The Student Perspective on the Thomas School of Business Passport for Professional Success

Senior Project

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By

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Introduction

The Thomas School of Business Passport for Professional Success (Passport Program) is a course required for graduation in all business majors. The course is designed to provide students with the soft skills needed in the business world, including but not limited to networking, presentations, and job search skills. In Fall 2022, Dr. Suzanne Altobello's Marketing Research Class conducted a survey relating to student satisfaction in the business school including the Passport Program. This analysis looks at the qualitative and quantitative sentiments from that survey to bring forth the student perspective on the Passport Program and uses that data to make recommendations for changes in the program.

The Passport Program

The Passport Program consists of 23 requirements for completion. The following are those requirements:

- Signing the contract that puts completion in the hands of the student.

- Completing a quiz to show that students understand the program requirements.

- Completing a quiz about the Study Abroad program.

- Completing a quiz about community and civic involvement.

- Attending and writing a report about a faculty engagement event.

- Completing a quiz about internships.

- Attending a resume workshop and turning in a resume based there on.

- Attending and writing a report about a career institute.

- Attending and taking a quiz on an etiquette dinner.

- Attending and writing a report about a formal dinner.

- Attending and writing a report about three networking events.

- Attending and writing a report about three guest speakers.

- Either attending club meetings and having active involvement there in, completing a study abroad opportunity, completing 20 hours of community service, or completing 120 internship hours.

- Attending a job expo and writing a report about the experience.

- Completing a mock interview.

- Completing an exit interview.

- Completing a leadership awareness assessment.

These activities must be completed over the course of enrollment of the business school. A failure to do so prevents students from graduating from the Thomas School of Business until the program is completed. This is true for both on-campus and online students.

The Survey

The survey conducted in Fall 2022 by Dr. Altobello's Marketing Research class asked students about their overall experience at the Thomas School of Business. Questions asked ranged from topics including overall satisfaction to preferred courses. The information pertinent here however comes from a select few questions which are as follows in the order in which they appeared on the survey.:

- Are you a transfer student at UNCP?

- How are you taking classes this semester?

- Rate your agreement with each of the following statements related to the Thomas School of Business Passport Program.

  o The Passport Program has taught me professional skills.

  o The Passport Program has prepared me for finding a career after completing my education.

  o It has been difficult to complete Passport Program requirements.

  o The Passport Program is useful for long-term success.

  o The Passport Program needs more virtual options for online and hybrid students.

  o When I've had questions about the Passport Program, my questions have been easily answered.

  o I know who to contact regarding questions about the Passport Program.

- How do you wish to be information about Passport events?

- Identify the times that you would most like Passport events to occur.

- What have been your most enjoyed or most Impactful Passport Program activities?

- What would you change about the Passport Program?

- What new virtual/online options would you like to have for the Passport Program?

While there are more questions included within the survey, the ones listed above are the ones that provide the relevant information regarding the passport program and its students.

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Favorite Passport Activities

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Students were given a chance to state which passport activity was their favorite during the survey. The results were as follows. Thirty-one students stated that the networking events

were their favorite. The students did not include specific networking events that they found memorable. Seventeen mentioned enjoying guest speakers with two of them emphasizing Alumni guests. Sixteen students enjoyed the dinner events, with nine putting an emphasis on etiquette dinners and two on formal dinners. Fourteen respondents found faculty engagement most impactful. Half of those students noted that the Cups and Conversations events were particularly enjoyable. Nine enjoyed the mock interviews, eight the resume workshop, seven the civic engagement and presentations, five the internships and student organizations, three the quizzes and seminars, two the career fair, and one the Professional and Career Development Institute. This data has been compiled into a table below for easier visualization.

Activity	Number of mentions
Networking	31
Guest Speakers	17
Dinners	16
Faculty Engagement	14
Mock Interviews	9
Resume Workshop	8
Civic Engagement	7
Verbal Presentations	7
Internships	5
Student Organizations	5
Quizzes	3
Seminars	3

Career Fair	2
Professional and Career Development Institute	1

Of the Passport requirements, only two were not mentioned: study abroad and exit interviews. Both of these activities, however, have reasons for being excluded. The study abroad option has been put on hold in recent years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Because of this, the sample of the population who had chosen the study abroad option will be small if existent at all during the survey period. The exit interviews have a different reason for not appearing. As can be interpreted by the title of the activity, the exit interview is one of the final passport requirements. The survey went out in October 2022. The exit surveys occur at the end of each semester. As such, few to none of the respondents had completed the requirement yet.

Passport Changes

Students were also given the chance to discuss what they would like to see changed in the program. Many students opted to not answer this question, however those who did gave interesting insights. Twenty-five respondents would like more online options. Twenty-three would like the program to have less requirements. Nineteen students would like communication relating to the program and its events. Twelve students would like to see the program become optional. Ten students would like the program's Canvas site to be made clearer.

