

A GROUNDED THEORY MODEL FOR THE SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE
STUDENTS

by

Kenneth Rivers Parker II

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Ferris State University

May 2019

© 2019 Kenneth Rivers Parker II
All Rights Reserved

A GROUNDED THEORY MODEL FOR THE SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE
STUDENTS

by

Kenneth Rivers Parker II

Has been approved

May 2019

APPROVED:

Gary L. Hauck, PhD

Committee Chair

Jean M. Bailey, PhD

Committee Member

Lori J. Willett, EdD

Committee Member

Dissertation Committee

ACCEPTED:

Roberta C. Teahen, PhD, Director

Community College Leadership Program

ABSTRACT

Soft skills, also known as employability skills, among other names, are those non-technical, sometimes intangible skills such as work ethic, communication, problem solving, teamwork, and others that might be hard to gauge with traditional data measures but make a difference in the workplace and the broader community.

The topic of soft skills is widely discussed in today's workplace, with employers reporting that many job applicants or employees lack strong soft skills competencies in ways that make hiring difficult or adversely affect the company's bottom line. Strong soft skills can improve one's productivity and opportunities for career advancement and are a common characteristic of successful leaders.

Community colleges are key conduits for employers, enrolling around twelve million employees or future employees per year, and are in a key position to play a part in soft skills development for the benefit of employers and employees.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to formulate and present a model for community colleges to use in establishing a robust, ongoing soft skills development program. The research conducted assesses the current state of soft skills development at Michigan's community colleges, about which there is a scarcity of available literature. The elements of the soft skills development model presented in this study were grounded in theory informed by the findings of the research of Michigan's community colleges and by best practices found in a

review of the literature related to soft skills development efforts in other states and in other institutions.

It is hoped that the recommendations offered and the new framework presented will prove useful to community colleges in Michigan and in other states to implement or improve soft skills training efforts.

KEY WORDS: soft skills, employability skills, community college

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to Winnie, Gretchen, and Maddie: you're my girls! I love you and I thank you for your patience in the process. To my parents, Ken and Joanne: thank you for your consistent love and support of my brother and sister and me and for encouraging us and modeling for us how to take a risk and blaze our own paths, all in balance with taking care of our responsibilities. My mother-in-law, Joanne, was the driving force behind an interpersonal communications course at Davenport College, with a curriculum heavy on soft skills; those lessons resonate today with your family, of which I'm proud to be a part.

Gary Hauck, my dissertation chair, has been a personal mentor to me over the years. I am thankful more than you know, Gary. Jean and Lori have been terrific colleagues and friends as well as committee members for this project; your input has been valuable.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for all of those who completed the survey, had conversations with me, and corresponded with me as I learned the lay of the land in soft skills education at Michigan's community colleges and beyond. To a person, you have all been very generous with your time and information. Thank you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	i
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Research Topic.....	2
Definition of Soft Skills.....	2
The Need.....	4
Can Soft Skills Be Learned?.....	8
Problem Statement and Research Questions.....	9
Problem Statement.....	9
Research Questions.....	10
Significance of the Study.....	10
Limitiations.....	13
Organization of the Dissertation.....	14
Chapter Summary.....	15
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	17
Introduction.....	17
Current Soft Skills Training Practices.....	18
International Examples.....	18
Business and Industry.....	19
Community and Civic Organizations.....	20
K-12 Education.....	21
Four-Year Colleges and Universities.....	22
Community Colleges in Other States.....	24
Michigan Community Colleges.....	28
Institutional Considerations.....	29
Institutional Commitment and Challenges.....	29
Identifying Key Soft Skills Competencies.....	31
Evaluation of Program Effectiveness.....	32
Planning the Key Elements of a Soft Skills Curriculum.....	35
Placement in the Curriculum.....	36
Content Design.....	36
Instructional Approach.....	39

Credentials and Recognition.....	40
Chapter Summary.....	43
CHAPTER THREE: STUDY DESIGN	45
Introduction	45
Methodology of the Study	46
Data Collection and Instrumentation	47
Data Presentation and Analysis.....	48
Reliability and Validity.....	48
Researcher Bias and Assumptions.....	52
Chapter Summary.....	52
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF THE DATA	53
Introduction	53
Survey Responses.....	54
Question 1: Identifying Information.....	54
Question 2: Does your college provide soft skills development activities to students? ..	56
Question 3: To whom is soft skills training offered or for whom is it required?.....	56
Question 4: What curriculum/curricula are used for soft skills training?	57
Question 5: What instructional methods are used?	58
Question 6: How many students participated in soft skills training in the 2017-2018 school year?	59
Question 7: How many students successfully completed at least one soft skills training program in the 2017-2018 school year?.....	59
Question 8: Describe the criteria for a student to successfully complete soft skills training.....	60
Question 9: How are successful trainees recognized or credentialed?	61
Question 10: How is effectiveness of soft skills training measured?	62
Question 11: Please share any available data the college has regarding the effectiveness, or return on investment, of its soft skills training initiatives.	63
Question 12: Additional comments regarding your college and soft skills development.	64
Question 13: Please share any advice for other colleges related to soft skills training. ..	65
Chapter Summary.....	66
CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESULTS	68
Introduction	68
Model Practices in Michigan	70
College A	70
College H	70
College M	71
College N	71
College R.....	71
College W	72

Recommendations	73
Placement in the Curriculum.....	73
Content Design.....	75
Instructional Approach.....	77
Assessment of Student Learning	78
Credentials and Recognition	79
Evaluation of Program Effectiveness.....	80
Other Comments and Advice	81
Chapter Summary.....	83
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK	86
Introduction	86
Discussion.....	87
A Model for a Community College Soft Skills Development Program.....	88
Lead the Charge	90
Institutional Commitment.....	91
Evaluation and Goal-setting	92
Plan into Action	93
Instructional Planning.....	93
Train Faculty and Staff.....	94
Student Assessment and Recognition	95
Conclusions	96
Recommendations for Future Study	97
Summary	98
REFERENCES	99
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL	114
APPENDIX B: SOFT SKILLS LISTS USED FOR REFERENCE IN THIS RESEARCH.....	116
APPENDIX C: SOFT SKILLS SURVEY FOR MICHIGAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES	120

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: The “Big Five” Personality Traits	3
Table 2: Colleges Responding to the Survey	55
Table 3: Number of Students Who Participated in and Completed Soft Skills Training at Michigan Community Colleges in the 2017-2018 School Year	59
Table 4: Student Achievement Data for College R	64

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Students to whom soft skills training is offered, or for whom it is required.....	56
Figure 2. Instructional methods used.	58
Figure 3. Criteria for successful completion of soft skills training.....	60
Figure 4. Successful trainee recognition or credential.....	61
Figure 5. A grounded theory model for the soft skills development of community college students.	89

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

My mother-in-law is a native Kentuckian, the wife of a Kentucky Colonel, a mother of six, and a retired professor of interpersonal communications. When meeting a young person, this lady of the South always offers a firm handshake, direct eye contact, and the appropriate pleasantries. If the young person does not respond in kind, she will correct the handshake or other skills that leave something to be desired and then engage in what is always a delightful conversation. Over the years, many people have been influenced by her excellent modeling of what would today be classified as soft skills.

In this paper, the author will develop a working definition of soft skills, describe the importance of soft skills, make the case that soft skills can be learned and improved, and connect the desire of employers for better soft skills in employees and job applicants to the role of the community college in fostering stronger soft skills competencies. A study of soft skills efforts underway at Michigan's community colleges will be complemented by a review of the literature to develop a grounded theory model for community colleges to use in developing student soft skills.

RESEARCH TOPIC

Definition of Soft Skills

Soft skills have been associated with expertise in communication, customer service, sensitivity to diversity, critical thinking, problem solving, emotional intelligence, sociability, self-management, ethics, teamwork, leadership, and more (Matteson, Anderson, & Boyden, 2016). Matteson et al. (2016) went on to say, “The literature on soft skills is confusing. The phrase *soft skills* is catchy but ambiguous, and authors use it extensively with little agreement on meaning.... No formally agreed upon, universal set of soft skills exists” (p. 75). In contrast to “hard” skills, which may be thought of as technical knowledge or skills such as being able to write computer code or making a quality weld, soft skills can be described more broadly as personal or intangible capabilities (Robles, 2012).

Popular literature addresses the topic of soft skills. Some might associate soft skills with the widely-popular book by Robert Fulghum (2014) *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, which suggested that success depends on things like playing fair and saying one is sorry. Duckworth (2016) researched and promoted the value of grit, a combination of passion and perseverance, while Goleman (1995) wrote of the importance of emotional intelligence in worker performance and leadership.

It is useful to list examples of individual competencies that illustrate what might be considered soft skills. Personality psychologists have been exploring the concept for decades and three selected seminal lists are presented in this section.

One prominent list was developed by Tupes and Christal (1992) and is known as the “Big Five.” It was revisited with updated terminology by Dayton (2017). See Table 1 for a comparison of the terms used with the “Big Five.”

Table 1: The “Big Five” Personality Traits

TUPES AND CHRISTAL	DAYTON
Surgency	Extraversion or Communication
Agreeableness	Teamwork or Cooperation
Dependability	Composure or Emotional Stability
Stability	Conscientiousness
Culture	Openness or Intellect

Sources: (Tupes & Christal, 1992; Dayton, 2017)

Much has been written about soft skills under the term Emotional Intelligence.

Emotional intelligence has been classified by Goleman and Boyatzis (2017) as consisting of four domains with accompanying competencies:

- Self-awareness
 - Emotional self-awareness
- Self-management
 - Emotional self-control
 - Adaptability
 - Achievement orientation
 - Positive outlook
- Social awareness
 - Empathy
 - Organizational awareness
- Relationship management
 - Influence
 - Coach and mentor
 - Conflict management
 - Teamwork
 - Inspirational leadership

The U.S. Department of Labor (2017) classified the core soft skills as communication, enthusiasm and attitude, teamwork, networking, problem-solving and critical thinking, and professionalism.

For this study, a broad definition of soft skills was formulated for the survey instrument used to gather information about soft skills development at Michigan community colleges. This definition was developed after consideration of the definitions and lists in this chapter and additional lists, found in Appendix B. The definition of soft skills used in the survey is:

Personal and interpersonal skills required for success in the workplace.

The Need

Employers have indicated that soft skills are lacking in today's workers and job applicants. In a survey of 500 U.S. executives, 92% indicated that they believed there was a skills gap in the American workforce (Adecco Staffing USA, 2013). Soft skills were identified as the most critical gap by 44% of those executives, while 22% named technical skills, 14% leadership skills, and 12% computer skills (Adecco Staffing USA, 2013). A Harris poll of managers and human resource leaders showed that 77% believed that soft skills are as important as hard skills, and 16% believed they are more important (CareerBuilder, 2014). The Workforce Readiness Report Card stated the employers saw soft skills as being deficient among job applicants (Barrington, Wright, & Casner-Lotto, 2006).

