the top three skills listed on current accounting positions are all soft skills. This study again highlights the importance of soft skills in the accounting field. Skills such as communication and interpersonal skills are highly sought after by employers (Dunbar et al., 2016).

There are different perspectives between students and employers as to what skills are necessary for accountants. Different studies have been conducted testing these different perspectives. Kavanagh and Drennan (n.d.) created a study to test these very perspectives. They found, similar to other studies that students perceive soft skills to be weighed greater than technical skills. The two skills that students identified as most important were communication and personal skills. When looking at what skills employers look for in students, the top skills are analytical

accounting skills, communication skills and interpersonal skills. This study agrees with many others done before as it emphasizes the importance of soft skills in the accounting field. This study also shows that accounting skills and analytical skills are also important in the eyes of employers, but they are not weighed more than soft skills. Studies like these go to show that soft skills are weighed just as important as technical skills, even though technical skills are mainly focused on in school (Kavanagh and Drennan, n.d.). A study conducted by Cernusca et al. (n.d.) also found that students had a different perception on hard and soft skills. They found that students were split when asked about the importance of technical and soft skills 50 % perceived technical skills as more important in the accounting labor market, while the other 50% saw soft skills as more important (Cernusca et al., n.d.).

As the field of accounting is changing, so do the skills required to be an accountant. Many predominant people in the accounting field have stated that the field of accounting as we know it will greatly change in the next 5-10 years. The position of a staff accountant will be greatly different as this change occurs. Research done by Google finds that when surveying the leaders in the tech community, they found that all of the main skills that made their employees successful were soft skills. Among the top skills included communication, and critical thinking. The skills that came last on this list were all technical skills (Lee, 1999). Power (2018) notes that this ranking directly applies to the accounting field as it is becoming more technical in this digital world. Research even supports that the need for soft skills in the STEM fields have increased since the 2000's. An article from Deloitte talks about how soft skills are in integral part of productivity and can actually increase revenue. This also talks about how, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, soft skills have become important to people's success both in school and working in the real world (Power, 2018). Not every job though needs both soft skills and technical skills. Accounting is one of the fields

where both of these skills are necessary. There are some fields that only require technical skills, some that only require soft skills, and some that require both. Trying to figure out what category your field fits into will impact the importance of certain skills (Ravi and Agarwal, 2016).

Computers are now easily able to create journal entries and financial statements, but they are unable to think creatively or express empathy. Honing in on soft skills is one way to give someone an edge in this changing field. Accountants now have the job to analyze the information the computer generates and convey that information to related parties. This new role of an accountant requires the use of soft skills such as communication, interpersonal, and analytical skills. People in this field need to work with the technology to become more of an advisor for their clients. There is also a change in consumer demands in the field that support the need for soft skills. As noted in all of the research above, soft skills are an integral part of the accounting field. Multiple studies support the need for improved soft skills, as soft skills have been ranked above technical skills majority of the times (Power, 2018).

## **Survey Research**

### **Research Motivation, Methodology, and Questions**

I have a very personal motivation for this research as I am a student in an accounting program who is planning on going on to a masters in accounting. Understanding the downfalls of the current accounting education standards will help to refine it to be more beneficial for students entering the workforce. Accounting is a field that is constantly changing with new laws and technology. For this reason, students preparing for the workforce must be adequately prepared. Educators must use the right tools to foster learning styles that will enhance students' skill development. Updating the accounting curriculum will be beneficial for both students entering the

workforce and companies in the accounting field. As a student currently going through the recruitment process for accounting positions, a criticism that is often heard suggests that some students do not have the necessary skills for employment after college. This criticism made me question the efficiency of the current accounting curriculum as I have heard this criticism from many different sources. This research takes an in-depth look at the current education and how it can be modified to be more effective for students.

There are a few research questions that I will answer. The first question is, “Do students graduate with the skills necessary to succeed in the workforce?” In this question, I am inquiring about the efficacy of the current accounting education. This will help me to see if a modification to the curriculum is needed. My second research question is, “Are soft skills useful in the field of accounting?” Answering this question will assist me in what should be included in accounting education to prepare students for the workforce. In addition, I would like to answer the questions “What are the best learning/teaching styles in accounting education that can foster the development of soft skills?” and “Does the current accounting education need to be modified to better prepare students?” These two questions will be used when creating my recommendations for modifications to the curriculum.

In order to answer my research questions, I created a survey. I designed the survey to be administered to professionals working in the accounting field and accounting professors teaching in higher education. The pool of participants was received from professional connections and a list of accounting firm contacts in the Rochester/Buffalo area from the Brockport Center for Student Success. Using the platform Qualtrics, the survey was sent online to approximately 350 people and I received 28 responses. Of these 28 responses, 26 responses were usable in this research. Two survey participants did not meet the professional qualifications to be an eligible participant.

When I created this survey, the idea was to see if professionals in the accounting field had an opinion on the gap in accounting education, to assess the importance they put on soft skills, and to observe if or how soft skills are developed in higher education. I was curious to see if factors such as years of experience, occupation, or position in the field affected their feelings on the subject. I began the survey asking for demographic information on the factors noted above. Before completing the actual questions in the survey, I inserted an open-ended question to get an unbiased opinion on the education gap and soft skills.

Then, I asked a series of questions on a Likert scale to see if participants agreed with the following statements about accounting education and soft skills. I listed 8 skills, a mix of soft skills and technical skills, to see what participants thought students should graduate with versus what they believe students do currently graduate with. I then asked a series of questions about accounting education. I wanted to know if participants believe there is a need for change in how accounting is taught, and what that change should be. In addition, I asked a question relating soft skills to a potential student's employability. I wanted to see if professionals valued soft skills over technical skills when deciding whether or not a student should get the job. I then asked participants to rank various skills from 1 to 8, with 1 being the most important and 8 being the least important. Among these skills were a mix of soft skills and technical skills. Lastly, I asked another open-ended question asking the participants for any additional comments, thoughts, or questions they may have after taking the survey.

