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IS Student Resume Writing Exercise

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ABSTRACT

Resumes are a necessary component to the IS student job search. Unfortunately, many IS students downplay the importance of their resume and do little to improve the likelihood of their resume being read and positively evaluated. This exercise requires students to peer review the resumes of their classmates using a standardized rating system that rank orders all the responses. IS students are able to review MS Excel skills to aid in their decision making as well as develop a graphical decision tool to more easily compare responses. Results suggest that students rank at least 2 of the same resumes highest or lowest on the ranking scale with middle rankings being much more subjective. A result is that students can utilize useful ideas from other student resumes. Instructors may use results to emphasize that extra effort pays off in creating opportunities for a more positive review and rewarding result.

KEYWORDS

Resume, Peer Evaluation, IS Evaluation, Job Search, Project Management, SIMPROJECT

INTRODUCTION

Resumes are essential to the job hunt process. Business students find resume writing exercises useful in their business communication courses yet many fail to update their resumes on a regular basis. They feel that resumes are not read or that the hiring decision is based on a subjective rationale beyond their understanding. In fact, the whole process of recruiting students for jobs on campus is a negative process. Recruiters try and screen out candidates so they can interview the remaining candidates (Cheryl, 2007). Further, strong communication skills are indicators of career success with verbal and written skills ranking number one in the top ten list of things employers look for in a job candidate (Anonymous, 2005). Not having a good resume weeds a candidate out quickly in an employers eyes.

Today, as in times past, a cyclical job market is not hiring and is downsizing employees. The job search for new graduates competes in an environment filled with new graduates and unemployed job seekers. A key issue for both the employer and the student is the preparation of an effective resume needed to attract an employers interest (English et al., 2003). Further complicating the hiring process is the additional requirement of Human Resources (HR) departments to submit an online version of a resume which adds to a student's frustration because it seems to be a needless step negating the importance of face-to-face interviews with prospective employers. Students fail to understand that the resume serves several purposes such as a screening tool, a talking point paper for interviewers, and a reminder paper for hiring personal to share with colleagues not personally involved with the job candidate. In many cases, the resume is the only face of the candidate through several selection processes before a candidate even receives an interview.

Faculty has a responsibility to aid students in writing resumes and understanding the career they are entering (Woodbury et al., 2008). In many cases, students want to show up at a career fair or make a phone call and just talk about their accomplishments rather than create an effective resume. This is not the best approach. They need a resume to showcase their accomplishments. But, students really don't think about what skills they gained in college except for what they find on their transcripts (Dana, 2007). Thus, an exercise that can provide peer review of a resume, access to successful resumes of successful students, and insight into how firms actually review resumes and select candidates for interviews would be useful.

Prior experience in running project management exercises lead to the development of this exercise. Many instructors have found that forming effective teams for group projects is difficult. Students who form their own teams tend to choose friends as colleagues and project leaders with little attention to diversity. Similarly, faculty members know little about a particular students' availability and capabilities to effectively form the teams themselves. Other researchers have allowed students to go through an application and hiring process using blinded student resumes that created a project team using a structured evaluation and firing process. In this way, students gain some insight into the employment process and the teams that are

formed are more diverse and perform better with fewer complaints (McCloskey, 2004). It is the understanding of the hiring process that is the basis of this exercise.

This resume writing exercise begins with students receiving a job description. They are told to write a cover letter and resume addressing the specifics of the job description. The top five resumes will be asked to interview for the job. The students turn in their cover letter with attached resume to the instructor. In addition, each student is required to research the salary ranges for the job description and provide their own salary range in the cover letter. The instructor copies each letter and resume, forming a packet of all letters and resumes for distribution to each member of the class. Each student is required to evaluate each student letter and resume assigning a score based upon the agreed upon evaluation criteria. Students then turns in their rankings in an Excel spreadsheet with a scatter plot that graphs salary (y-axis) against resume score (x-axis) with a trend line. The instructor then summarizes the data from each of the student's rankings. In the next class, the instructor announces the top five students invited for the interview. A discussion of the results follows.