The desire for workers with well-developed soft skills shows up in job postings. When identifying the ideal candidate for employment, the National Association of Colleges and Employers' (2015) list of key competencies showed soft skills occupying nine of the top eleven

positions. Kang and Ritzhaupt (2015) reported on an analysis of more than 400 postings for educational technology professional jobs and found soft skills as the top eight desired abilities in those postings. Jones, Baldi, Phillips, and Waikar (2016) conducted a study of recruiters at a career fair and found that soft skills were the top thirteen in a list of the most common attributes in demand by the employers. A study of business leaders by Bentley University identified integrity, professionalism, and attitude as the three most important traits for their employees (Eggleston, 2014). A survey of 2,100 health care employers showed that soft skills accounted for the top three desired capabilities in their hiring (Kollinger, 2017).

The lack of competence in soft skills is thought to put organizations at risk of diminished performance. Employers who don't effectively recruit and/or evaluate soft skills capabilities in job applicants may be hindered in hiring the best candidate (Freifeld, 2013). Social skills competencies were linked to reductions in business costs and positive wage returns for employees (Deming, 2015). Gallup estimated a yearly loss in worker productivity of \$300 billion traceable to workers not being adequately engaged at work (Gillespie, 2012). Shuman, Besterfield-Sacre, and McGourty (2005) proposed that soft skills strengths can add value to American engineering graduates when they are competing for jobs against international candidates who may accept lower pay, but in the long run have a higher cost of employment due to lack of soft skills like teamwork. It is expected that soft skills instruction will increase team effectiveness, in turn leading to increased efficiency and productivity (Rowthorn, Olsen, & Hirshon, 2014).

The ability to put strong soft skills into action helps the employer, and the employee realizes benefits as well. In a survey of more than 400 employers, soft skills outweighed

technical skills in what the employers saw as necessary for employee success (Barrington et al., 2006). McClelland (1973) wrote that what we today call soft skills are a better predictor of employee performance than technical skills or natural intelligence. Boyatzis (2008) found that the key traits that predict effectiveness for managers and leaders are emotional, social, and cognitive intelligence; these fall into the classification of soft skills. Goleman and Boyatzis (2017) recommended that for leaders to excel, they must have strength and balance across all areas of soft skills capabilities. Citing research as far back as 1918, the National Soft Skills Association (2017) reported the possibility that 85% of job success is tied to soft skills proficiency. Jenny Blake, a co-founder of Google's career mentoring initiative and now a published author and consultant for companies such as Microsoft and The World Bank, identified the key competency for successful leaders as effective listening, a soft skill (CNBC Make It, 2018). Jackall (1983) asserted that the rise to middle or upper management takes some competency in hard skills, but rests more heavily on five soft skills: appearance, self-control, being a team player, style, and having a powerful mentor.

The CFO of the Delaware Technical Community College System is of the opinion that a high IQ (intelligence quotient) might get one hired, but it is a high EQ (emotional intelligence) that gets one promoted (G. McNesby, personal communication, January 12, 2017). The director of Year Up, a national organization working to equip young urban adults for professional employment, reported that skills may be what gets someone hired initially, but attitude and behaviors are what make the difference between success and being fired (Eastwood, 2018). A study of 175 employees of an unidentified large public university suggested that emotional

intelligence predicts task performance and that those with low cognitive intelligence can perform effectively if they have high emotional intelligence (Côté & Miners, 2006).

Soft skills matter when it comes to successful leadership. Goleman (2004) found in his studies that while great leaders differed in style and in how they handle different situations, there is a common thread of high emotional intelligence. In his research of 188 top companies, he found emotional intelligence to be twice as important as intellect or technical skills in excellent leadership performance (Goleman, 2004). Further, his studies showed that emotional intelligence accounted for 90% of the difference between average- and high-performing senior leaders (Goleman, 2004). Goleman (2004) put it this way: "...emotional intelligence is the sine qua non [essential ingredient] of leadership" (p. 82).

The problem of soft skills deficits is not limited to the United States of America, but rather spans the globe. The issue of soft skills was prominent enough in the United Kingdom that the University of Luton instituted "employability skills" development in all undergraduate programs in 1994 (Fallows & Steven, 2000). Human resources professionals were surveyed at a career fair at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, and soft skills occupied the top fifteen capabilities for which they were looking in job candidates (Matsouka & Mihail, 2016). A lecturer at the Polytechnic of Namibia cited a global need for soft skills development to be a part of the university curriculum (Schulz, 2008) and soft skills were connected to productivity among workers in the Czech Republic (Balcar, 2016). In India, Pazhani and Priya (2012) reported that strong soft skills stand out to employers in a country that seems to see a lack of such abilities. Andrews and Higson (2008) found the lack of, and need for, soft skills to be consistent across the United Kingdom, Austria, Slovenia, and Romania.

Can Soft Skills Be Learned?

If the case can be made that people who have a strong set of soft skills have an advantage in the workforce and positively influence an organization's performance, a logical question to be addressed is that of whether soft skills are something with which people are born, or whether soft skills can be learned or improved through intentional instruction and experiences.

Boyatzis (2008) stated that adults can increase social and emotional intelligence with training. In a study of nine cohorts – six full-time and three part-time – of MBA students of non-traditional college age, significant or near-significant improvement was observed through multiple measures of soft skills capability after embedded training (Boyatzis, 2008). Similar results were found in longitudinal studies of middle-aged executives in a professional fellows' program at Case Western Reserve University (Boyatzis, Stubbs, & Taylor, 2002). Researchers at the University of Queensland in Australia have determined that those lagging in emotional intelligence are able to catch up to others with higher emotional intelligence (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Goleman's (2004) research shows that emotional intelligence is capable of development, even though there appears to be some sort of genetic component that plays a part. Goleman (2004) adds that there is a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and age, and that desire to learn also plays a role in the acquisition of skills. Culpin and Scott (2012) conducted case studies on nineteen students in an executive education program and concluded that soft skills improved or could be expected to. Laker and Powell (2011) concluded that it is possible to achieve mastery in soft skills, but caution that it is more difficult than the mastery of hard skills, and that guidance after initial training is required but rarely provided.

Whitehurst (2016b) contended that grit is more hereditary than learnable, based on a twin study and meta-analysis. He encouraged schools to concentrate on skills shown to be learnable such as persistence and hard work and time management (Whitehurst, 2016b). Duckworth, on the other hand, called grit, “absolutely teachable” (CBS, 2016).

The preponderance of the evidence suggests that soft skills can be learned, reinforcing the relevance of efforts to teach, and foster the development of, these competencies.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Problem Statement

Employers today report a lack of soft skills competency in many job applicants and employees that negatively affects organizational performance (Adecco Staffing USA, 2013; Barrington et al., 2006) and have called on institutions involved in the training of future workers to cultivate improved soft skills (Kollinger, 2017; Barrington et al., 2006). The researcher is an educator in Michigan, with the community college being his area of focus. Community colleges are a key player in the training of current and future workers and should have in place strong interventions to foster the development of student soft skills (Wyner, 2014; Cherniss & Goleman, 2001).

This study reveals that community colleges in Michigan have recognized that soft skills development is a relevant issue, but efforts to develop student soft skills at Michigan’s community colleges differ widely in scope and measurable effectiveness. This study also demonstrates that Michigan community colleges vary widely in their commitment to, and investment in, soft skills development.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to formulate and present a model for community colleges to use in establishing a robust, ongoing soft skills development program. The research conducted assesses the current state of soft skills development at Michigan's community colleges, about which there is a scarcity of available literature. The elements of the soft skills development model presented in this study were grounded in theory informed by the findings of the research of Michigan's community colleges and by best practices found in a review of the literature related to soft skills development efforts in other states and in other institutions.

Research Questions

1. What are Michigan's community colleges doing to equip and train their students with improved soft skills competencies?
2. What best practices of Michigan community colleges can be identified and used to create a model for a soft skills development program?
3. What best practices can be identified in the review of the literature related to soft skills development in other institutions to inform the soft skills development model?
4. What issues and challenges need to be addressed in the development of a soft skills program?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Community colleges can play a key role in helping produce a generation of workers with stronger soft skills. Fong (2004) contrasts a past time when higher education was most concerned with intellectual development while other institutions such as the family, the faith community, and the legal system were involved in character education. Some have called for a

return to higher education structured more like a traditional liberal arts curriculum, with less emphasis on technical skills and the inclusion of soft skills and character development (Fong, 2004). Tobak (2016) decried soft skills being “bred out” of our culture for a variety of reasons, including family dynamics, and since the community college touches so many people in a community – from infancy to the elderly – it should include soft skills development at every opportunity. Kennamar (personal communication, July 6, 2017) described a society in which few students are growing up in a farm culture, with its inherent chores and responsibility.

White and Crawford (2018) pointed out that community colleges interact with many first-generation college students and many first-generation workers, who are often found to be deficient in soft skills. Wyner (2014) viewed soft skills instruction at the community college as essential to remaining relevant in the development of today’s and tomorrow’s workforce. Since soft skills are also essential social and life skills and many students proceed no further than the community college in their education, the community college should consider a strong investment in fostering the mastery of those skills (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001).

There is direct pressure on the community college from the corporate world to teach more skills to would-be employees. American executives would like to teach soft skills in the workplace but find this sort of training costly to implement, so they remind colleges to not overlook soft skills instruction alongside technical training (Adecco Staffing USA, 2013). Cappelli (2015) described a business climate in which much training has shifted from the company to the college or the individual; in 2011, 79% of workers surveyed reported that they had received no training from their employer within the past five years. Kollinger (2017) reported that health care employers prefer to count on colleges to train students in soft skills. Barrington et al.

(2006) found that over 45% of 431 employers surveyed expected colleges to develop the soft skills of students, while Ritter, Small, Mortimer, and Doll (2017) found in their survey that more than 70% of those they surveyed thought colleges should put more emphasis specifically on teamwork and collaboration. The expectation of employers that colleges will contribute in a significant way to student soft skills development is not just an American phenomenon: employers in Greece see higher education as shouldering responsibility (Matsouka & Mihail, 2016).

There is a very real possibility of political pressure coming to bear if community colleges are seen as not meeting a need (Smith, 2016). Political involvement in educational governance can mean a loss of control of educational programming along with the risk of ineffective programming, which is common with top-down initiatives (Smith, 2016). Accreditation may also play a growing role in soft skills development. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business is an accreditation agency for business schools and includes nine soft skills areas as part of required curriculum content (The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, 2017).