### **Setting and Participants**

(Table 1)

I received 28 responses to my survey. Of these 28 responses, only 26 of them are usable in this research. Two responses were not usable as the respondents did not meet the qualifications to be an eligible participant. Both of these people worked in human resources at a CPA firm but are not actual CPAs. Out of these responses 19 are accountants in the accounting field and 7 are accounting educators. When it comes to experience, 42% came from people who had 0-5 years' experience in the field, 12% had 5-10 years' experience, and the remaining 46% had more than 10 years of experience. I also differentiated between each person's position in their field. 27% of the respondents are staff accountants, 12% hold the position of Senior Accountant or equivalent, 8% of people who responded are Managers or equivalent, 23% are Partners or equivalent, the remaining 31% are educators.

### **Procedure**

The survey was administered and collected during March 2019, and was created and distributed using the online program Qualtrics. This program allowed me to monitor the distribution of the survey. In addition to my professional contacts in the Rochester/Buffalo area, I created a post on LinkedIn to get a wider reach for my survey. Of the surveys collected, 15 of them were from LinkedIn while 11 of them were from my personal contacts. After the data was collected, I exported the data and used various programs to analyze it. Two main programs I used were Excel and Tableau.

### **Measures**

In the survey, participants were asked various questions revolving around the gap in accounting education and the importance of soft skills. The survey consisted of different types of questions including ranking, Likert Scale, and open-ended. The survey contained 2 optional open-

ended questions. One question was asked at the beginning of the survey to get an unbiased opinion from the participants about the subject. The second open-ended question was asked at the end of the survey. This gave the participants a chance to add anything to the research that was not already mentioned in the survey. In addition to the open-ended questions, there was a question that allowed people to select all options that apply. This question asked participants to select all learning styles they believe prepare students for real life experiences. The options included a mix of both passive and active learning styles. There was also a question that asked people to rank different skills, such as interpersonal and excel skills, as they relate to a student's employability after college.

The majority of the questions in the survey contained Likert statements to measure additional variables. The survey contained a total of 21 Likert statements. Seventeen statements addressed the participants attitude toward the soft skills that students should graduate having developed and the skills that they actually do graduate with. Two statements addressed their attitude toward how accounting is taught in higher education. One statement addressed soft skills as they relate to a student's employability. Additionally, the last statement weighs the importance of soft skills versus technical skills. The survey as well as the results utilized in this research are available in the appendix.

## **Data Analysis**

**“Do students graduate with the skills necessary to succeed in the workforce?”** To answer this question, I asked two sets of Likert Scale questions. The first one asks participants if students should graduate with certain skills, and the second one asks if students currently graduate with certain skills. This section will go through each skill and see the differences between what is expected and what actually happens. The first skills that will be discussed are soft skills.

When it comes to written communication, 88% of participants believe that students should graduate having fully developed this skill. On the other hand, when it comes to what participants believe students actually graduate with, the participants were divided. 46% of participants believed that students do graduate having fully developed written communication and 46% believe that students do not currently graduate with this skill. 96% of participants believe that students should graduate with verbal communication while only 38% believe that they actually do graduate with it fully developed. This means that 35% say that accounting students do not graduate having fully developed verbal communication. The same pattern is shown for problem-solving skills. 96% of participants believe that students should graduate with developed problem-solving skills, while on the other hand, only 46% of participants believe students actually graduate with this skill. Interpersonal skills show a similar trend. It is almost unanimous with 96% of participants agreeing that students should graduate with interpersonal skills, while only 38% believe they actually do. The last soft skill analyzed is analytical skills. For this particular skill, 92% of participants agree that students should graduate having analytical skills developed. When it comes to what people thought about what students currently graduate with only 42% agree that this skill is developed. For all of the soft skills, it was almost unanimous that students should graduate with these skills developed, while participants are more divided when it comes to what they believe students do currently graduate with.

The next category of skills that were evaluated are different technical skills. The first technical skill that was analyzed is excel skills. 92% of participants agreed that students should graduate with excel skills, while only 54% of participants agreed that students actually do graduate with excel skills. When it comes to GAAP regulation, 81% of participants believe that students should graduate with this skill. On the other hand, only 38% of participants believe that students

currently graduate knowing GAAP regulation. The last skill that was analyzed is financial statement analysis. For this skill, 85% of participants believe that students should graduate with developed financial statement analysis skills, while only 38% of participants agreed that students actually do graduate with this skill.

**“Are soft skills useful in the field of accounting?”** The importance of soft skills was evaluated using a Likert scale by both professionals and educators. Overall, soft skills were ranked just as important, if not more important than technical skills. 46% of participants said that soft skills weighed greater, 38% said they are equally important, and only 15% said technical skills weighed slightly greater. When filtering the results by professional CPAs and educators there were no discrepancies. Both educators and professional CPAs agreed that soft skills weighed greater than technical skills. Next, the importance of soft skills was evaluated based on employability. An overwhelming 96% of participants agreed that a student with more highly developed soft skills are more employable than a student who does not have fully developed soft skills. Only 1 participant, 4% of the sample, somewhat disagreed that soft skills are not an important factor in employability. This one participant who disagreed identified as an educator.

(Table 2)

The participants were also asked to rank various skills as they relate to a student's employability after college. With this ranking, 1 is considered the most important and 8 is considered the least important. This is used to see how soft skills weigh versus technical skills in the real world. All rankings will be listed starting with the most important and ending with the least important. This is the overall ranking for educators and professionals combined: verbal communication, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, written communication, analytical skills, excel skills, financial statement analysis, and GAAP regulation. This is the overall ranking,

but there is a discrepancy between professionals and educators. This is the ranking for professionals: interpersonal skills, verbal communication, problem-solving skills, written communication, analytical skills, excel skills, financial statement analysis, and GAAP regulation. The ranking for educators is as follows: problem solving skills, verbal communication, analytical skills, written communication, Excel skills, GAAP regulation, and financial statement analysis. Even though there are discrepancies in the specific order of the skills, both professionals and educators ranked soft skills over technical skills when it comes to employability.

(Table 3)

**“Does the current accounting education need to be modified to better prepare students?”** For this question, the first item I looked at was the need for change in how technical accounting skills are taught. 81% of the participants agreed that there is a need for a change in how technical skills are taught, 11% neither agreed nor disagreed a change is necessary, and 8% are of the opinion that no change in developing technical skills is needed.