While those are the only requests that saw significant repetition throughout the responses, there are a few other recommendations that made up for the lack of numbers in quality of response. Seven students want students in the professional world to have the choice to opt out of

the program, while three students would like to see the requirements simply modified for that demographic. Seven other students recommended having job experience count in the place of some of the requirements.

Students were also presented with a more targeted, et still open-ended question, asking what changes or new options they would like to see virtually. Thirty-three students stated that they believed that all of the passport requirements need to have better online access. Ten students think that the online options that are available need to be at more convenient times. Nine students would like to see more online networking events while seven would like to see more guest speakers to have virtual options. Six students would like to see online seminars, six more would like to see more virtual presentation options, and six others would like to see virtual dinners as an option. While there are other responses, they did not have enough respondents or were not transformative to the program.
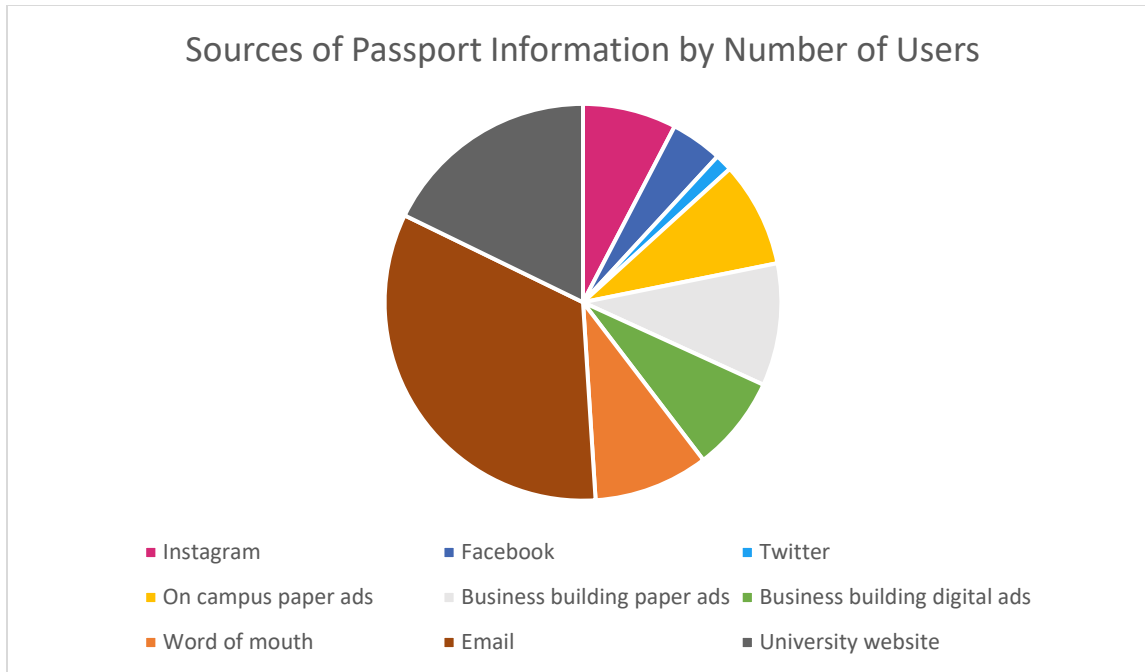
Passport Times