The opinion that soft skills instruction should be part of the mission of today's community college does have some dissenting voices, although they seem to be a small proportion of those writing about the subject. Andreas (2018) saw soft skills cultivation as the responsibility of the individual and said, "...the perception that 4-5 years of academic classwork... can teach skills that require a lifetime of practice could be characterized as unrealistic" (p. 51). Hurrell (2016) placed blame on employers in the United Kingdom for

creating job disaffection by hiring, on-boarding, and training practices that lack in effectiveness, causing employees to withdraw their engagement and, as a result, underutilize their soft skills.

Community colleges have a tremendous opportunity at hand to help students become more proficient in soft skills. There are more than 1,100 community colleges in the United States with a total enrollment of twelve million students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018). Community colleges touch the lives of first-generation college attenders, displaced employees, children and youth, the elderly, and business and industry – a broad cross-section of our communities – and for that reason, are well-positioned to influence vast numbers of diverse people. As Kurtinitis (2018) wrote:

Taken as a whole, America’s community colleges are the largest network of workforce providers in the nation, educating 12 million Americans this year alone. For our students, we are the only sector of higher education that can make a significant difference in their cost of attending college and minimizing the size of their student debt. To borrow a phrase from T.S. Eliot, we are the ‘practical cats’ of higher education. (p. 1)

There is limited literature available regarding current efforts in soft skills development at Michigan’s community colleges, so this study will add to the body of information. It is hoped that community colleges in Michigan and beyond will be able to benefit from the findings and recommendations of this study, and to use the grounded theory model for a community college soft skills program as a practical tool to implement or improve soft skills development.

LIMITATIONS

There are limitations in any study of soft skills. As stated earlier, the terminology itself can be confusing. Wagenheim (2016) wrote of “a lot of sameness using different words and a lot of differentness using the same words.” Whitehurst (2016a) described soft skills research as

being a young field and likened it to a “Tower of Babel” in its constructs and measures, with models for instruction and assessment not being sufficiently developed for education. Wilson-Ahlstrom et al. (2014) agreed that the development of effective measures of soft skills competency are not keeping pace with the understanding of the importance of those skills.

Limitations exist in the completeness of available information. The researcher obtained only as much information on soft skills development at Michigan community colleges as is available in the literature and that contacts at those colleges were willing and able to provide through the survey.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter 1 introduces the topic of soft skills and states the need for the community college to be a part of the solution to a soft skills problem. The problem statement and research questions of this study are outlined. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature on current soft skills development initiatives in business and industry, community and civic organizations, K-12 education, four-year colleges and universities, community colleges in other states, and community colleges in Michigan.

Chapter 3 is an outline of the study design and addresses pertinent research issues such as reliability and validity and researcher bias. Chapter 4 is a presentation of the data collected in the survey of Michigan community colleges.

Chapter 5 is an analysis of the data and implications of the results. The data from the survey of Michigan’s community colleges is supplemented by information obtained in the literature review to develop a solid foundation for identifying elements of a model for soft skills

development for community colleges. Chapter 6 is a discussion of the findings. A model for a community college soft skills program is presented. Conclusions and recommendations for future study culminate this study.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

There are many definitions of soft skills. The broad definition of soft skills used in association with the survey instrument used in this study is: *Personal and interpersonal skills required for success in the workplace.*

Companies and organizations are increasingly pointing out the lack of well-developed soft skills in employees and job applicants. Soft skills are an important element of organizational, personal, and leadership effectiveness in today's marketplace. Many companies and organizations view America's community colleges as a main provider of prospective job candidates.

The demand from employers for stronger worker competencies places the community college in a position to help narrow the gap between workers' current soft skills competencies and the needs of employers. As institutions providing training in academic and technical skills to learners from a wide range of backgrounds, ages, and experience, community colleges are uniquely positioned to contribute to the development of these critical soft skills. To not do so is to ignore a key aspect of personal and professional development for community college students. As a Delaware Technical Community College executive said, "We can't have our students walk across the stage to the unemployment line" (G. McNesby, personal communication, January 12, 2017). There may also be impending political and accreditation

issues that should prompt the community college to take a serious look at its role in soft skills development.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to formulate and present a model for community colleges to use in establishing a robust, ongoing soft skills development program. The research conducted assesses the current state of soft skills development at Michigan's community colleges, about which there is a scarcity of available literature. The elements of the soft skills development model presented in this study were grounded in theory informed by the findings of the research of Michigan's community colleges and by best practices found in a review of the literature related to soft skills development efforts in other states and in other institutions.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to formulate and present a model for community colleges to use in establishing a robust, ongoing soft skills development program. The research conducted assesses the current state of soft skills development at Michigan's community colleges, about which there is a scarcity of available literature. The elements of the soft skills development model presented in this study were grounded in theory informed by the findings of the research of Michigan's community colleges and by best practices found in a review of the literature related to soft skills development efforts in other states and in other institutions.

In this review of the literature, the state of soft skills development was examined on a broad basis. The intent of a broad review is not only to learn what soft skills development efforts at Michigan's community colleges have been publicized and reported on, but to provide additional information from which to identify effective practices and eliminate the need to "reinvent the wheel" when developing recommendations for a model program. This section is a review of the literature related to soft skills development internationally, in American business and industry, community and civic organizations, the K-12 and four-year college and university systems, and community colleges in other states. The published soft skills efforts underway at Michigan's community colleges were examined. Other institutional considerations for program design that any organization might encounter were examined.

CURRENT SOFT SKILLS TRAINING PRACTICES

The literature reveals an array of soft skills training initiatives underway at educational institutions and in the corporate world. This section begins with the available literature on soft skills training efforts outside the United States, moves to American non-educational organizations, American K-12 and four-year higher educational institutions, community colleges in other states, and finally focuses on Michigan community colleges.

International Examples

International practices may prove useful in the planning efforts of community colleges to develop student soft skills. The fact that efforts are being made outside the United States underlines the importance of soft skills development for all workers in our present global economy and society.

ITNET is a consulting and business process company in the United Kingdom. The company identified soft skills that appeared to be overlooked in their employees' skills sets and instituted a training and mentoring program (Cowie, 2003). ITNET documented increases in customer satisfaction, projects completed on time, and projects completed within budget (Cowie, 2003).

Colleges and universities outside the United States are invested in soft skills development. The Ho Chi Minh Vocational College of Technology in Vietnam has integrated soft skills training in technology and engineering courses (Higher Engineering Education Alliance, 2017). The soft skills curriculum was developed with the assistance of the Higher Engineering Education Alliance Program, a global partnership with members such as USAID, Intel, and

Arizona State University (Higher Engineering Education Alliance, 2017). A key precept is that skills be applied in an active learning environment that forces students beyond cognitive understanding (Higher Engineering Education Alliance, 2017). The Sri Lankan Aviation College employs soft skills faculty who provide training for students, employees, and external organizations (Sri Lankan Aviation College, 2017).

A different approach to soft skills development is that of the Folkehøjskole in the Nordic countries (Flowers, 2016). Dating back to the 1850s, this is in effect a gap-year program that is publicly funded and targeted to the 18- to 24-year age range (Flowers, 2016). The Nordic countries see soft skills as being as important for college readiness as technical skills and students learn by participating in practical projects and interactions with the “real world” (Flowers, 2016). Participants have demonstrated high levels of college success that is attributed to this experience (Flowers, 2016).

Business and Industry

Soft skills training has generated successful outcomes in the corporate world and provides insight to community colleges in efforts to provide such training. A corporate example of soft skills training in action is that of Cascade Engineering in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The company labels its culture as “People, Planet, and Profit” (Cascade Engineering, 2017). They profess values such as anti-racism and run programs such as Welfare to Career and Returning Citizens, the latter geared to provide a second chance to those who have been in the prison system (Cascade Engineering, 2017). The company cites over 800 employees who have left the welfare rolls (Cascade Engineering, 2017).

Community and Civic Organizations

Community and civic organizations contribute to the soft skills development of workers, supporting the importance of the mission. Dayton (2017) provided an example of a community organization providing soft skills training in YouthBuild, which runs programs for around 10,000 young people ages 16 to 24 in 46 states. The participants are often high school dropouts, may be parents, and some have criminal records (Dayton, 2017). Studies of outcomes after participation in YouthBuild show better school attendance and a lower likelihood of imprisonment and early death (Dayton, 2017). Year Up is an organization that matches low-income, young, urban adults in poverty with corporate sponsors, who take part in mentoring and sometimes hiring (Year Up, 2017). Year Up reports that 90% of its graduates are employed or enrolled in post-secondary education within four months (Year Up, 2017).

A case study in a civic initiative supported directly by a governmental organization is the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board, which advises the governor on workforce issues and develops and institutes programs to advance workforce health in the state (Kentucky Workforce Investment Board, 2017). One example of an initiative for which they are responsible is the Work Ready grants program (Kentucky Workforce Investment Board, 2017). A Work Ready Communities designation may be earned for grant recipients who successfully implement programs that enhance the local workforce and worker readiness through soft skills training, adult education improvements, and other strategies to enhance worker qualifications (Kentucky Workforce Investment Board, 2017).

K-12 Education

The effort to instill soft skills competencies is alive in K-12 education. One of the most prominent examples is the efforts of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. CASEL is well-known for research, cultivating practice, and advocating politically for social-emotional learning from preschool through secondary education, and partners with school districts representing nearly one million students to facilitate best practices and student social-emotional growth (CASEL, 2018).

Georgia BEST is a statewide soft skills development program consisting of a partnership between local school districts, the state Departments of Labor, Education, and Juvenile Justice, and the University of North Georgia (Georgia Department of Labor, 2017). Students in middle school, high school, and adult education can earn a Work Ethic Certification through training embedded in their coursework and evaluation by teachers (Georgia Department of Labor, 2017).

The KIPP charter school organization serves as an example of a system-wide school culture approach. KIPP is an acronym for Knowledge is Power Program and the schools are considered college-preparatory in nature (KIPP, 2017). There are 209 schools serving 90,000 students under the KIPP umbrella and character education is a high priority in their mission (KIPP, 2017). The overarching values of KIPP schools are Work Hard and Be Nice, with objectives of zest, grit, optimism, self-control, gratitude, social intelligence, and curiosity (KIPP, 2017). KIPP cites a population with 88% of students receiving free or reduced lunch yet outperforming peer schools on standardized testing that is administered in fourth grade, middle school, and high school (KIPP, 2017).

Four-Year Colleges and Universities

Four-year colleges and universities can provide useful input for the practices of community colleges. Some have embedded soft skills development efforts into coursework. Coastal Carolina University chose to embed teamwork into the coursework in College of Business (Ritter et al., 2017). Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, California, has a designated service-learning course with soft skills development incorporated, including communication, teamwork, professionalism, self-motivation, leadership, problem-solving, creativity, efficiency, meeting deadlines, organization, and passion for a project (Carter, 2011).

