

# Are We Preparing Our Students Correctly? An Employability Skills Analysis within a College of Agriculture.

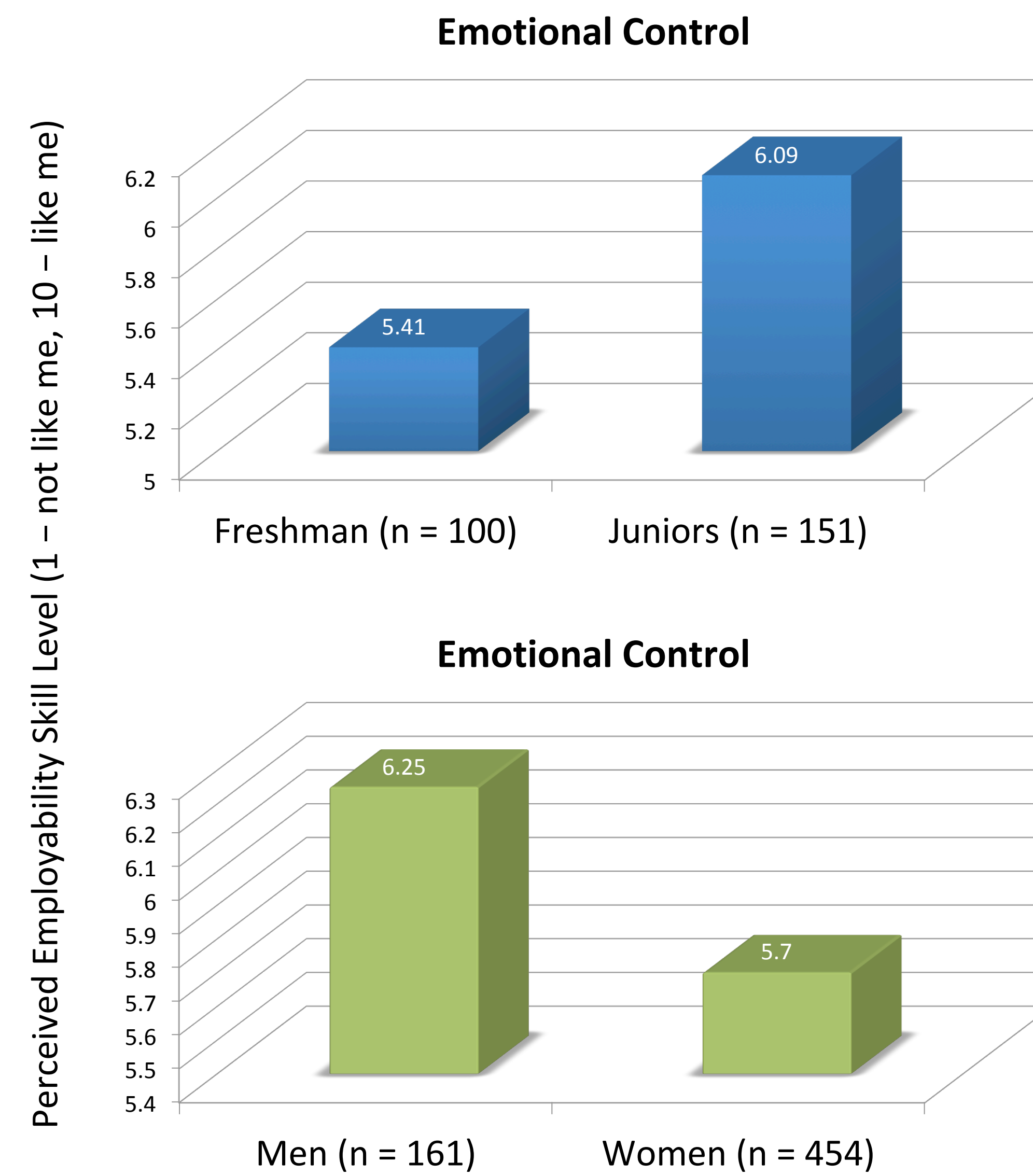
## INTRODUCTION

In order for the United States to continue to provide for an ever-growing population, today's college students must be prepared to fill the vacant agricultural jobs of tomorrow (Goerker, Smith, Fernandez, Ali, & Goetz, 2015). Now, more than ever, employers are seeking graduates who possess not only career-specific technical skills, but also the higher-order behavioral skills that can be applied to a variety of issues (Bentley University, 2014; Casner-Lotto, Barrington, & Wright, 2006; Landrum, Hettich, & Wilner, 2010; Paranto & Kelkar, 2000; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning, 2015; Rateau, Kaufman, & Cletzer, 2015). Hillage and Pollard (1998) state that the concept of employability skills points to three main ideas: gaining a job, maintaining a job, and obtaining a new job, if required. With employer groups being vocal in their demand of universities to provide graduates who are willing to make a significant contribution in the workplace, the quality of university programs must be measured by their ability to meet the specific needs of employers (Clarke, 2018). Thus, the burden of the ever-growing employability skills gap is placed directly on educational institutions.

This study sought to determine if differences exist in employability skill levels across demographics including class level, gender, ethnicity, and hometown community, within California State University, Fresno's Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (JCAST).