The next step in evaluating if there is a need for modification in accounting curriculum is to analyze if there a need for change in how soft skills are taught. For this question, 92% of participants agreed that there is a need for change in how soft skills are taught, 4% neither agreed nor disagreed that a change is needed, and 4% does not agree that a change in how soft skills are taught is needed. The figure 1 creates a visual of these results.

(Figure 1)

**“What is the best learning/teaching style in accounting education that can foster the development of soft skills?”** As noted above, both professionals and educators believe that there is a need for a change in how both soft skills and technical skills are taught. This question analyzes

the best ways to modify the curriculum to foster the development of these skills and prepare students for real life experiences. When considering changing how accounting is taught, I wanted to see the difference between active and passive learning styles. The question in the survey listed a mix of active and passive styles and asked participants to select all the styles they believe will better prepare students. For both professionals and educators, the top 5 learning/teaching styles chosen are business simulations, case studies, team projects, presentations, and self-assessment exercises. The percentages for each are business simulations 20%, case studies 18%, team projects 17%, presentations 15% and self-assessment exercises 14%. The lowest chosen styles are verbal lectures, supplemental reading assignments, handouts, and passive note taking. All of the lowest chosen styles were chosen by 4% of the participants. This goes to show that active learning/teaching styles will better prepare students for life after graduation and will foster the development of soft skills. There were no discrepancies between the two professions as both ranked active over passive. The figure 2 is a visual representation of the data collected. The learning styles with the larger circles were chosen more by participants.

(Figure 2)

### **Professional Testimony**

There are a few accounts from professionals and educators that have interesting viewpoints. The first personal account says, “The future of the accounting profession is centered in how to provide business advisory services. Gone are the days of keeping your head down at your desk. Here are the days of getting to know people, understanding what they do, and helping them reach their goals.” This was one of the first opinions that made me choose to research this topic. The accounting field has changed and adapted as time has gone on, but the education hasn’t. Accounting education needs to modernize to adequately prepare students for the new accounting

profession. This person is suggesting that the accounting field is not what it used to be as accountants need to be more than just a number cruncher who is alone in their cubical all day. Today's accountants work hand in hand with clients and act more as advisors than they used to.

Another opinion is that, "There is a prominent stereotype surrounding the accounting field as a whole that accountants are typically stoic and, for lack of a better term, human calculators. However, interpersonal skills are strongly desired both by clients when in the field and by employers when they are analyzing candidates." This is an interesting thought as many people still believe the old accounting stereotype. Before coming to college, this was similar to the idea that I had about the accounting field. As noted above, the field has changed but people's stereotype about it hasn't. Incoming students need to realize the extent that the field has changed to know if it is right for them.

A few participants had the perspective that soft skills are just as important, if not more important than technical skills. One opinion says, "Soft skills are as necessary if not in some ways more important in achieving success in the accounting profession." Soft skills are some of the most overlooked topics in education, but are highly important to accountants in the field.

A few people commented on how accounting is taught in higher education. One of these opinions is, "An issue I see with the gap, is that school is primarily teaching young professionals how to take the CPA exam or any kind of licensing exam. Only a portion of what is taught in college assists in the day to day work." This participant is advocating for a change in how accounting is taught. More emphasis needs to be put on preparing students for real life experiences than just teaching for the CPA. Additionally, educators need to focus on how the accounting curriculum is taught.

Lastly, another opinion states, “too much time is spent on content and not enough on application.” Teaching students to apply what they have learned to real life situations will better prepare them for work after graduation. Incorporating more active learning into the curriculum will help to enhance students’ understanding of the application of practices. One person’s perspective is that, “education should be more focused on applications and where to find answers and less on memorization.” This person also suggests that a change in accounting education is necessary. Currently, accounting education focuses on passive learning as the curriculum is very heavy. Educators focus on preparing students to take the CPA exam, when they should be focusing more on preparing students for real life situations. As the accounting curriculum is very dense, educators have a time constraint to adequately cover all of the material. Some educators are against the change as they would have to create new lessons plans and may have less time to cover the materials. I believe that focusing on applying the content is a more effective method to prepare students.

## **Results**

After analyzing all of the data that I collected from participants I was able to form a few conclusions. The first conclusion has to do with the gap in accounting education and application. Students do not graduate with the necessary skills being fully developed. When asking professionals if students should graduate with certain soft and technical skills it was an overwhelming agreement that students should graduate with these skills developed. Professionals did agree slightly more with soft skills but all skills had over 80% agreement. When asked if students do currently graduate with these skills the answers were not as unanimous. Only approximately one-third to one-half of participants said students currently graduate having these skills. This difference shows the disconnect between what skills professionals think students

should graduate with and what they actually graduate with. This is just one instance that validates the gap in accounting education and application. Employers expect students to graduate with a set of skills and they are not meeting that expectation. After coming to the conclusion from my data that the gap does exist, I wanted to explore different options on how to bridge it. The first option that I thought of was through the use of soft skills, so next I looked into the importance of soft skills in the profession.

To test my idea that soft skills could bridge the gap in accounting education, I needed to know how important and useful soft skills are in the field. When asked to compare the importance of soft skills versus technical skills participants believe that soft skills are just as important, if not more important, than technical skills. The majority of the participants voted that there is either an even split between the two skills or that soft skills weigh greater. There were no discrepancies between the two types of participants as both agreed.

Next, soft skills were evaluated based on employability. The participants were in overwhelming agreement that a student with highly developed soft skills is more likely to get a job than a student without them. Similarly, the participants were asked to rank different skills based on employability. Both educators and professionals ranked the soft skills as more important than technical skills on the scale. There was a discrepancy in the specific order of the skills, but overall soft skills ranked more important when it comes to employability.

Accounting education needs to be modified to better prepare students for the real world. Participants were asked if there is a need for change in how soft skills are taught in accounting education. Over 90% of the participants agreed that there is a need for change in this area. When asked if there is a need for a change in how technical accounting skills are taught, participants agreed that the need is there as well. This result was surprising to me as going into this I thought

there would only be a need to change how soft skills are taught. Both questions had a large percentage of participants agree that change is needed, though there was a higher percentage for the change in soft skills. The hope is that modifying the accounting curriculum will help to better develop both soft skills and technical skills to make students more prepared for work after college.