There are examples of four-year colleges or universities providing opportunities for earning soft skills credentials both in and outside the classroom. A professor of interactive communication at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut utilized a system of badges to be earned as the basis for graduate student grades in place of a traditional grading scale based on assignments and tests (Ash, 2012a). Students had to collaborate to earn a sufficient number of badges to earn a high grade and could target a given grade by choosing which badges to earn (Ash, 2012a). The University of Iowa offers a Leadership Studies Certificate (University of Iowa, 2018). Undergraduates must earn at least twenty credits in designated courses, including Perspectives on Leadership, Leadership Theory into Practice, a Self or Group Leadership option, a Communications option, a Cultural Competence option, an Ethics and Integrity option, and an Experiential Learning option (University of Iowa, 2018). Reinhardt University in Georgia has developed the Strategic Career Advantage Platform (Tate, 2017). One Saturday session per month is offered on a pertinent topic and a student successfully completing the requirements for five sessions is awarded a pin to be displayed on the graduation gown (Tate, 2017).

Colorado State University has collaborated with Goodwill Industries of Denver to produce the Essential Soft Skills for Employment (Colorado State University, 2017). This online curriculum consists of seven courses and associated digital badges that may be earned (Colorado State University, 2017).

Experiential learning is a vehicle for soft skills development at four-year institutions. Kettering University in Flint, Michigan, has been distinguished for decades by its use of the cooperative education program (Kettering University, 2017). Through the cooperative education model, students gain work experience and it is expected that they will hone their soft skills on the job site (Kettering University, 2017). The University of Rhode Island uses campus employment as a key incubator for soft skills development for students who can't afford to do unpaid internships (Fede, Gorman, & Cimini, 2018). Ohio Northern University (ONU) reports success using high-impact practices with a direct connection to soft skills development such as numerous opportunities for experiential learning through internships and cooperative education and an emphasis on capabilities such as critical thinking, adaptability, and ethics (DiBiasio, 2016; Ohio Northern University, 2017).

Four-year schools are involved in youth development related to soft skills. The J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development at the University of Georgia offered a day of soft skills training for county 4-H students (J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development, 2017).

Community Colleges in Other States

The soft skills development efforts underway at community colleges in other states serve as a valuable tool to expand awareness of practices at the level of higher education upon which this study is focused.

There are states in which a statewide or regional community college association has developed a soft skills training program. California's New World of Work was developed under the auspices of the chancellor's office (Nelson, 2016). Two lessons each have been developed for ten identified critical soft skills, with colleges having the option of incorporating the lessons into an academic program, through workshops, or online (Nelson, 2016).

The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges formulated the I-BEST program, which is used in developmental courses across the state (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2017). These courses are team-taught with an academic instructor and a job training specialist who incorporates soft skills instruction; content for both skill sets is delivered in the course (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2017). Results reported for the I-BEST program were students being 23% more likely to earn college credit, 17% more likely to persist in their program, 40% more likely to earn a credential, and 17% more likely to display improved basic skills (Advance CTE, n.d.).

The Missouri Community College Association identified soft skills gaps by consulting employers in the Kansas City, St. Louis, and Springfield areas and secured federal grants to develop and offer soft skills training, with positive results so far (Missouri Community College Association, 2017). In Kansas, the Project 17 program was developed as a regional initiative of seventeen counties in the southeast corner of the state (Project 17, 2017). It has several

elements that can lead to a Kansas WORK Ready! Certificate, with students and non-students able to earn the credential through course work, boot camp-style training, or other workshops or extracurricular opportunities (Project 17, 2017). The Community College System of New Hampshire offers a free workforce development program, called Work Ready NH (Community College System of New Hampshire, 2017). The classes that constitute the program meet face-to-face, work is completed online, and successful completers earn two certificates that may be used when applying for jobs or promotions (Community College System of New Hampshire, 2017).

There are colleges offering a course or courses dedicated to soft skills. Asnuntuck Community College in Connecticut offers a course called Soft Skills for a Digital Workplace, in which people skills and ethics are emphasized and group activities and case studies are utilized as teaching tools (Asnuntuck Community College, 2012).

Soft skills competencies are incorporated into course grades at Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College in North Carolina. Faculty are trained and grade students on skills related to workplace readiness (Chen, 2018; Fain, 2012). It is expected that 8-10% of a course grade will be based on soft skills proficiencies, and students are able to earn a workplace readiness certificate from the college (Chen, 2018; Fain, 2012).

Some community colleges facilitate experiential learning opportunities that are expected to lead to improved soft skills. Virginia Highlands Community College, in partnership with business and industry leaders, has expanded opportunities for internships, cooperative education, job shadowing, service learning, undergraduate research, and projects in the community (Virginia Highlands Community College, 2017). Students at North Carolina's

Davidson County Community College in the Digital Media Advertising program were assigned a short-term project of creating design proposals for an entrance sign being built for a new industrial park (Davidson County Community College, 2017). Students had to practice relationship and time management, effective communication and teamwork, delegation, and respect for others; the college reported seeing remarkable growth in the students in only three weeks (Davidson County Community College, 2017).

Community colleges are also involved in providing soft skills development services for local workforce needs. The Community College Workforce Alliance is a partnership between two Virginia community colleges and local business, industry, and government leaders (Community College Workforce Alliance, 2017). The Alliance offers consulting and instruction for the public and private sectors in central Virginia (Community College Workforce Alliance, 2017). Paul D. Camp Community College in Virginia has formulated soft skills development modules for local employers and employees (Paul D. Camp Community College, 2017). The New Jersey Business and Industrial Association funded soft skills classes that are offered by Bergen Community College (Bergen Community College, 2017). These classes include communication and supervisory skills and are presented as one-day seminars (Bergen Community College, 2017).

For-profit providers of soft skills curriculum are utilized by some colleges. Mt. Hood Community College in Washington was one of five recipients of scholarships to offer the Wonderlic Soft Skills Bootcamp free of charge for six months in 2017 and chose to offer the training to adults in their high school diploma program (Mt. Hood Community College, 2017).

Optional soft skills training opportunities are available at some community colleges. Northeast Alabama Community College created a program called Passport to Success, which leads to a workplace readiness certificate (M. Kennamar, personal communication, July 6, 2017). Kennamar reported that students may pursue this certificate by having instructors certify them for soft skills competencies for which they receive scores of 0 or 3 or 6. They must earn 36 points in the seven areas (M. Kennamar, personal communication, July 6, 2017). It is an optional, student-initiated endeavor and fewer than ten certificates per year are awarded (M. Kennamar, personal communication, July 6, 2017).

Eastern Florida State College administers the Core Scholars Program, providing soft skills growth opportunities to build competencies in self-knowledge, motivation, self-efficacy, interpersonal skills, and the identification and use of helpful resources (Eastern Florida State College, 2017). Students must participate in a learning community, peer tutoring, and soft skills workshops, and work with a success coach (Eastern Florida State College, 2017). Successful completion of the Core Scholars Program is rewarded with a transcript notation and special graduation regalia (Eastern Florida State College, 2017).

Many community colleges offer access to online resources, with no related course requirements, support, or recognition. These may include documents, videos, articles, and websites (Haywood Community College, 2017; Midlands Technical College, 2017; Roane State Community College, 2017; Saddleback College, n.d.). Pulaski Technical College offers online resources with college support as requested (Pulaski Technical College, 2017). Laredo Community College in Texas offers a Soft Skills Suite at a cost of \$395 (Laredo Community College, 2017). The college's program contains the following modules: Achieving Success with

Difficult People, Interpersonal Communication, Skills for Making Great Decisions, and Individual Excellence (Laredo Community College, 2017).

Michigan Community Colleges

The websites of Michigan's community colleges were searched for the terms "soft skills" and "employability skills" to learn what publicized opportunities exist for students to develop those capabilities. A general web search with the terms "Michigan community college soft skills" and "Michigan community college employability skills" was conducted to identify any other literature related to current efforts underway. The same was done using the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Google Scholar search engines. In the course of the study, two personal contacts were made, which added to the information available online.

Of the 29 Michigan colleges, the websites of 22 contain some reference to soft skills development efforts. Of these 22 colleges, 16 have information posted about programs that appear to be active; the others are historical programs or documents. The researcher was invited to speak about his early research on soft skills to the Michigan community college liberal arts deans in 2017, due to the fact that the chair of his dissertation committee was a member of that group. Based on the conversation that followed the presentation, it was clear that not all soft skills development efforts are publicized online. In the interest of protecting the identities of the specific colleges, the information obtained is aggregated without naming the college(s). Here is a summary of the information available online:

- Manufacturing industry partnership that spanned the years 2014 to 2017 (8 colleges);
- Specific courses or majors with embedded soft skills instruction (5);

- Soft skills training for high school students through K-12 partnerships such as early college programs (5);
- Active programs in business and industry training (4);
- Active partnerships with workforce development organizations (3);
- Self-developed informational documents related to soft skills (3);
- Recipient of a Wonderlic Soft Skills Bootcamp scholarship, but dropped the program once the scholarship expired due to prohibitive cost (1);
- Employability skills training through the student services office (1); and
- Soft skills training incorporated into prison education program (1).

The research done in this study will add to that found online to give a more complete picture of current soft skills initiatives underway at Michigan's community colleges.

INSTITUTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Institutional Commitment and Challenges

The literature indicates that the introduction of new programs, or changes to existing ones, often brings challenges that must be addressed for successful implementation to occur.

Higher education governance structures may obstruct effective response to change, leaders can feel paralyzed when facing decisions between competing needs with limited resources, and effective decision-making models are sometimes lacking (Benjamin & Carroll, 1996). Hampson (2008) suggested that the sort of organizational change that would be required to make any initiative a part of the fabric of an organization's culture is usually not best done from the top down, whether that means institutional leadership or a governmental agency dictating change. Hampson (2008) cited the examples of the United Kingdom and

Australia experiencing failure in government-mandated and -designed vocational curricula.

Both countries found that regional needs can vary, and both operate in a federal system like the U.S. in which local or regional government or organizations might resent what might be perceived as heavy-handed mandates (Hampson, 2008). Kotter (1995) listed stumbling blocks that may exist in fostering transformative organizational change:

- Lack of vision for where the initiative will lead;
- Lack of a plan to create short-term wins;
- Underestimation of the difficulty of implementing successful change;
- Lack of support of the head of the organization;
- Having a management mindset rather than a leadership mindset (management tends to focus on minimizing risk and keeping systems in place);
- Skipping steps in the process; and
- New behaviors not being rooted in the organization's social norms and shared values.