The reminder of the article discusses the specifics of the exercise and a discussion of the exercise results.

RESUME ASSIGNMENT DIRECTIONS

The first step is to provide each student a copy of the job description. At the same time, a class discussion is conducted outlining the attributes of an effective resume. Students are allowed to use their own choice of format. The cover letter should be addressed to the President of ACME Industries. The student heard about the job in class and thought he/she might be a good fit. The résumé is limited to one page, with 1/2-inch margins at the top and bottom, 1-inch on the left and ½ inch on the right. Students are asked to use a suitable 10 or 12 New Times Roman or Ariel font for ease of copying. The student name and contact information should be centered at the top of the page. Students are told that the resume should reflect a new hire, a just out of school graduate, applying for a Systems Analyst I position. In addition, the cover letter should include a standard cost per hour and overtime cost per hour for the salaried position.

To arrive at a cost per hour, students are asked to research System Analyst I salary ranges. These ranges are divided by the standard number of hours in a work year. The low and high salary ranges then can be divided 2080, the standard number of hours in a work year. Student resumes are graded 100, 50 or 0. A zero reflects no assignment turned in, a 50 is the grade you earn by just turning something in to get it done, and a 100 is for your best effort.

JOB DESCRIPTION
ACME Industries requires a systems analyst to design IT solutions that improve business efficiency and productivity. Typical assignments may require working as part of a project team or working independently for external clients or an internal client (such as a department within our organization). Working nights and weekends may be necessary.

Working closely with the user, the candidate will examine existing business models, processes, and data flows. The candidate will discuss findings with stakeholders and design an appropriate IT solution. Further, the candidate will be expected to formulate a number of alternatives to be presented to decision makers for implementation decisions.

The candidate will present in both written and oral form, solution designs and return on investment calculations for all proposed IT systems, specifying the processes the system will perform, and the way data will be viewed by the user.

Specifically, the candidate can expect to:

- liaison with external or internal clients;
- analyze existing systems;
- conduct risk assessments;
- translate requirements into project briefings;
- identifying alternate solutions and assess them for both technical and business suitability;
- create logical and innovative solutions to complex problems;
- create proposals for new or replacement systems;
- produce project feasibility reports;
- present proposals to stakeholders;
- work closely with developers and users to ensure technical compatibility and user satisfaction;

- ensuring that budgets are adhered to and deadlines met;

- create testing schedules;

- be able to program in a variety of languages;

- oversee implementation of developed systems;

- be flexibly and be able to adhere to a deadline;

- be able to write user training manuals;

- maintain currency with professional technical skills and industry developments;

- and other tasks as assigned.

After the instructor receives all the résumés, they will be copied, compiled, and then returned to the students for evaluation. Each student will review, evaluate, and rank each students resume per the instructions found in the next section. It is left to the discretion of the instructor to ask students to evaluate their own resume or not. Either approach has worked successfully in the past. Resumes may be distributed electronically to students but experience suggests students do a better job of evaluation with paper copies.

RESUME EVALUATION
The student will now assume the role of Human Resources Director at ACME Industries. Ultimately, a student will invite five candidates to the offices of ACME Industries for an interview. Their job is to screen the resumes from an applicant pool applying for the Systems Analyst I position.

Students review the résumés given to them in class. These resumes must be rank ordered. They use the criteria listed in Table 1. They will need to create an Excel Spreadsheet that ranks each individual on each of the nine-job qualification criteria found in Table 1. Standard and Overtime costs reflect the hourly wage and overtime wage the prospective employee considers being fair. These numbers come from the salary ranges provided in the cover letter. Students will need to divide these numbers by 2080. Students often fail to understand the differences/perspective between salary and hourly wage as many students have worked at an hourly wage in a part-time job. Further, each of the nine-job qualification criteria should reflect scores between 0-100.