Once I established that the gap exists and that changing education to better integrate soft skills is agreed upon, I wanted to find out what the best way is to achieve this. The results show that participants agreed that active learning/teaching styles better prepare students for real life experiences. All of the top five styles chosen were active, while the bottom four styles were passive. Modifying accounting curriculum to incorporate more active styles will better foster the development of both soft and technical skills.

### **Limitations, Unexpected Findings, and Recommendations for Future Research**

There are various limits to this study that may affect the strength of the study. There are a few limitations that arose through conducting research. The first limitation is the size of my sample. In order to ensure that the result of my research is valid, it is important to have a sufficient sample size. With a sample size of 26 responses, the margin of error is large. Having a greater sample size would have been more beneficial as the margin of error decreases as the sample size increases. With this small of a sample, it will be harder to generalize the data to the masses.

In addition to the size of the sample, there is a limitation with the specific participants as well. I had a limited ability to obtain access to the proper geographic scope of participants. 24 out of the 26 participants were located in the western New York area. Only two of the participants resided outside of this area, and their locations were Colorado and California. Unfortunately, this does not give me a large geographic scope for my sample.

The time constraint is another limitation of this study. As this research must be concluded by my graduation in 2019, it limited the amount of time that was available to collect data. The time between the start of data collection and the end of data collection was only a period of one month. If there was not the time limitation of the due date of this research, the sample size I collected could have been much larger.

Further research in this field will allow for better integration of active learning into the accounting curriculum. It will help guide faculty members in the most successful way to modify the curriculum to better foster the development of soft and technical skills in the classroom. I hope that these results will aid with future research in this field.

### **Recommendations and Implications for Accounting Education**

The findings suggest that integrating active learning/teaching styles into accounting curriculum can increase the development of both soft and technical skills in accounting students. Instructors can modify how they teach their materials to add more active styles. This can be done through many different methods such as case studies or business simulations. Educators and professionals are in agreement that a change in accounting education is necessary to better prepare students for their life after graduation.

This will have implications for accounting education as educators will have to create new lesson plans to integrate active styles into their teaching. The findings suggest that educators can increase the development of soft skills through the integration of active styles into the curriculum. For example, the use of case studies or team projects create an atmosphere that fosters the development of soft skills. If a professor chooses to use case studies or business simulations the educators will need to create those from scratch to use in their class. Essentially professors are just

modifying how they teach the class and not what content they actually teach. Scholars have seen a correlation between active learning and soft skills in the classroom. If educators choose to modify the way accounting is taught, others may follow as well. The goal is to make active learning/teaching styles the standard nationwide.

### **Conclusion**

The accounting field, similar to many other professions, will adapt and change as time goes on. The field of accounting specifically has had major changes in the past 50 years. Accountants are not just number crunchers anymore as their role in business has shifted to more of an advisor. This change in the role of an accountant creates a need for a change in accounting education. As the accounting field has changed, the education has not. This has caused a gap in accounting education and application. My research supports the existence of the gap and proposes a way to try to bridge it.

The future of accounting will most likely see a major change in the role of a staff accountant in the next 5 years. An emphasis on the development and use of soft skills will need to be a part of that change. As the role of an accountant has changed, so has the skills needed to be successful in that position. Students entering the accounting field need to be adequately prepared for this change. Changing how accounting is taught can go a long way to better prepare students for working in this changing field. This change includes the implementation of active learning in accounting curriculum. Implementing this change will help to better prepare students for work as it will foster the development of well needed soft skills. The first step to bridging the gap between accounting education and application is to implement this change in accounting education across the country. Active learning needs to be stressed as an important concept in accounting education.

## References

Table 1

| Type of Profession | Accountant | Educator | Total |
|--------------------|------------|----------|-------|
| Responses          | 19         | 7        | 26    |
| Percentage         | 73%        | 27%      | 100%  |

| Years of Experience | 0-5 | 5-10 | 10+ | Total |
|---------------------|-----|------|-----|-------|
| Responses           | 11  | 3    | 12  | 26    |
| Percentages         | 42% | 12%  | 46% | 100%  |

| Type of Position | Staff Accountant | Senior (or equivalent) | Manager (or equivalent) | Partner (or equivalent) | Educator | Total |
|------------------|------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------|-------|
| Responses        | 7                | 3                      | 2                       | 6                       | 8        | 26    |
| Percentages      | 27%              | 12%                    | 8%                      | 23%                     | 31%      | 100%  |

Table 2

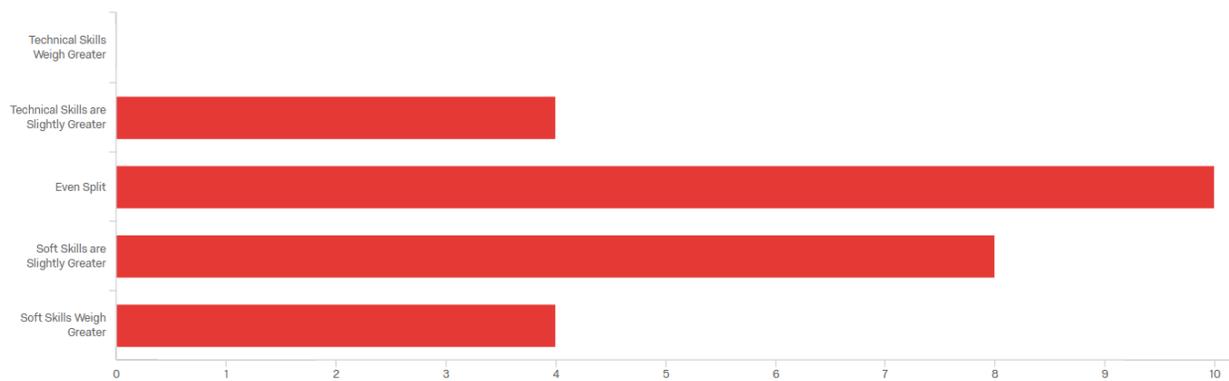


Table 3

| Overall Results              |      |
|------------------------------|------|
| Field                        | Mean |
| Verbal Communication         | 2.62 |
| Interpersonal Skills         | 2.96 |
| Problem-Solving Skills       | 3.04 |
| Written Communication        | 4.08 |
| Analytical Skills            | 4.46 |
| Excel Skills                 | 5.08 |
| Financial Statement Analysis | 6.69 |
| GAAP Regulation              | 7.08 |