Laker and Powell (2011) contrasted the training of hard skills to that of soft skills and wrote the soft skills training often brings more trainee, organizational, and managerial resistance. de Villiers (2010) pointed out that there may be barriers due to limited financial, physical, and human resource availability. Ritter et al. (2017) wrote that a commitment must be made to the further development of teaching skills related to soft skills if the classroom is used in cultivating student soft skills.

Some faculty members may see soft skills as being in the realm of student services (Boyatzis et al., 2002) and some may argue that it is too late to teach soft skills (Michigan

Liberal Arts Deans, personal communication, June 8, 2017). de Villiers (2010) indicated that faculty may not be well-connected to new developments in business and industry and will need to be kept abreast of soft skills needs. Colleges have noted that some faculty members do not display strong soft skills themselves (de Villiers, 2010; Michigan Liberal Arts Deans, personal communication, June 8, 2017). Teaching methods may need to be refined to develop the capacity of faculty and staff to teach skills outside traditional academic fields, and that development may require support and refinement after initial training (Ritter et al., 2017).

A legitimate concern about incorporating any new program, or expanding one already in existence, is that of cost. Wagenheim (2016) asserted that training methods requiring more interaction are likely to lead to higher costs due to lowering class sizes to make the training more effective. There might be cost involved in training the trainers (Nattur Technical Training Foundation, 2017).

Identifying Key Soft Skills Competencies

The identification of desired outcomes is a crucial part of any program. Northwest Mississippi Community College (2014) used input from local business leaders to identify soft skills to be integrated into all business courses. In developing the standards for the Georgia BEST soft skills program, the Governor's Office of Workforce Development conducted 31 public town hall meetings to solicit input from business, industry, education, and the public (Ogeechee Technical College, 2011). Eastern Kentucky University put students to work identifying critical soft skills. Students from junior-level business classes interviewed executives to identify which skills mattered most to them (Robles, 2012).

Evaluation of Program Effectiveness

A key consideration in developing and maintaining any program is the evaluation of its effectiveness. Nunn (2013) stated, "Even though colleges may believe they are using effective approaches to develop and reinforce soft skills, if they are not consistently assessed and part of a feedback loop to the student and the institution, the skills gap and the perception gap are likely to go unaddressed." Wilson-Ahlstrom et al. (2014) wrote that soft skills outcomes should be measured so that colleges can advocate for supporting policy positions, performance improvement, and proof of training effectiveness. Henville (2012) said that return on investment should be documented in order to secure necessary funding.

Redford (2007) recommended that key performance indicators should be identified before designing soft skills curriculum and measurement methods. Examples of those might be productivity, morale, and employee turnover, to cite three (Redford, 2007). A combination of measures can then be chosen and could include trainee feedback and pre- and post-assessment of identified measures (Redford, 2007). Beard, Schwieger, and Surendran (2008) gave numerous examples of measurement options: exams, case studies, internship observations, projects, portfolios, presentations, team performance, self-assessments, and external assessments, e.g., the California Critical Thinking Test or the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory.

Culpin and Scott (2012) discussed the use of pre- and post-study questionnaires with training participants. Henville (2012) took the idea a step further and proposed that trainees write reports that describe how learning has been applied, and that might in turn yield data for measuring return on investment. Baron and Morin (2010) concluded that a measure of trainee

self-efficacy before and after training will serve as a proxy for measuring soft skills gains, saying that self-efficacy has been shown to correlate to various organizational outcomes that reflect soft skills competency.

There are some commercially-available instruments designed to measure soft skills competency. ACT's Tessera measures social and emotional skills through self-reporting, situational judgment scenarios, and forced-choice items (ACT, Inc., 2017b). The categories measured equate to the traditional "Big Five" referenced earlier and are labeled Tenacity/Grit, Organization/Responsibility, Teamwork/Cooperation, Composure/Resilience, Curiosity/Ingenuity, and Leadership/Communication Style (ACT, Inc., 2017b).

The ROI (Return on Investment) Institute has worked with over 5,000 organizations to benchmark key goals and measure competencies used to improve performance, including soft skills (Phillips, Phillips, & Ray, 2015). Kirkpatrick Partners (2017) uses the Kirkpatrick Model, originally designed in the 1950s, to measure training effectiveness. Their four-level model assesses the reaction to training of the participants, the learning acquired, the behavioral effects on trainees, and the degree to which outcomes occur as a result of training (Kirkpatrick Partners, 2017).

Adhvaryu, Kala, and Nyshadham (2017) conducted a study of workers at a garment factory in Bangalore, India, in which female employees were given soft skills training. After the training, several measures were taken over time and the researchers reported a 256% return on investment for soft skills training twenty months after the training was conducted (Adhvaryu, Kala, & Nyshadham, 2017). Workers became 10% more productive and exhibited improved personal outcomes such as accumulating more personal savings and an improved

self-image (Adhvaryu, Kala, & Nyshadham, 2017). Sanofi, a French pharmaceutical company, worked to develop emotional intelligence capabilities in its sales force and saw a performance increase of 12% annually (Wilcox, 2015). Motorola also targeted emotional intelligence development in a manufacturing plant and reported that 90% of those who received the training showed increased productivity afterwards (Wilcox, 2015). Allied Signal administered two days of team building at its Garrett Engine Division in Phoenix and used the Kirkpatrick Model to measure a return on investment of 125% (Pine & Tingley, 1993).

Academia has joined in the effort to measure the results of soft skills cultivation. The State of Washington's I-BEST program studied workers who seemed mired in low-paying jobs and those who were not and created a benchmark: a student who completes one year of college-level study and at least one other credential is regarded as having reached what is called the Tipping Point (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2017). They found that Tipping Point completers produced a return on investment for the employer of 12.4% per year (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2017). Gains were also reported in college credits earned, persistence, the earning of credentials, and the demonstration of basic skills (Advance CTE, n.d.).

At Simmons College in Boston, Ingols and Shapiro (2014) experimented with three methods of assessment for soft skills. They used a commercially-available instrument and cross-referenced it to the input of faculty, built an instrument based on a theory rubric, and worked with expert consultants to develop yet another assessment tool (Ingols & Shapiro, 2014). They suggested that when using a commercially-available instrument, it is advantageous to locate one able to assess data that is already collected so that unnecessary strain isn't created (Ingols

& Shapiro, 2014). The self-designed instrument was notable in that it engendered stronger faculty buy-in and drove curriculum improvement, but it was noted that it is important to use reliable scholarship to ensure reliable and valid data (Ingols & Shapiro, 2014).

Emsi is a data tool that provides subscribers access to profiles of more than 100 million college graduates and is endorsed by the American Association of Community Colleges (Emsi, 2017). Data is acquired from government reports, job postings, and online profiles of workers and job seekers (Emsi, 2017). Based in the United States, the company serves clients in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Emsi, 2017). For its higher education customers, Emsi advertises services related to economic impact, program alignment, career coaching, labor market analytics, and Alumni Insight, which may be used by a college to track employment data for its graduates (Emsi, 2017).

Planning the Key Elements of a Soft Skills Curriculum

Crosbie (2005) reported that most soft skills training efforts failed to produce the full extent of change desired due to the lack of a full-fledged, effective plan. Key elements of curricular planning found in the review of the literature include placement in the curriculum, content design, instructional approach, and student credentials and recognition. Whitehurst (2016a) and Carter (2011) suggested that faculty be well-versed and competent in soft skills so that it can be modeled in interaction with students. The information that follows will address the curricular elements just identified.

Placement in the Curriculum

The incorporation of soft skills training in academic or general education classes is recommended by Hirsch (2017) and Carter (2011), and De Villiers (2010) recommended a soft skills emphasis be built into all levels of all college programs. Research by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (2017) suggested that, because soft skills can lead to higher academic achievement, soft skills instruction should be incorporated as early as possible. In Carter's (2011) observations, dedicated soft skills courses tended to be very unpopular with students.

A focus on specific competencies strategically incorporated into courses with direct application, with an emphasis on opportunities for volunteering and projects in the field, was recommended by Boyatzis et al. (2002). Hirsch (2017) reported that Purdue University supplemented instruction with things like internships and mock job interviews. Khasanzyanova (2017) is an advocate for soft skills development through student volunteerism, which is a priority item in the European Union's 2020 strategies. Khasanzyanova (2017) refers to a French study in which students who volunteered exhibited strong soft skills acquisition and believes this is more effective than academic instruction of soft skills since practice is believed to facilitate deeper learning than passive learning.

Content Design

As documented in an earlier section of the literature review, some organizations design their own content based on research and consultation with partners in business and industry. Content that is not self-designed can be obtained in a number of different forms. In this section,

the literature related to content design is outlined, and examples are given of commercially-available content.

Ritter et al. (2017) gave an example of a recommended planning framework in which “backwards design” is key: planning is done by first defining the desired results and then working backwards to solve the placement and content issues. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2012) also called for the backwards design of soft skills curriculum.

There are commercially-available products for soft skills training. One company providing such curriculum is ACT, offering the Soft Skills Suite, which prepares students for ACT’s National Career Readiness Certificate Plus by providing instruction related to teamwork, customer service, workplace discipline, and management (ACT, Inc., 2017a). Another prominent vendor is Wonderlic, known for its Soft Skills Bootcamp that consists of eight instructional units and corresponding assessments and was developed in consultation with the National Soft Skills Consortium and a network of 8,000 business and industry partners (Wonderlic, 2017). Wonderlic’s program is offered on an e-learning platform as a self-directed or instructor-led course, and digital badges may be earned for successful completion (Wonderlic, 2017). Adroit Learning and Manpower provides training to job seekers and companies in India and other countries (Adroit Learning and Manpower, 2017). Alden E. Habacon is an educational entrepreneur offering soft skills training to organizations in Canada, with an emphasis on colleges (Habacon, 2017). Beverly Amer of Northern Arizona University has developed a soft skills curriculum presented through video and an accompanying workbook (Amer, 2008). Anide Jean is a speaker and coach offering training to schools and other organizations (Overcomer

Consulting LLC, 2017). Lynda.com is an online learning system and subsidiary of LinkedIn that is utilized by more than 10,000 organizations in the corporate, governmental, and educational world (Lynda.com, 2017).

Skip Downing's (2014) *On Course* text, used widely at colleges, lists eight choices of successful students that lead to success at college and correlate to key soft skills concepts.

Successful students:

1. Accept personal responsibility;
2. Discover self-motivation;
3. Master self-management;
4. Employ interdependence;
5. Gain self-awareness;
6. Adopt lifelong learning;
7. Develop emotional intelligence; and
8. Believe in themselves. (p. 9)

Downing's (2014) textbook addresses attitude, teamwork and networking, and professionalism through the elements of the eight choices of successful students. *On Course* is designed to support success in school, the workplace, and in life, and uses self-assessments, articles, study skills strategies, case studies, and other tools to teach and grow successful behaviors and mindsets (Downing, 2014).