As mentioned before, many students found an issue with the times that the events were held. The survey dug into that sentiment by asking students when they would prefer to see the events occur. The options were split between each weekday and an online option, each of which were then divided between events occurring between 9 AM and 5 PM, or 6PM to 9 PM. Students could choose as many of the options as they wanted. The results were quantified in the table below.
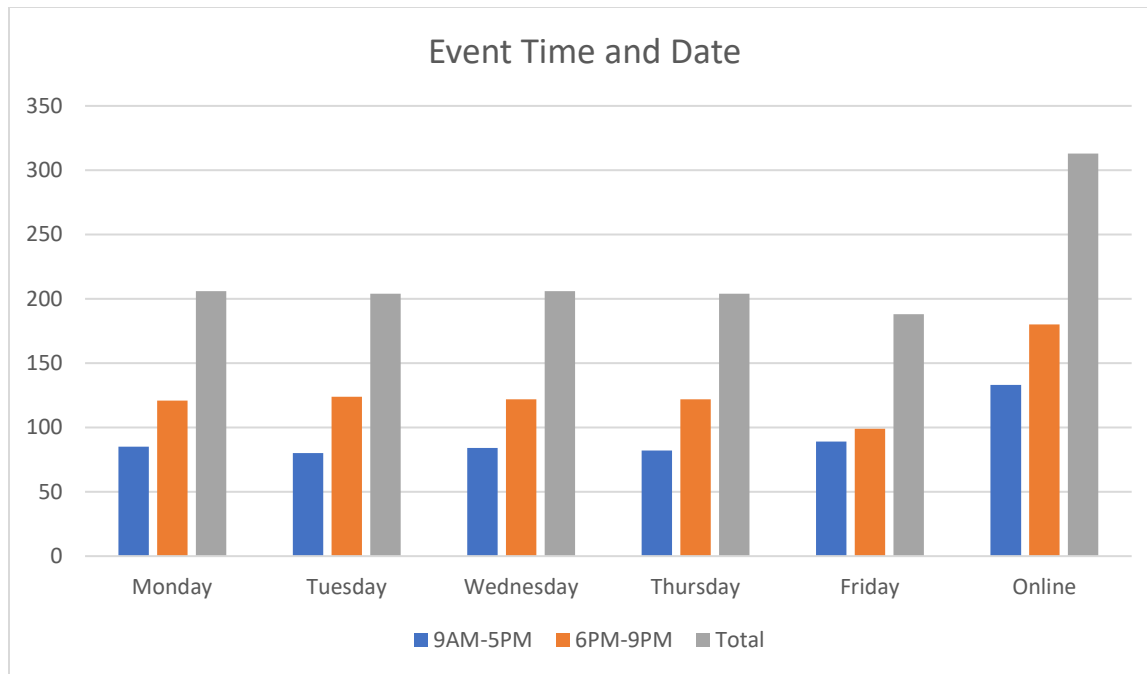
While no weekday has a clear majority of respondents, a few statistics of note stand out. First, evenings are preferred no matter the day or format. The 6PM to 9PM option won by about forty votes in most instances, with the exception being Friday which only had a ten-vote lead. That Friday discrepancy leads to the other observation. Fridays received 16 less votes than the next lowest preferred days. What Friday's do have going for them is their 9AM to 5PM time slot. Fridays had the most votes to have events during the day, though Friday evenings were still preferred. Finally, the online option received the most overall votes by more than 100, however the online option was not sorted into days, so daily schedules could not be accounted for.

Communication Methods

The survey asked students to disclose how they would prefer the individuals in charge of the Passport Program to get the word out about upcoming events that count for passport credit. There were a variety of options including on campus and online choices, the results of which are catalogued in a table below.

Sources of Passport Information by Number of Users

Legend:
- Instagram
- Facebook
- Twitter
- On campus paper ads
- Business building paper ads
- Business building digital ads
- Word of mouth
- Email
- University website

A majority of respondents discover events through emails sent to them from the university with ninety-nine votes more than the second-place university website. Both digital and paper advertisements around campus also generate a good amount of interaction as do most social media. Twitter is the only information source which is not effective. Of the nine users, only one of them only gets information from Twitter alone with the other eight using one or more alternative sources as well.

Online VS On Campus

When it comes to any college experience, there will be a difference in opinion between students who are online and students who are on campus. These experiential differences were reflected when asked to rank their agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree:

- The Passport Program has taught me professional skills (PP_Agree1).

- The Passport Program has prepared me for finding a career after completing my education (PP_Agree2).

- It has been difficult to complete Passport Program requirements (PP_Agree3).

- The Passport Program is useful for long-term success (PP_Agree4).

- The Passport Program needs more virtual options for online and hybrid students (PP_Agree5).

- When I've had questions about the Passport Program, my questions have been easily answered (PP_Agree6).

- I know who to contact regarding questions about the Passport Program (PP_Agree7).

In order to examine these differences, T-tests were conducted to find the difference between the means of the two groups' responses.

Statement Designation	On-Campus Mean	Online Mean	T-Test Result
PP_Agree1	3.750	3.221	2.338*
PP_Agree2	3.563	3.197	1.534
PP_Agree3	3.719	3.743	0.025
PP_Agree4	3.750	3.298	2.137*
PP_Agree5	3.844	4.405	-2.769*
PP_Agree6	3.469	3.719	-0.950
PP_Agree7	3.563	3.868	-1.007

*$p<.05$

PP_Agree1 asks students whether or not they believe that the passport has helped them learn professional skills. On Campus students believe that it has helped significantly more than those who are off campus. The on-campus students had a mean agreement of 3.750 while online students had a mean agreement of 3.221. The t-value for these two means is 2.338, indicating that the difference between the means is significant. This means that the online students find the program has helped them significantly less in developing professional skills.

PP_Agree2 asks students if the program has helped prepare them for finding a career after graduation. The on-campus mean was 3.563 while online was 3.197 with a t-value of 1.534. This means that there is a non-significant difference between being on-campus vs online and the level of preparation for a career. This difference means that online students find the program preparing them less for their career compared to the on-campus students, but it did not reach statistical significance.