The criteria in Table I came from SIMPROJECT (www.mhhe.com/simproject). SIMPROJECT is a project management simulation tool written by Jeffery Pinto and Diane Parente from Penn State University Erie. This exercise was originally written to help students access the reliability measures of the avatars used in SIMPROJECT as they were assigned to project tasks. At some point it became helpful to introduce the concept of evaluating avatar skill sets prior to an individual being assigned to a project task. It was useful as a teaching tool to begin this learning process by starting with a student's own resume. Further, the timing of the course allowed students to write and update a resume for this exercise prior to attending the fall or spring job fairs.

Each of the nine criteria was discussed in class. Students were asked what they thought the criteria meant and how they might assign a range of values. In addition, ways to reflect these criteria in their resumes was discussed. Education is a good place to start. Students typically want to assign wide ranges but this is the instructor's opportunity to point out that every Systems Analyst I in class has a college degree and has a similar academic background. In fact, students see themselves gaining a competitive advantage by getting a college education but rarely understand so are the others students around them. Additionally, they get an appreciation of not only how little their course work differs from their classmates but how it is remarkably similar to other college graduates at other schools. In response, students often narrow their education parameters. At this point the instructor has the opportunity to discuss the other evaluation criteria and what possible ranges of scores might be assigned to these criterions.

The general idea is that each student evaluates each resume and cover letter by assigning a numbered score for each of the evaluation criteria. This information can then be placed in an Excel spreadsheet for additional analysis. These individual scores can then be added together to create a summary score as shown in Figure 1. The summary score can then be plotted as a scatter plot with cost per hour on the y-axis and summary score on the x-axis as shown in Figure 2. The idea is to select the top five candidates. As shown in Figure 1, the spreadsheet has the names of the candidates arranged vertically, by last name. The STC and OTC should be in adjoining columns. Next, the student arranges the nine-job qualification criterion across the top. The evaluation criteria results for each candidate can now be populated in the cells of this matrix. Students must decide

on their own criteria to arrive at a defendable number. The instructor can also include a weighted summary score column. Students are asked to change the weightings of the evaluation criteria to affect a change in the rankings. Weightings introduce into the evaluation discussion the possibility that some criterions are more important than others. From the evaluator's perspective, if education level does not significantly differentiate a candidate, possibly, public relation skills, work ethic, skill level, etc. might.

STC	Standard Cost per hour from salary range found in the cover letter.	SKL	Skill (SKL) is the degree of expertise	REP	Reputation (REP) is the general belief about an individual's character.	FLX	Flexibility (FLX) is a measure of the adaptability of a person to a change in circumstance and the ability to handle changes.
OTC	Overtime Cost per hour from upper salary range found in the cover letter.	EXP	Experience (EXP) is the length of time that an individual has worked in a specific area. More experienced personal tend to be more efficient and adapt faster to working on project teams.	WKE	Work Ethic (WKE) is the set of principles that individuals have about performing their job.	IPS	Interpersonal Skills (IPS) are goal-directed behaviors conducted in a face-to-face environment. They are those characteristics of a person to relate and interact with others.
TRN	Training (TRN) is the amount of instruction in specific skills.	EDU	Education (EDU) is a specified level of education that will refer to both the level and type of education completed.	PBR	Public Relations (PBR) skills include employee communications, media relations, advertising, and community relations. They are the ability of a person to present an appropriate "face" to the external stake holders.		

Table 1: Job Evaluation Criteria

An additional benefit of this methodology is that quantitative decision making is used and basic MS Excel skills revisited that were learned in previous classes. Students are expected to know and be able use relative and absolute cell references, basic formulae, and how to create weightings. In reality, there is a lot of review.

EVALUATION DISCUSSION
Students turn in their rankings to the instructor and to bring a copy to class to assist them in the class discussion. This can be done in print or electronically. Electronic submission is preferred since it is easier to summarize the results. Students' evaluations look similar to Figures 1 and 2. Figures 1 and 2 reflect the summary results of an entire class.