The U.S. Department of Labor produces a free downloadable workbook entitled *Skills to Pay the Bills – Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success*, which is targeted to ages 14 to 21 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017). Its modular units are designed to be engaging for a young

audience and it was created for the use of youth development initiatives both in and out of the educational realm (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017). The document is 142 pages long and contains tips, activities, and strategies focused on the soft skills of communication, enthusiasm and attitude, teamwork, networking, problem solving and critical thinking, and professionalism (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017).

Instructional Approach

Georges (1996) made a distinction between training and education in which he described education as knowledge that may not be associated with proficiency, whereas training was described as a more challenging and time-consuming process that generally leads to greater proficiency. Crosbie (2005) likened the learning of soft skills to learning to drive a car: it's one thing to know in theory how to steer or accelerate or brake, but it's quite another to have the feel for it and for it to become second nature. He referred to Abraham Maslow's stages of learning to reinforce the case that it must be an intentional process and developed through awareness, time, and practice (Crosbie, 2005). He made the case for active and kinesthetic learning as necessary to produce long-term results (Crosbie, 2005). Yorke and Knight (2006) reported that the learning of soft skills takes time and practice.

Wilhelm, Logan, Smith, and Szul (2002) concluded that the best method for learning soft skills is real-world practice. Nunn (2013) rated the top five approaches for training students in soft skills, in order: experiential learning, role playing, teamwork methods, case studies, and extracurricular activities. Charoensap-Kelly, Broussard, Lindsly, and Troy (2016) wrote that the successful transfer of soft skills training requires activities to be interactive and that frequent

practice is required. Berry (2009) reported that corporations want colleges to provide students with experiential learning and not just content.

Nealy (2005) reported the success of active learning approaches in management courses at the University of Houston. Nealy (2005) described active learning as an approach in which students must search for meaning and understanding, must take personal responsibility for their learning, are concerned with skills as well as knowledge, and are provided a curriculum that is applicable to employment and social settings. Ritter et al. (2017) suggested that experiential, active learning activities provide the best chance for developing competencies that transfer to the workplace in the future. While teaching to develop emotional intelligence, Connolly and Reinicke (2017) found that active learning was far more effective than a lecture format, and that classroom team-building led to strong self-reported outcomes: almost 94% of participants in a project management course with embedded soft skills training left class feeling that soft skills would be crucial in the success of future project managers.

A study was done on e-learning of soft skills at York University in Canada and it was found that helpful curricular elements in fostering student online learning were learner control, alignment with learner needs, performance-based tasks in which learners could demonstrate improved competencies, and considering the content, context, and learner in designing every objective (Morgan & Adams, 2009).

Credentials and Recognition

Sullivan (2013) described a society that places a greater demand on abstract skills, which points to a need for people to verify or demonstrate competence in such skills. She presented the idea of digital badges or e-portfolios, which a job seeker can share with almost anyone,

anywhere (Sullivan, 2013). Fong, Janzow, and Peck (2016) reported on a survey of 190 higher-education institutions conducted by Pearson and the University Professional and Continuing Education Association. Results showed that 94% of these institutions offered some type of alternative credential and that 64% saw these kinds of credentials as an important strategic item moving forward (Fong, Janzow, & Peck, 2016). The types of credentials reported were digital badges, certificates, and micro-credentials, or digital certificates (Fong, Janzow, & Peck, 2016). The Seattle Jobs Initiative implemented a Work Readiness Credential and put the plan into action, yet 86% of employers surveyed were unaware of the existence of the credential (Pritchard, 2013).

The National Work Readiness Council has designed a Work Readiness Credential that is meant to be a predictor of entry-level work competencies (National Work Readiness Council, 2017) and ACT offers a National Career Readiness Certificate based on competency on the ACT WorkKeys tests in math, reading, and locating information (ACT, Inc., 2017a).

The Mozilla Foundation has created an extensive open program for digital badging called the Open Badge Infrastructure (OBI), which the organization hopes will become an internationally-recognized and -utilized platform (Mozilla, 2018). The company cites an advantage of developing a badging system is that students can develop their own employment skills portfolio and profile for others to see (Mozilla, 2018). Statistics from the OBI may help instructors and colleges in planning and evaluation (Mozilla, 2018). There are concerns to be addressed regarding privacy, administrative costs, and credibility and relevance to employers (Devedžić & Jovanovic, 2015). Since its creation in 2011, Mozilla has awarded millions of Open

Badges and at the time of this study is preparing for the launch of Open Badges 2.0 (Mozilla, 2018).

Ash (2012b) recognized the potential of a platform like the Mozilla Foundation's to create a recognition system for soft skills but has concerns about the possible unintended consequences of creating systems offering external rewards rather than finding a way to appeal to intrinsic rewards. Moltz (2014) reminded readers of the remarkable long-time success of badges for groups such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and sees a digital badge being valuable if set up so that an employer can click and learn more about the credential. He sees issues that need to be addressed such as monitoring who is able to issue a digital badge and fraud prevention (Moltz, 2014).

There are examples of digital badges being utilized by colleges. The California Community College System provides digital badges for students who complete training through its New World of Work initiative (Nelson, 2016). These badges utilize the Mozilla Open Badging Initiative. The Community College System of New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Department of Resources, and the New Hampshire Department of Employment Security developed WorkReadyNH in order to up-skill workers for the state's job force (Community College System of New Hampshire, 2017). Those who successfully complete WorkReadyNH earn the National Career Readiness Certificate through ACT (Community College System of New Hampshire, 2017). Colorado State University partnered with Goodwill Industries to create Goodwill Industries of Denver's Essential Soft Skills for Employment, an online curriculum in which three levels of digital badges may be earned (Colorado State University, 2017). To motivate workers

to stay up-to-date on their skills, the badges are good for three years (Colorado State University, 2017).

Purdue University created its own badging platform, which integrates with the Mozilla platform, LinkedIn, and Facebook (Purdue University, 2018). Purdue's platform consists of two mobile applications, Passport and Passport Profile (Purdue University, 2018). Through Passport, faculty and advisors may recognize skills learned in class through field experiences like internships, or through extracurricular activities (Purdue University, 2018). Passport Profile is the student's digital badge portfolio and allows students to display the badges earned (Purdue University, 2018). Purdue is offering for sale the use of the Passport platform to other organizations (Purdue University, 2018).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter is a presentation of the wider body of literature relevant to current soft skills development efforts at Michigan's community colleges. As a complement to the information gleaned from Michigan's community college, a review of the literature on soft skills development at other institutions and organizations was completed. The available literature on the efforts of Michigan's community colleges and the published information on soft skills development efforts was reviewed. Considerations and challenges in soft skills development found to be common in the literature are also outlined in this review of the literature.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to formulate and present a model for community colleges to use in establishing a robust, ongoing soft skills development program. The research conducted assesses the current state of soft skills development at Michigan's

community colleges, about which there is a scarcity of available literature. The elements of the soft skills development model presented in this study were grounded in theory informed by the findings of the research of Michigan's community colleges and by best practices found in a review of the literature related to soft skills development efforts in other states and in other institutions.

CHAPTER THREE: STUDY DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to formulate and present a model for community colleges to use in establishing a robust, ongoing soft skills development program. The research conducted assesses the current state of soft skills development at Michigan's community colleges, about which there is a scarcity of available literature. The elements of the soft skills development model presented in this study were grounded in theory informed by the findings of the research of Michigan's community colleges and by best practices found in a review of the literature related to soft skills development efforts in other states and in other institutions.

The research questions addressed in this study were:

1. What are Michigan's community colleges doing to equip and train their students with improved soft skills competencies?
2. What best practices of Michigan community colleges can be identified and used to create a model for a soft skills development program?
3. What best practices can be identified in the review of the literature related to soft skills development in other institutions to inform the soft skills development model?
4. What issues and challenges need to be addressed in the development of a soft skills program?

There is information currently available to the public on the topic of soft skills development at Michigan's community colleges and this was outlined in the review of the

literature. The researcher used the data obtained in this study to add to that available information and give a more complete picture of what is being done to develop soft skills in Michigan's community colleges. It is hoped that what is learned in this study will be useful to community colleges in Michigan and beyond in identifying effective practices and helping accelerate the improvement of soft skills development efforts.

The remainder of this chapter will outline:

- Methodology of the study;
- Data collection and instrumentation;
- Plan for data presentation and analysis;
- Reliability and validity; and
- Researcher bias and assumptions.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This project was a qualitative study of soft skills training incorporated at Michigan's community colleges which, coupled with a review of the literature, allowed the formulation of a model for community colleges to use to improve or develop a soft skills program.

Qualitative research has its origins in anthropology and sociology, fields in which researchers work to understand people's lives, the contexts of their lives, and how they understand their world (Merriam, 2009). In learning about soft skills training at community colleges, the researcher was seeking a better understanding of an aspect of the "life" of each college, the context, and how that is understood in their educational world.

Some attributes of qualitative research are that it seeks to explore phenomena, describe variation, describe and explain relationships, and describe individual experiences; this study will

provide descriptions of experiences at the colleges and bring out variation in their approaches and practices. The qualitative design is commonly one in which instruments of data collection can be flexible and are open-ended (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). For these reasons, a qualitative approach was a good fit for learning about individual college programs and processes.

The general research design used was that of grounded theory. Nieswiadomy and Bailey (2017) wrote, "Grounded theory studies are studies in which data are collected and analyzed and then a theory is developed that is *grounded* in the data" (p. 174). The Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching at Grand Canyon University (2018) reported that grounded theory allows the researcher to investigate process, action, or interaction in order to accomplish the goal of formulating a more highly-developed theory in which observations are used to "ground" theory. Gibson and Brown (2009) put it this way: "Grounded theory refers to the process of developing theory through analysis, rather than using analysis to test preformulated theories" (p. 26). These are fitting descriptions of the methodology of this study as the aim of the researcher was to collect information about current practices and, from the information gathered, make recommendations for best practices.

DATA COLLECTION AND INSTRUMENTATION

The instrument of data collection for this study was a survey developed by the researcher and piloted with a representative group of liberal arts deans from Michigan community colleges at the time of the researcher's presentation of early findings about soft skills development. From the pilot survey and follow-up discussion with selected deans, the

survey was finalized. In designing the survey instrument, the first task was the identification of information expected to be helpful in understanding current soft skills training practice and informing future best practices. See Appendix C for the survey instrument.