| Professional Results         |      |
|------------------------------|------|
| Field                        | Mean |
| Interpersonal Skills         | 2.21 |
| Verbal Communication         | 2.42 |
| Problem-Solving Skills       | 3.21 |
| Written Communication        | 4.11 |
| Analytical Skills            | 4.84 |
| Excel Skills                 | 5.16 |
| Financial Statement Analysis | 6.58 |
| GAAP Regulation              | 7.47 |

| Educator Results             |      |
|------------------------------|------|
| Field                        | Mean |
| Problem-Solving Skills       | 2.57 |
| Verbal Communication         | 3.14 |
| Analytical Skills            | 3.43 |
| Written Communication        | 4.00 |
| Excel Skills                 | 4.86 |
| Interpersonal Skills         | 5.00 |
| GAAP Regulation              | 6.00 |
| Financial Statement Analysis | 7.00 |

Figure 1

Do you agree that there is a need for change/improvement in how soft skills are developed in higher education?

Do you agree that there is a need for change/improvement in how technical skills are developed in higher education?

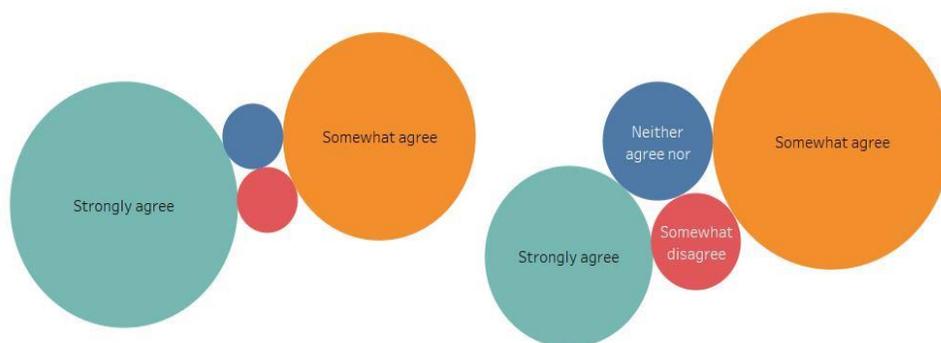
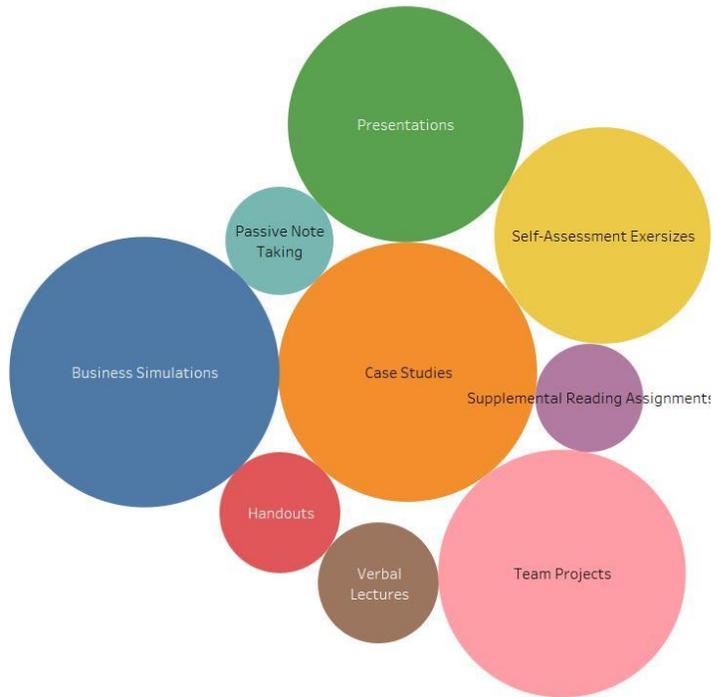


Figure 2

Learning styles that better prepare students for real world experiences.



## Appendix A

### Thesis Survey

#### *Institutional Review Board*

#### *Form A—Statement of Informed Consent For Adult Participants*

**KEY INFORMATION:** You are being asked to be in a research study of the use and development of soft skills in accounting education. As with all research studies, participation is voluntary. The purpose of this study is to understand the gap in accounting education and application with regard to the development of soft skills. The study will provide insight to what real accounting professionals think about the education. A maximum of 80 people will take part in this study. The results will be used for an undergraduate honors thesis about accounting education. The survey answers will remain completely anonymous and will in no way be traced back to you or your organization.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be involved in this study for from February 15, 2019 to April 30, 2019. The study will only take 5-10 minutes to complete and will require no follow-up information. If you decide to participate in the study you will be asked to complete a survey regarding your opinion of accounting information. The survey will take 5-10 minutes and will be completed online. This is the only research task you will need to perform. We believe there are no known risks associated with this research. You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may help to shed light on the gap in accounting education and create changes to better accounting education to better prepare students for life after graduation. You are being asked to be in a research study of the gap in accounting education and the development and use of soft skills in the field. This study is being conducted at The College at Brockport. This study is being conducted by: Megan Gullo in the Accounting Department at The College at Brockport. You were selected as a possible participant because you are either an educator in accounting, or you are a professional currently working in the accounting field that underwent accounting education. Please read this consent form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be in the study.

**PROCEDURES:** If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following: You will be asked to fill out a survey expressing your opinions on accounting education and the use of soft skills in accounting. The survey will be completed online and will take no more than 5-10 minutes to complete. You will first be asked to consent to taking the survey and then will be asked the questions. The survey answers will remain anonymous and will in no way be traced back to you directly.