When the summary results are displayed in class, some students are surprised by the rankings and pleased to find that several of their choices are in the top of the group. Normally, students find that 2 or 3 of their top 5 candidates find there way into the summarized results. Upon further reflection and guidance from the instructor, they find that 2 or 3 of their lowest ranked candidates are also in the bottom of the rankings. The key learning point is that while the ranking system is subjective and that each student could apply their own criteria, within limits, the top and bottom rankings are remarkably consistent. The middle of the road rankings are grouped tightly and have less variability. Students are asked what made both the top and bottom resumes standout.

In general, students point out what we would expect. Poor resumes have miss spellings, small print, didn't follow the guidelines or address the job position. Many of these students just filled out their resume using the wizard in MS Word without thinking about what went where. The top resumes look sharp, are easy to read, focus on the job description and are customized. Many of the top resumes reflect students with work experience, internships, and part-time positions where their experience has been tailored to the Systems Analyst I position. When the summary scores are rank ordered from high to low, the low variability becomes more obvious. It becomes easier to point out to students that with just a little extra work, a few extra evaluation points might be added to move a resume from the middle to the top. Students are surprised at this, which leads to a discussion as to why the variability in rankings is so modest.

As a separate discussion issue, students are asked how they fairly evaluated each resume.   Common results are that they spent more time on the first resume than on the last, didn't read them all the way through, and often made quick judgments. This is counter to their expectation that an employer read their resume thoughtfully and in good faith. This drives home the point that most resume readers spend less than 30 seconds looking at an individual resume.

Resource Name	STC	OTC	TRN	SKL	EXP	EDU	REP	WKE	PBR	FLX	IPS	Summary Score Total	Weighted Score Total
			Weighted Score										
Evaluation Weight	2.5	1.4	1.8	1.5	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	3.0				
Student A	$19	$28	70	75	75	55	85	85	30	22	45	**542**	**855**
Student B	$23	$34	75	80	75	55	85	85	30	18	45	**548**	**870**
Student C	$20	$35	70	75	75	55	75	80	29	16	47	**522**	**839**
Student D	$25	$35	80	75	80	65	85	88	35	18	51	**577**	**926**
Student E	$25	$37	80	77	80	68	80	80	35	20	60	**580**	**949**
Student F	$30	$45	80	82	81	60	85	90	35	25	51	**589**	**939**
Student G	$20	$35	70	75	75	55	75	85	30	20	50	**535**	**858**
Student H	$20	$35	70	75	75	55	80	80	28	18	45	**526**	**839**
Student I	$36	$50	83	80	76	61	85	80	30	20	51	**566**	**916**
Student J	$22	$35	70	75	75	68	85	80	30	21	60	**564**	**913**
Student K	$20	$35	78	82	76	55	85	80	30	17	45	**548**	**876**
Student L	$20	$35	70	75	75	55	85	85	30	22	45	**542**	**855**
Student M	$20	$35	75	80	77	55	85	85	30	20	50	**557**	**891**
Student N	$75	$100	88	85	85	68	80	80	30	25	47	**588**	**950**
Student O	$30	$45	85	80	79	67	85	88	30	18	45	**577**	**923**
Student P	$30	$45	85	84	81	69	85	85	30	25	45	**589**	**939**
Student Q	$20	$35	70	75	75	55	80	80	30	20	45	**530**	**843**
Student R	$25	$37	83	78	80	61	85	85	30	21	50	**573**	**923**
Student S	$25	$42	78	80	75	55	85	85	30	20	45	**553**	**880**
Student T	$20	$35	72	76	80	55	85	88	35	22	50	**563**	**893**
Student U	$20	$35	70	77	76	55	86	85	30	19	48	**546**	**866**
Student V	$29	$44	88	80	81	69	85	85	30	22	50	**590**	**953**
Student W	$30	$45	83	82	85	69	85	85	35	20	50	**594**	**954**
Student X	$30	$45	85	78	77	68	85	85	30	20	45	**573**	**917**
Average	**$26**	**$41**	**77**	**78**	**78**	**61**	**83**	**84**	**31**	**20**	**49**	**561**	**898**
STD DEV	11.4	13.7	6.6	3.2	3.2	6.1	3.2	3.1	2.2	2.4	4.3	22.0	39.6