All 29 community colleges in Michigan were invited to participate. The researcher contacted the Michigan liberal arts deans, since a direct connection had already been established with a large number of them, to identify the best person(s) at each college to approach for the survey. The identified person(s) were contacted by email and/or telephone and asked to participate in the survey.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The data collected is presented in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, the data was analyzed, and implications are presented. The data obtained in the survey was utilized to develop an overview of current practices in soft skills development in Michigan's community colleges and best practices are examined. Information and processes identified in the review of the literature are employed to further inform ideas for best practices. In Chapter 6, discussion, conclusions and recommendations are presented, and the model for a community college soft skills program formulated as a result of this study is outlined in detail.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

It was reported by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) that the 1980s were a time of serious questioning of whether there could be reliability and validity in qualitative research, followed by a shift in emphasis to looking at validity in qualitative inquiry as something to be addressed in the evaluation of the research findings rather than in the

research design. In qualitative research, standards and terminology changed and became confusing as researchers tried to establish reliability and validity, often through different standards, and terms like rigor, trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability, among others, entered the vocabulary of qualitative researchers (Morse et al., 2002). Morse et al. (2002) pointed out that research that doesn't have some sort of rigor is useless and, for this reason, reliability and validity should be addressed in qualitative research. They recommended that the terms be maintained, and that qualitative researchers adhere to standards of reliability and validity, though it may look different than those constructs in quantitative research (Morse et al., 2002).

Creswell and Miller (2000) echoed the disagreement about approaches to establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research and the need to address those despite the confusion. They argued that validity in qualitative studies rests more on the quality of the inferences made than on the data collected (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The model they developed to help identify the best approach with which to address validity in a qualitative study is based on the concepts of trustworthiness and authenticity (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Merriam (2009) addressed the issues of reliability and validity in qualitative research by first noting that these constructs related to the integrity of the research differ from practice in quantitative research yet remain important since applied human research is often used to affect policy and practice and can touch peoples' lives on a personal level. That research is conducted in an ethical manner is of utmost importance (Merriam, 2009).

Maxwell (1992) wrote an article that addressed validity in qualitative research, and he stressed that lack of validity makes for untrustworthy results. Maxwell (1992) suggested that

the validity of qualitative inquiry should be viewed in light of the purpose of the research and the situation(s) being addressed. He presented understanding as a more appropriate idea than validity but went on to use the term validity and presented a typology of categories that might be used with various types of qualitative studies (Maxwell, 1992).

If Maxwell's idea of understanding is an analogy for validity, the present study should be assessed as to whether or not the research results demonstrate understanding of the state of soft skills development efforts at Michigan's community colleges. The researcher presents two pieces of evidence that do so. The first is the fact that 23 of 29 community colleges in Michigan responded to the survey and that the colleges responding are diverse geographically and demographically, providing a wide view of practices. The second piece of evidence is the alignment of the review of the literature with the survey findings. The situation across the United States and around the globe is very similar to that found in the Michigan-centric research: most organizations have decided, to one degree or another, that soft skills development is crucial for today's employees and; practices and investment in soft skills development vary widely.

Maxwell (1992) developed a model with five categories of validity related to qualitative research. The first is descriptive validity: are the accounts as recorded factually accurate? It is asserted that, because the facts were gathered from a standard survey that was completed by people who should have knowledge the topic, this study has descriptive validity.

The second construct is interpretive validity: are the facts presented in such a way as to accurately portray the perspective of the participants? Because the survey instrument was a fact-finding instrument more than research on experiences and their meaning, the researcher

contends that this study has interpretive validity. Theoretical validity, the third construct, is described as how well the accounts reflect the theory of a phenomenon. Theoretical validity is asserted for the same reasons as those for interpretive validity.

The fourth construct presented by Maxwell (1992) is that of generalizability, or whether the development of theory for the population studied makes sense for that population, but also whether the same process used in a different situation can lead to different results. The data obtained in the survey can be triangulated with the review of the literature to an extent. The general conclusions of soft skills being important to the community colleges, and the wide range of efforts and commitment, are consistent with the review of the literature, meeting the former standard of this construct. The latter standard of the fourth construct is in effect reliability. Merriam (2009) contended that reliability, or repeatability, is not applicable to qualitative research, but used the word consistency in association with reliability. Consistency is a better term for a study like the present one, and the design of the survey lends itself to consistent results as long as a person with knowledge of a college's curriculum completes the survey. In this case, those completing the survey seem to be in appropriate roles to speak with authority on the subject, making the case for consistency, or reliability if one prefers.

The fifth and last construct of Maxwell (1992) is that of evaluative validity, or the accurate judgment of the situation. In the present study, this would apply to the recommendations for best practices. These recommendations are based on the preponderance of the data. For this reason, the researcher asserts evaluative validity of this study.

RESEARCHER BIAS AND ASSUMPTIONS

The researcher identifies bias in himself in that he is of the opinion that soft skills development is important, and that the community college should play a part in the soft skills training of its student body and community, formally or informally, whenever possible and practical. Because this study was largely a fact-finding exercise, and because recommendations are based on a preponderance of the evidence, the researcher believes his bias and assumptions will not adversely impact the conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to formulate and present a model for community colleges to use in establishing a robust, ongoing soft skills development program. The research conducted assesses the current state of soft skills development at Michigan's community colleges, about which there is a scarcity of available literature. The elements of the soft skills development model presented in this study were grounded in theory informed by the findings of the research of Michigan's community colleges and by best practices found in a review of the literature related to soft skills development efforts in other states and in other institutions.

In this chapter, the researcher has presented the methodology for a qualitative study with a grounded theory research design, presented the survey instrument and plan for presentation of the data and data analysis, and addressed the reliability and validity of the study and researcher bias and assumptions. The study design is well-aligned with the purpose of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to formulate and present a model for community colleges to use in establishing a robust, ongoing soft skills development program. The research conducted assesses the current state of soft skills development at Michigan's community colleges, about which there is a scarcity of available literature. The elements of the soft skills development model presented in this study were grounded in theory informed by the findings of the research of Michigan's community colleges and by best practices found in a review of the literature related to soft skills development efforts in other states and in other institutions.

The research questions addressed in this study were:

1. What are Michigan's community colleges doing to equip and train their students with improved soft skills competencies?
2. What best practices of Michigan community colleges can be identified and used to create a model for a soft skills development program?
3. What best practices can be identified in the review of the literature related to soft skills development in other institutions to inform the soft skills development model?
4. What issues and challenges need to be addressed in the development of a soft skills program?

The data obtained in the research will be presented in this chapter. The information collected regarding each question in the survey will be reported as expressed by the respondents. See Appendix B for the survey instrument.

At least three attempts were made to secure a respondent at each of Michigan's 29 community colleges, 28 public and one tribal. Of the three or more attempts made, at least one phone call was made to a likely administrator to try and solicit input from the college in question. Of the 29 colleges contacted, responses were collected from 23. Some colleges chose to have more than one person respond so that the survey would be answered more fully and accurately. In total, 31 responses were collected from the 23 colleges. In the cases of colleges with multiple respondents, the data were merged for that college.

SURVEY RESPONSES

Question 1: Identifying Information

The 31 respondents were comprised of the following positions:

- Executive, e.g., president, vice president, provost (10);
- Administrative, e.g., dean (13); and
- Faculty, including division chair (8).

Some respondents did not complete the entire survey. Those respondents were contacted by the researcher directly and asked if anything was unclear or difficult to answer. Questions asked by the respondents were answered and they were offered the opportunity to

finish the remaining questions; all but two did so. The responding colleges will be identified as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Colleges Responding to the Survey

PSEUDONYM	URBANICITY	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	POSITION(S) OF RESPONDENT(S)	COMPLETE RESPONSE?
College A	Rural Distant	1	Administrator	Yes
College B	Fringe, Rural	1	Administrator	Yes
College C	Midsized City	1	Administrator	No
College D	Fringe, Rural	1	Administrator	Yes
College E	Small City, Suburb	1	Executive	Yes
College F	Small City	1	Administrator	Yes
College G	Fringe, Rural	1	Executive	Yes
College H	Fringe, Rural	1	Faculty	Yes
College I	Fringe, Rural	1	Executive	Yes
College J	Remote, Rural	1	Executive	Yes
College K	Fringe, Rural	1	Administrator	Yes
College L	Fringe, Rural	1	Executive	Yes
College M	Midsized City	1	Executive	Yes
College N	Small City	2	Administrator (2)	Yes
College O	Large City, Suburb	2	Administrator, Faculty	Yes
College P	Rural Distant	1	Administrator	Yes
College Q	Rural Distant	1	Administrator	Yes
College R	Fringe, Rural	1	Faculty	Yes
College S	Remote, Town	6	Executive (2), Faculty (4)	Yes
College T	Large City	1	Executive	No
College U	Small City	2	Executive (1), Administrator (1)	Yes
College V	Midsized City	1	Faculty	Yes
College W	Small City	1	Administrator	Yes

Notes: Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the colleges. Urbanicity is the degree to which an area is urban (YourDictionary, n.d.). Classification of urbanicity (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019).

Question 2: Does your college provide soft skills development activities to students?

Of the 23 colleges responding, all have something in place to foster the development of soft skills in their students.

Question 3: To whom is soft skills training offered or for whom is it required?

The responses to the multiple-choice portion of the question are presented in Figure 1, followed by additional information and comments.

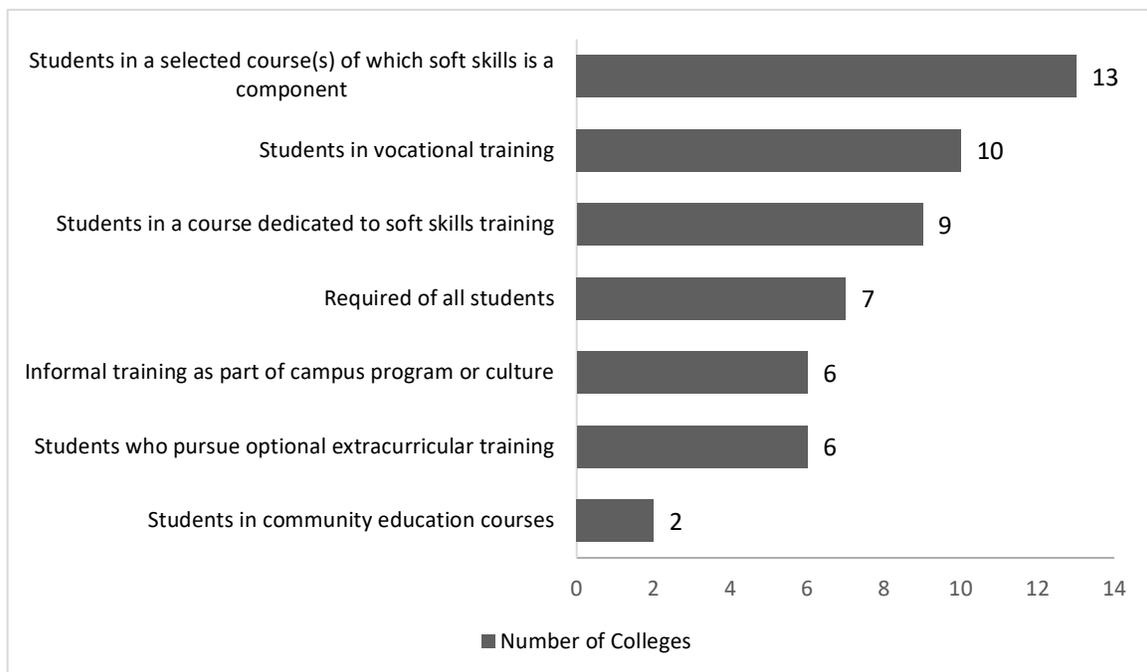


Figure 1. Students to whom soft skills training is offered, or for whom it is required.