**COMPENSATION/INCENTIVES:** You will not receive compensation.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** The records of this study will be kept private and your confidentiality will be protected. In any sort of report the researcher(s) might publish, no identifying information will be included. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher(s) will have access to the records. All data will be kept on a password-protected laptop by the investigator(s). All study records, including approved IRB documents, tapes, transcripts, and consent forms, will be destroyed by shredding and/or deleting after 3 years.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:** Participation in this study is voluntary and requires your informed consent. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with The College at Brockport. If you decide to participate, you are free to skip any question that is asked. You may also withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. *If you would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, please contact The College at Brockport IRB compliance officer at (585) 395-2779 or*

IRB@brockport.edu. **STATEMENT OF CONSENT:** I am 18 years of age or older. I have read and understood the above information. I consent to participate in the study.

- I consent, begin the study (1)
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate (2)
- 

Q3 Identify your Profession

- Educator (1)
- Accountant at a CPA Firm (2)
- 

Q4 Years of Experience in your field

- 0-5 Years (1)
- 5-10 years (2)
- 10+ Years (3)
- 

Q15 Identify your position

- Staff Accountant (1)
- Senior (or equivalent) (2)
- Manager (or equivalent) (3)
- Partner (or equivalent) (4)
- Educator (5)
- Human Resources (6)
- 

Q20 Before completing this survey, do you have any thoughts regarding the development and use of soft skills in accounting, or the gap in accounting education?

(This will be the only open-ended question of the survey)

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Q7 Do you agree that students are adequately prepared for beginning their career?

|                               | Strongly agree<br>(1) | Somewhat agree<br>(2) | Neither agree<br>nor disagree (3) | Somewhat<br>disagree (4) | Strongly<br>disagree (5) |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Are students<br>prepared? (1) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |

Q10 Evaluate the importance of soft skills vs technical skills in accounting positions.

|   | Technical Skills<br>Weigh Greater<br>(1) | Technical Skills<br>are Slightly<br>Greater (2) | Even Split (3)        | Soft Skills are<br>Slightly Greater<br>(4) | Soft Skills<br>Weigh Greater<br>(5) |
|---|--|---|-----------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Soft skills vs<br>Technical Skills<br>(1) | <input type="radio"/>                    | <input type="radio"/>                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                      | <input type="radio"/>               |

Q11 Do you agree that students SHOULD GRADUATE college being proficient in the following skills?

|  | Strongly Agree<br>(1) | Somewhat agree<br>(2) | Neither agree<br>nor disagree (3) | Somewhat<br>disagree (4) | Strongly<br>disagree (5) |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Written<br>Communication<br>(1)          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| Verbal<br>Communication<br>( 1-on-1) (2) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| Excel Skills (3)                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| Problem-<br>Solving Skills<br>(4)        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| GAAP<br>Regulation (5)                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| Interpersonal<br>Skills (6)              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| Financial<br>Statement<br>Analysis (7)   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| Analytical Skills<br>(8)                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |

Q12 Do you believe that students CURRENTLY GRADUATE having developed proficiency in the following skills necessary for employment?

|  | Strongly Agree<br>(1) | Somewhat agree<br>(2) | Neither agree<br>nor disagree (3) | Somewhat<br>disagree (4) | Strongly<br>disagree (5) |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Written<br>Communication<br>(1)          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| Verbal<br>Communication<br>( 1-on-1) (2) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| Excel Skills (3)                         | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| Problem-<br>Solving Skills<br>(4)        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| GAAP<br>Regulation (5)                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| Interpersonal<br>Skills (6)              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| Financial<br>Statement<br>Analysis (7)   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |
| Analytical Skills<br>(8)                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |

Q17 Do you agree that there is a need for change/improvement in how soft skills are developed in higher education?

|  | Strongly agree<br>(1) | Somewhat agree<br>(2) | Neither agree<br>nor disagree (3) | Somewhat<br>disagree (4) | Strongly<br>disagree (5) |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Change in Soft<br>Skills<br>Development<br>(1) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |

Q18 Do you agree that there is a need for change/improvement in how technical accounting skills are developed in higher education?

|   | Strongly agree<br>(1) | Somewhat agree<br>(2) | Neither agree<br>nor disagree (3) | Somewhat<br>disagree (4) | Strongly<br>disagree (5) |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Change in<br>Technical Skills<br>Development<br>(1) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |

Q13 What type of learning style(s) do you believe will better prepare students for real life experiences?  
Select all that apply

- Case Studies (1)
- Verbal Lectures (2)
- Supplemental Reading Assignments (3)
- Business Simulations (4)
- Handouts (5)
- Team Projects (6)
- Presentations (7)
- Passive note taking (8)
- Self-Assessment Exercises (9)

Q14 Do you agree that students that have more highly-developed soft skills are more employable than a student who has not if they have the same education/experience level?

|   | Strongly agree<br>(1) | Somewhat agree<br>(2) | Neither agree<br>nor disagree (3) | Somewhat<br>disagree (4) | Strongly<br>disagree (5) |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Are students<br>more<br>employable? (1) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>    |

Q16 Please rank the following skills as they relate to a student's employability after college:

1 being the most important factor and 8 being the least important factor

Please move the skills to put them in the order you like

- \_\_\_\_\_ Written Communication (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Verbal Communication (1-on-1) (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Excel Skills (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Problem-Solving Skills (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ GAAP Regulation (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Interpersonal Skills (6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Financial Statement Analysis (7)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Analytical Skills (8)

Q19 Thank you for participating in this survey. Your input was greatly appreciated! After taking this survey, please feel free to leave any additional comments, thoughts, questions, or concerns.