Figure I (Student Evaluation Results)

The scatter plot allows the instructor to map salary against summary score. As you would expect, the higher the qualifications (evaluations) the more a student would get paid. Hopefully, you have a student, as shown in Figure 2, who has salary expectations out of line with reality. This leads to a discussion of outliers and how little variability in salary there is for a Systems Analyst I position. The students can also see the trend line move more level rather than the higher upward slope caused by the outlier. Now the discussion is about how little difference really exists between candidates and how

important even little things can be in making a resume stand out. Students hear this message all the time but rarely have the opportunity to grasp its significance. Also, students can see that salary can be a decision criteria as well as summary score.
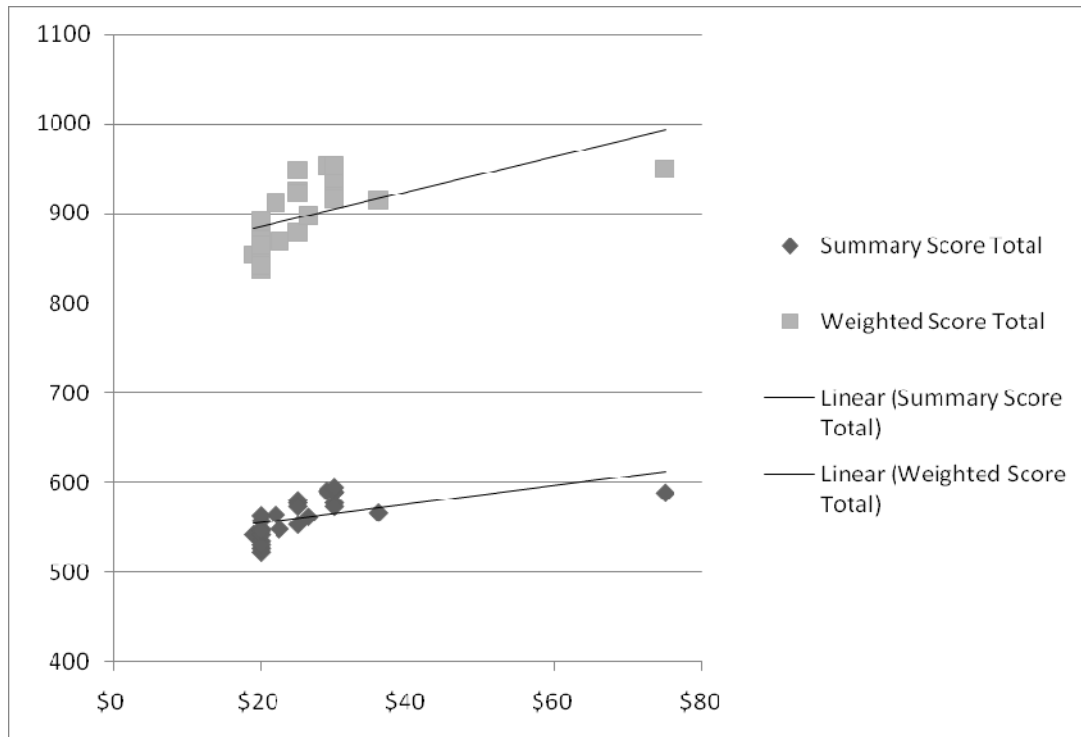

Figure 2 (Student Evaluation Scatter Plot Results)

CONCLUSION

This exercise attempts to bring a realistic perspective to the resume review process. It hopes to show students that employers go through a similar analysis of resumes and may take the same short cuts they do. It reviews quantitative decision making and basic Excel formatting. Student comments suggest that they do get it and work to improve their resume and use ideas from classmates to improve their own projected image. Some students do learn that little things can matter and that attention to detail has both positive and negative connotations. Another benefit is that students begin to learn to translate the knowledge portrayed in their transcripts into a format and language employers can understand. They also begin to perceive the relationship between salary, performance, and promotion opportunities.

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