

Research Reveals Engineers Want Universities To Teach Business Skills

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A recent study for Tufts University by market research specialist B2B International, examines how universities can develop engineers and scientists into business leaders of the future

One of the biggest challenges facing any higher education institution is attracting students through its doors. Â

The Tufts Gordon Institute, part of Tufts University's School of Engineering in Boston, Massachusetts, recently commissioned global market research specialist B2B International to research the views of potential masters degree students across North America.Â

The project's objective was to assist Tufts Engineering School in updating its innovative masters program in management specifically aimed at engineering and science graduates-the Master of Science in Engineering Management (MSEM).

The MSEM degree is a relatively new phenomenon, only recently appearing at various top universities across North America.

Tufts University has been one successful school with this offering, and its directors were interested to learn more about potential student's preferences so it could optimize the program further. Â

Eve Lenkowsky, Research Executive at B2B International explains, "Typically, science and engineering college graduates have been faced with the choice of either learning about business completely outside of their scientific fields, or simply continuing with an advanced engineering or science program like a masters or Ph.D.Â Few institutions give ambitious science graduates the chance to make their skills more applicable to the modern workplace and, in particular, management positions.Â Our project confirmed that there is a rising need for this kind of offering."

The study was conducted among American and Canadian professionals who had all previously completed an undergraduate course in engineering or science. Â

Nearly all are currently employed in an engineering, scientific or technical role and stated a possible interest in pursuing a graduate masters degree or Ph.D. in engineering or science.Â Carried out via e-survey, some of the key findings from the study include the following:

- A modern masters program will ideally provide a blend of distance learning and in-person contact.Â While students require the flexibility to learn as and when their schedules allow them to, they also demand the opportunity to meet and discuss subjects with professors and peers.
- Students have become more price-sensitive due to the economic recession, and are more insistent on combining studying with their employment.Â Successful universities need to provide flexible learning at a reasonable cost.
- The students most interested in MSEMs have strong business aspirations, and seek to use their technological knowledge to create practical, marketable products.
- The motivation to enroll in an MSEM derives more from a desire to gain applicable knowledge that enables them to advance professionally, as opposed to the desire to learn about theoretical technical topics that might be more suitable for academia.

Mary Viola, Engineering Management Program Director, concluded, "We were very pleased with the success of the research. The feedback from the participants reveals clear trends and preferences which we will build into our program to meet the needs of our potential students even more effectively.Â We look forward to better serving students who are looking to develop into leaders of technology companies." Â

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