## METHODS

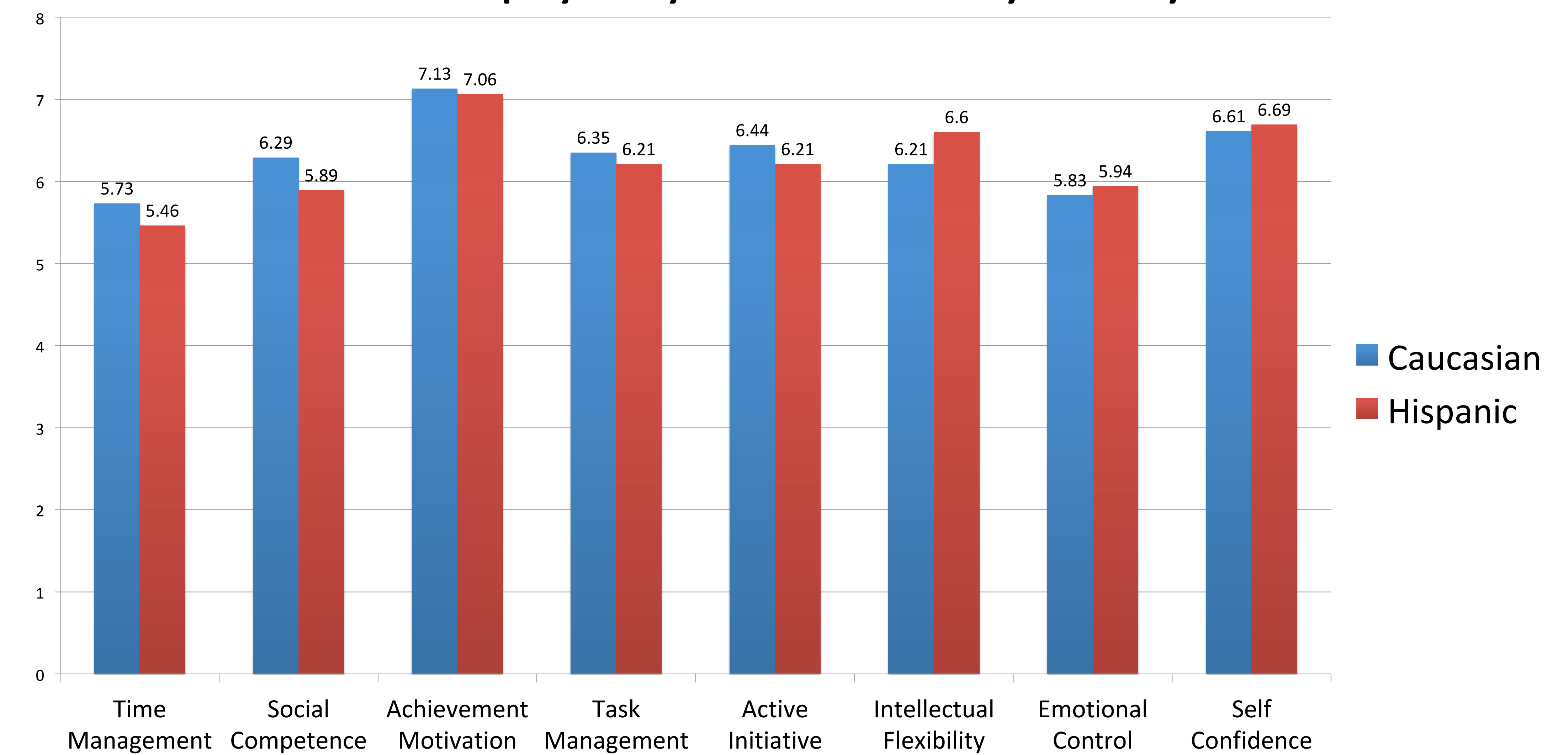
The researchers conducted a census study of all students enrolled in JCAST during the fall of 2019. An email was sent to 2,303 undergraduate and graduate students. The instrument for this study was the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire - Version H (LEQ-H), developed by Dr. James T. Neill. The 24 item, 8-factor model measures the following constructs: Time Management, Social Competence, Achievement Motivation, Intellectual Flexibility, Task Management, Emotional Control, Active Initiative, and Self Confidence. The instrument utilizes 24 Likert-type questions with a scale of 1-8 "not like me" to "like me." Descriptive statistics were utilized to determine if differences existed between various demographic factors.



Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ-H)	
Soft Skill Factors	Description
Time Management	Makes optimum use of time.
Social Competence	Personal confidence and self-perceived ability in social interactions.
Achievement Motivation	Motivated to achieve excellence and put the required effort into action to attain it.
Intellectual Flexibility	Can adapt his/her thinking and accommodate new information from changing conditions and different perspectives.
Task Leadership	Can lead other people effectively when a task needs to be done.
Emotional Control	Maintains control when he/she is faced with potentially stressful situations.
Active Initiative	Likes to initiate action in new situations.
Self Confidence	Confidence in his/her abilities and the success of their actions.

## RESULTS

### Self-Perceived Employability Skill Differences by Ethnicity



## CONCLUSIONS

This census study sought to determine if differences exist between various demographics factors and students' self-perceived employability skill levels. The descriptive analysis indicates that there is a discrepancy between the competency of certain grade levels, women, Hispanic students, and those not from a farm or ranch, when compared to their counterparts. For JCAST to better serve the needs of a diverse community of students, regardless of background, it is recommended that standards, curricula, and programs be implemented to more effectively serve these groups. This study and its recommendations remain consistent with *The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS)*, which calls to communicate standards, conduct assessments that gauge areas needing progress, and inject competencies into the school's curriculum (SCANS, 2000). To better understand the program's shortcomings as it relates to employability skill development, it is further recommended that the same instrument be utilized for a longitudinal study, which will gauge student's skill development as they progress through their degree program.

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