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**Survey Testimonials**

| <b>Text Entry</b>   |
|---|
| Yes, I research in this area and have presented on the topic.   |
| The future of the accounting profession is centered in how to provide business advisory services. Gone are the days of keeping your head down at your desk. Here are the days of getting to know people, understanding what they do, and helping them reach their goals.  |
| Students need to practice communication skills (written and verbal) and other soft skills as part of the curriculum.  |
| Soft skills are critical for success in the field of accounting. There is a definite gap in accounting education- too much time is spent on content and not enough on application. Students leave school without the basic ability to reason things out.  |
| Soft skills are just as important as technical skills.  |
| There is a prominent stereotype surrounding the accounting field as a whole that accountants are typically stoic and, for lack of a better term, human calculators. However, interpersonal skills are strongly desired both by clients when in the field and by employers when they are analyzing candidates. Soft skills are not as developed as technical skills are, so they can really set an individual apart during the interview process.  |
| I believe soft skills in the accounting profession are extremely important as we network and communicate with many different clients who themselves have different interests and businesses. I think often the skills required for accounting and the skills required to network and communicate are conflicting (one very technical and one very soft) and not everyone is intuitively good at both. It takes desire, education, practice.   |
| Within audit, it seems group project skills are undervalued and under emphasized. When you're stuck in an audit room for 10-16 hours, 6-7 days a week, understanding and fulfilling your role while managing relationships, stress, unpredictable issues that come up, etc.... but this is hard to replicate in a classroom setting. Internships prepare you better than the degree, so I think colleges maybe don't always emphasize that point enough. My internship was a big wake up call and reality check for me, being an introvert. |
| a mandatory internship requirement as part of the accounting curriculum with specifications related to the evaluation of student's soft skills at the beginning and ending of the internship  |
| An issue I see with the gap, is that school is primarily teaching young professionals how to take the CPA exam or any kind of licensing exam. Only a portion of what is taught in college assists in the day to day work. As an accountant, I felt that I should have had more experience actually analytically looking at work changes in accounts and understanding how this would affect the business versus simple journal entries.   |
| Soft skills are as necessary if not in some ways more important in achieving success in the accounting profession.  |
| I think there should be more opportunities for students to network with accounting professionals. I went into accounting as I thought I would avoid writing, but have to document and write proposals as part of my current role. Today's students rely too much on electronic communication versus interpersonal skills.   |
| In my experience soft skills are vital to the accounting profession, however school experience alone cannot fully prepare students for the workplace.   |
| Soft skills are perhaps one of the most overlooked topics in education from my experience ('15 graduate). Coming from an individual working in an audit/assurance area, people skills are some of the most beneficial as I've seen myself get better answers from and build better relationships with clients as I became more comfortable with them.   |

For many years, educators have noticed the lack of soft skills in accounting students, and students in general. Educators have continually addressed these concerns through changes in curriculum. One problem is the continuing decline in students' abilities to write and think. Also, the curriculum is very heavy and creates problems with time for adequate coverage, including soft skills. We are also faced with students complaining about the amount of work and spending too much time working outside of class. Everyone wants an A but many don't want to put in the time to earn it.

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**Thank you for participating in this survey. Your input was greatly appreciated! After taking this survey, please feel free to leave any additional comments, thoughts, questions, or concerns.**

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### Text Entry

Group projects + presentations + internships are most important. A class dedicated to excel would be great too.

Add one more to the learning styles/modes: active learning assignments are best -- it is strongly recommended at our SUNY school (not Brockport) and we are moving to a model that requires these assignment types.

the classification of these skills above are not perfect. For example, problem solving skills definitely including understanding of GAAP Regulation. Maybe you can put them into basic skills and soft skills sets. Financial statement analysis is not a general type of skill that are comparable to the others and also it may be similar or included in the analytical skills.

Team projects where the roles are clearly identified. In most firms, there will be a staff, a senior, a manager, and a partner involved. The staff does a lot of work. The senior manages the staff and does the more difficult assignment. The manager reviews the work of the staff and senior and the partner does a high level review of it all. The responsibility of the success is the manager and partner ensuring all aspects of the project have been addressed. I think students could benefit from analyzing their teammates work more closely and not just compiling it one paper.

It's difficult to rank some of the skills as more or less important than the others. Some, if not all, are equally important. Having said that, interpersonal and communications skills are somewhat more important to get your foot in the door. If there is a baseline of certain technical skills, they can then be mastered/honed on the job. A perfect candidate has it all.

Education should be more focused on applications and where to find answers and less on memorization.

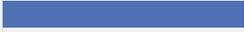
Great topic. Best of luck in your future career!

Survey Data

| # | Answer                   | Bar  | Response | %       |
|---|--------------------------|--|----------|---------|
| 1 | Educator                 |   | 7        | 26.92%  |
| 2 | Accountant at a CPA Firm |  | 19       | 73.08%  |
|   | Total                    |  | 26       | 100.00% |

| Min Value | Max Value | Average Value | Variance | Standard Deviation | Total Responses | Total Respondents |
|-----------|-----------|---------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1         | 2         | 1.73          | 0.20     | 0.45               | 26              | 26                |

## Years of Experience in your field

| # | Answer     | Bar   | Response | %       |
|---|------------|---|----------|---------|
| 1 | 0-5 Years  |  | 11       | 42.31%  |
| 2 | 5-10 years |  | 3        | 11.54%  |
| 3 | 10+ Years  |  | 12       | 46.15%  |
|   | Total      |   | 26       | 100.00% |

| Min Value | Max Value | Average Value | Variance | Standard Deviation | Total Responses | Total Respondents |
|-----------|-----------|---------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1         | 3         | 2.04          | 0.92     | 0.96               | 26              | 26                |

**Identify your position**

| # | Answer                  | Bar   | Response | %       |
|---|-------------------------|---|----------|---------|
| 1 | Staff Accountant        |  | 7        | 26.92%  |
| 2 | Senior (or equivalent)  |  | 3        | 11.54%  |
| 3 | Manager (or equivalent) |  | 2        | 7.69%   |
| 4 | Partner (or equivalent) |  | 6        | 23.08%  |
| 5 | Educator                |  | 8        | 30.77%  |
| 6 | Human Resources         |   | 0        | 0.00%   |
|   | Total                   |   | 26       | 100.00% |

| Min Value | Max Value | Average Value | Variance | Standard Deviation | Total Responses | Total Respondents |
|-----------|-----------|---------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1         | 5         | 3.19          | 2.72     | 1.65               | 26              | 26                |

**Do you agree that students are adequately prepared for beginning their career?**

| # | Question               | Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Response | Average Value |
|---|------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|---------------|
| 1 | Are students prepared? | 1              | 12             | 4                          | 7                 | 2                 | 26       | 2.88          |

| Statistic          | Are students prepared? |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| Min Value          | 1                      |
| Max Value          | 5                      |
| Mean               | 2.88                   |
| Variance           | 1.23                   |
| Standard Deviation | 1.11                   |
| Total Responses    | 26                     |
| Total Respondents  | 26                     |