PP_Agree3 asks students about how difficult it is to complete the program with 1 being the easiest and 5 being the hardest. The T-value for this question is 0.025 indicating that there is barely a difference between the two means, those being 3.719 for on-campus students and 3.743 for online students.

PP_Agree4 asks if the program will be useful for long-term success. On-campus students had a far more positive response with a mean response of 3.750, while online students had a mean response of 3.298. The T-value of 2.137 indicates a significant difference between the learning method and perceived value of the program. Online students ultimately believe that the program is significantly less helpful for long term success.

PP_Agree5 suggests that there should be more virtual options for online and hybrid students. On-campus students had an average agreement of 3.844 while online students had a 4.405 average agreement. With a T-stat of -2.769, this shows that there is a significant difference, which makes sense given that the question is more geared towards the online students. As such, that demographic agrees that they should be provided more options.

PP_Agree6 asks students if their questions about the program had been easily answered. On-campus students had an agreement score of 3.469 while online students had an agreement score of 3.719. The T-score of -0.950 shows that there isn't a significant difference between education method and ease of obtaining answers.

Finally, PP_Agree7 asks students if they know who to contact if they have any questions. On-campus students had a mean response of 3.563 while online students had a mean response of 3.868. The T-score of -1.007 demonstrates that there is no significant difference between learning method and not knowing who to contact.

Ultimately, these correlations demonstrate that online students believe that the program teaches them less and provides less skills for long term success than those who attend UNCP in person. On top of this online students believe that they should be provided with more opportunities to complete the requirements virtually.

Traditional Students VS Transfer Students

Just as online students and on-campus students have different experiences, transfer students and traditional students too may have different experiences. A comparison can be made with the same questions and methodology as the online and on-campus section.

Statement Designation	Traditional Mean	Transfer Mean	T-Test Result
PP_Agree1	3.384	3.227	1.317
PP_Agree2	3.343	3.169	1.165
PP_Agree3	3.282	3.708	0.886
PP_Agree4	3.505	3.253	1.742
PP_Agree5	4.202	4.123	0.616
PP_Agree6	3.444	3.578	-0.898
PP_Agree7	3.576	3.721	-0.836

As demonstrated by the table, a majority of the traditional and transfer student experiences did not vary much, with the exception of PP_Agree4. This question asked students to rank on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, how well they thought that the program prepared them for long term success. Traditional students had a mean response value of 3.505 while transfer students had a mean response value of 3.253. With a T-score 1.742, the variance in means is slightly statistically significant. This demonstrates that transfer students tend to see that the program is less helpful for long term success than traditional students.

Recommendations

All of these statistics work together to paint a picture of the student experience. Based on what has been discovered, three primary areas of the program should be put under consideration for change, those being the experience for non-traditional students, timing for events, and communication.

Throughout the survey, it was demonstrated that non-traditional students had a more negative view of the program. As such, changes should be made to create a more positive experience. First, students already in the professional world should be permitted to use job experience in lieu of certain requirements such as the Professional and Career Development Institute, mock interview, and the club involvement, internships, study abroad, or service hours. Students who have full-time careers have already demonstrated proficiency in the areas that these requirements are supposed to improve and as such are redundant. Second, online students should be provided with an alternative program. As demonstrated by their responses to the survey, they view the program as more difficult and less useful than those who are on campus. The program should have requirements that need the students to be in a physical location should be removed or modified more than they already are to account for their learning environment. Examples of such changes could be reducing the networking requirements from three to only one or two, reducing the verbal presentations from two to one, and either the removal of the job expo, or the addition of a digital job expo each semester. These changes will make the program more convenient for students who are already in circumstances which make attending school in person difficult in the first place.

The second change recommended is related to the time at which events occur. According to the calendar on the Passport Program's Canvas page, most of the events this semester occurred during the day on Wednesdays, or on a single Friday throughout the day. This survey, however, demonstrates that students prefer evening events to daytime events. This preference is not one that is likely to change between semesters because nights are preferred no matter the day. Moving most events to this 6PM to 9PM time slot could potentially lead to increased attendance as that is when students indicated that they would attend.

Finally, students would like to see communication improved. As most students indicate that they find out about events through email, email should be the primary form of communication. Messages should be sent weekly to inform students about all upcoming events throughout the week similar to how Campus Recreation sends weekly emails about their events. This will give students ample warning as to when events are occurring.

The Passport Program provides students with skills needed to succeed in their careers. While the program has clearly received positive reception from many students, it is not perfect. Understanding what students want to get out of the program will help decision makers to constantly improve it and create something that is equitable and educational for all.