**Evaluate the importance of soft skills vs technical skills in accounting positions.**

| # | Question                        | Technical Skills Weigh Greater | Technical Skills are Slightly Greater | Even Split | Soft Skills are Slightly Greater | Soft Skills Weigh Greater | Response | Average Value |
|---|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|----------|---------------|
| 1 | Soft skills vs Technical Skills | -                              | 4                                     | 10         | 8                                | 4                         | 26       | 3.46          |

| Statistic          | Soft skills vs Technical Skills |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Min Value          | 2                               |
| Max Value          | 5                               |
| Mean               | 3.46                            |
| Variance           | 0.9                             |
| Standard Deviation | 0.95                            |
| Total Responses    | 26                              |
| Total Respondents  | 26                              |



**Do you believe that students CURRENTLY GRADUATE having developed proficiency in the following skills necessary for employment?**

| # | Question                       | Strongly Agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Response | Average Value |
|---|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|---------------|
| 1 | Written Communication          | 1              | 11             | 2                          | 9                 | 3                 | 26       | 3.08          |
| 2 | Verbal Communication ( 1-on-1) | 1              | 9              | 7                          | 9                 | -                 | 26       | 2.92          |
| 3 | Excel Skills                   | 4              | 10             | 5                          | 6                 | 1                 | 26       | 2.62          |
| 4 | Problem-Solving Skills         | -              | 12             | 7                          | 5                 | 2                 | 26       | 2.88          |
| 5 | GAAP Regulation                | 1              | 9              | 9                          | 6                 | 1                 | 26       | 2.88          |
| 6 | Interpersonal Skills           | -              | 10             | 8                          | 8                 | -                 | 26       | 2.92          |
| 7 | Financial Statement Analysis   | 1              | 9              | 9                          | 5                 | 2                 | 26       | 2.92          |
| 8 | Analytical Skills              | -              | 11             | 5                          | 8                 | 2                 | 26       | 3.04          |

| Statistic          | Written Communication | Verbal Communication ( 1-on-1) | Excel Skills | Problem-Solving Skills | GAAP Regulation | Interpersonal Skills | Financial Statement Analysis | Analytical Skills |
|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Min Value          | 1                     | 1                              | 1            | 2                      | 1               | 2                    | 1                            | 2                 |
| Max Value          | 5                     | 4                              | 5            | 5                      | 5               | 4                    | 5                            | 5                 |
| Mean               | 3.08                  | 2.92                           | 2.62         | 2.88                   | 2.88            | 2.92                 | 2.92                         | 3.04              |
| Variance           | 1.43                  | 0.87                           | 1.29         | 0.99                   | 0.91            | 0.71                 | 1.03                         | 1.08              |
| Standard Deviation | 1.2                   | 0.93                           | 1.13         | 0.99                   | 0.95            | 0.84                 | 1.02                         | 1.04              |
| Total Responses    | 26                    | 26                             | 26           | 26                     | 26              | 26                   | 26                           | 26                |
| Total Respondents  | 26                    | 26                             | 26           | 26                     | 26              | 26                   | 26                           | 26                |

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**Do you agree that there is a need for change/improvement in how soft skills are developed in higher education?**

| # | Question                          | Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Response | Average Value |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|---------------|
| 1 | Change in Soft Skills Development | 14             | 10             | 1                          | 1                 | -                 | 26       | 1.58          |

| Statistic          | Change in Soft Skills Development |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Min Value          | 1                                 |
| Max Value          | 4                                 |
| Mean               | 1.58                              |
| Variance           | 0.57                              |
| Standard Deviation | 0.76                              |
| Total Responses    | 26                                |
| Total Respondents  | 26                                |

**Do you agree that there is a need for change/improvement in how technical accounting skills are developed in higher education?**

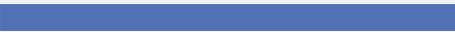
| # | Question                               | Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Response | Average Value |
|---|--|----------------|----------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|---------------|
| 1 | Change in Technical Skills Development | 7              | 14             | 3                          | 2                 | -                 | 26       | 2.00          |

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| Statistic          | Change in Technical Skills Development |
|--------------------|--|
| Min Value          | 1                                      |
| Max Value          | 4                                      |
| Mean               | 2                                      |
| Variance           | 0.72                                   |
| Standard Deviation | 0.85                                   |
| Total Responses    | 26                                     |
| Total Respondents  | 26                                     |

**What type of learning style(s) do you believe will better prepare students for real life experiences?**

Select all that apply

| # | Answer                           | Bar  | Response | %       |
|---|----------------------------------|--|----------|---------|
| 1 | Case Studies                     |  | 21       | 80.77%  |
| 2 | Verbal Lectures                  |   | 5        | 19.23%  |
| 3 | Supplemental Reading Assignments |   | 4        | 15.38%  |
| 4 | Business Simulations             |  | 23       | 88.46%  |
| 5 | Handouts                         |   | 5        | 19.23%  |
| 6 | Team Projects                    |  | 19       | 73.08%  |
| 7 | Presentations                    |  | 17       | 65.38%  |
| 8 | Passive note taking              |   | 4        | 15.38%  |
| 9 | Self-Assessment Exercises        |  | 16       | 61.54%  |
|   | Total                            |  | 114      | 100.00% |

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| Min Value | Max Value | Average Value | Variance | Standard Deviation | Total Responses | Total Respondents |
|-----------|-----------|---------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1         | 9         | 4.99          | 7.07     | 2.66               | 114             | 26                |

**Do you agree that students that have more highly-developed soft skills are more employable than a student who has not if they have the same education/experience level?**

| # | Question                      | Strongly agree | Somewhat agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Response | Average Value |
|---|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|---------------|
| 1 | Are students more employable? | 20             | 4              | -                          | 1                 | -                 | 25       | 1.28          |

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| Statistic          | Are students more employable? |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Min Value          | 1                             |
| Max Value          | 4                             |
| Mean               | 1.28                          |
| Variance           | 0.46                          |
| Standard Deviation | 0.68                          |
| Total Responses    | 25                            |
| Total Respondents  | 25                            |



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