The colleges reported using a variety of formats. Some have embedded activities as part of a program or workshop or in selected classes. There are colleges that require a seminar-type course of all certificate or degree students, and one that requires a one-credit workplace professionalism course. Some colleges target soft skills development within a department, for instance, business or English or communications. Others offer soft skills seminars not only for students, but for faculty and staff. The promotion of clubs and activities that foster soft skills

development, such as a women's business club or student senate, are a part of some colleges' strategies to broaden these competencies.

Some colleges have embedded soft skills into the institution's general education outcomes and require incorporation of instruction of various skills into designated courses. One college has identified critical thinking as an institutional outcome, saying, "It is assessed in various ways throughout the programs but must show up somewhere in every program."

At some colleges one will find a college success or student success course, or a first-year experience class used as an avenue to develop stronger soft skills. One college noted that they offer non-credit soft skills classes taught by college employees (this comment was offered as a response to Question 4).

One college reported that optional soft skills training has been offered to vocational students in the past, with little success, so it has changed its approach: vocational instructors are aware of the need for employees to have well-developed soft skills in the workplace and are expected to address those in class when it is appropriate.

Question 4: What curriculum/curricula are used for soft skills training?

Five colleges use soft skills curricula from commercial vendors: four use the textbook *On Course* (Downing, 2014) and one uses *The Hard Truth About Soft Skills* (Klaus, 2008). Nineteen colleges use curriculum custom-designed by the college itself, or some combination of self-designed and elements of commercially-published curriculum.

Question 5: What instructional methods are used?

Figure 2 summarizes the responses to the multiple-choice portion of the question, followed by additional information and comments.

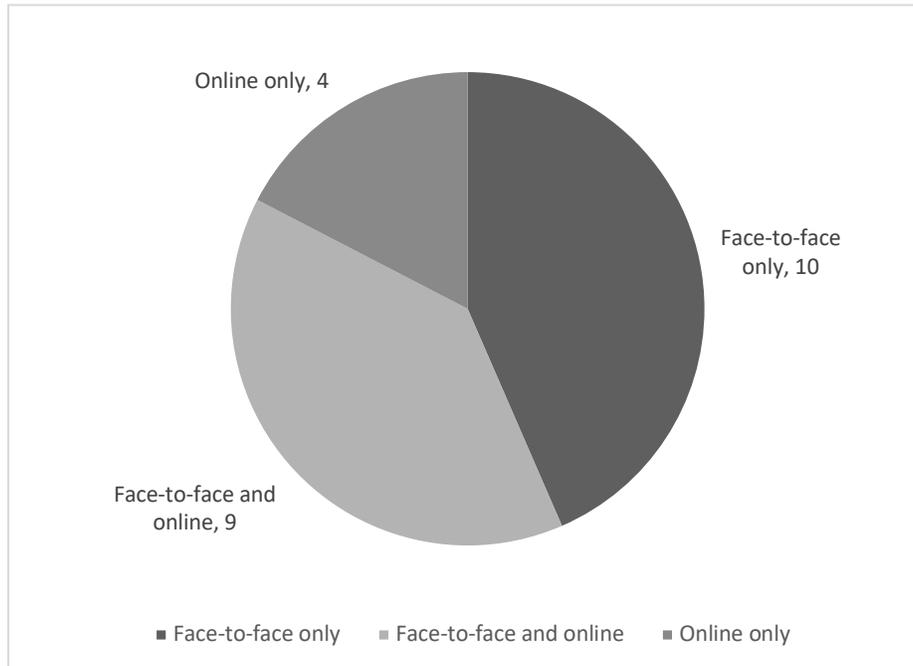


Figure 2. Instructional methods used.

There are ten colleges among the respondents that utilize only face-to-face instruction in soft skills training. There are nine colleges among the 23 responding that use both face-to-face and online instruction and four that use only online tools. One college commented that an attempt is made to incorporate soft skills training into all programs to an extent, and another uses guest speakers to support soft skills development. One college acquired a grant to fund faculty training: all instructors of their seminar courses, which stress soft skills, completed a full workshop related to the text *On Course* and; over 300 of their faculty participated in *On Course* workshops to enable them to reinforce the training given in the college's seminar course. One respondent commented, "Face to face by its nature stresses soft skills."

Question 6: How many students participated in soft skills training in the 2017-2018 school year?

The responses to this question included three colleges who had not tracked the number of students participating, and four who reported that all, or nearly all, of their students received some form of soft skills training. Among the “all” or “nearly all” respondents, it was reported by one that more than 10,000 students received instruction. Another reported that all degree- or certificate-seeking students receive training. Of the colleges providing numbers, the responses ranged from 45 students to over 10,000. One college offering a class centered on soft skills answered, “This is hard because we have soft skills in many of our classes. My specific course which is 100% soft skills taught around 140 students.”

See Table 3 for more detailed information.

Question 7: How many students successfully completed at least one soft skills training program in the 2017-2018 school year?

Of the colleges responding to this question with numbers of students participating in training, three were unable to report how many students completed that training. It was reported by the other colleges providing numbers that most or all were able to complete that training. See Table 3 for more detailed information.

Table 3: Number of Students Who Participated in and Completed Soft Skills Training at Michigan Community Colleges in the 2017-2018 School Year

PARTICIPATED IN TRAINING (QUESTION 6)	COMPLETED THE TRAINING (QUESTION 7)
Unknown	Unknown
Approximately 100	Unknown
45	38
All (10,000)	Impossible to answer
Over 1,000	Over 1,000

PARTICIPATED IN TRAINING (QUESTION 6)	COMPLETED THE TRAINING (QUESTION 7)
55	No response
All degree-seeking	No stand-alone softs skills data as it is part of general education requirements
All enrolled in general education courses	Uncertain
All	All, indirectly
678	556
Approximately 900	Unknown
200	175
Unknown	Unknown
100	75
Unknown	Unknown
Unknown	Unknown
200 First-year experience course plus an unknown number in workshops	Approximately 175 completed the first-year experience course

Question 8: Describe the criteria for a student to successfully complete soft skills training.

The responses to the multiple-choice portion of this question are presented in Figure 3, followed by additional information provided.

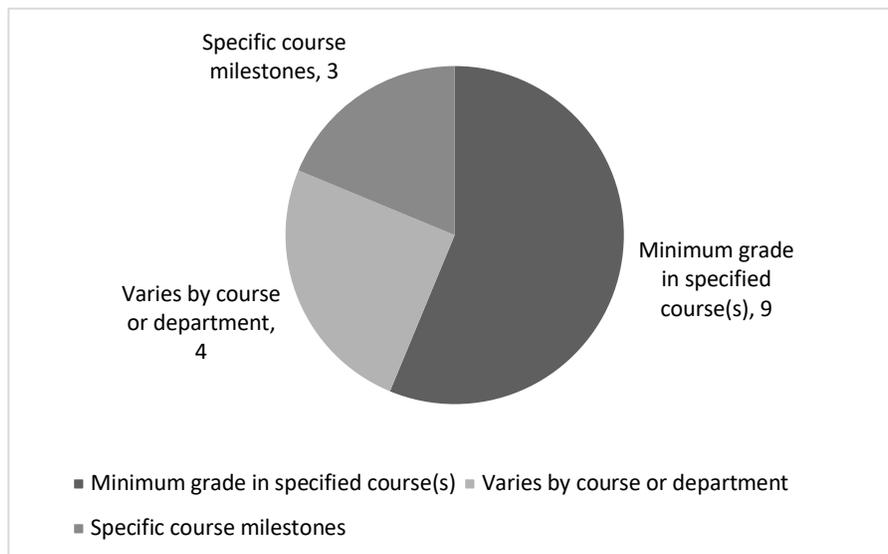


Figure 3. Criteria for successful completion of soft skills training.

Responses to this question were obtained from sixteen colleges. Of those sixteen, nine colleges use a minimum grade in a specified course(s) to judge the successful completion of soft skills training. Four colleges report that completion of soft skills training is assessed in different ways, varying by course or department. Three colleges report that specific course milestones – e.g., attendance, specific assignments, assessments, or presentations, or a combination thereof – are used to judge completion of soft skills training.

Question 9: How are successful trainees recognized or credentialed?

The responses to the multiple-choice portion of this question are shown in Figure 4, followed by additional comments and information provided.

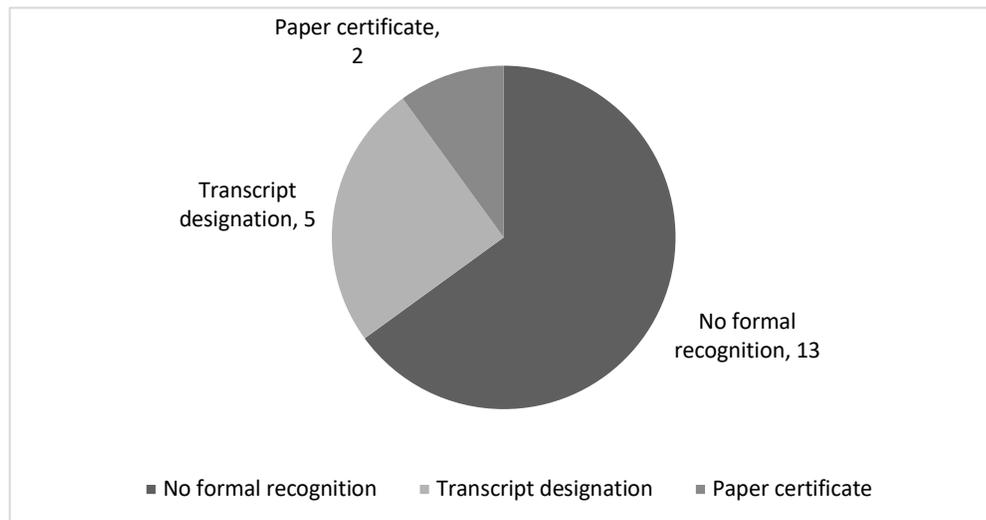


Figure 4. Successful trainee recognition or credential.

Thirteen colleges offer no formal recognition for soft skills training, five provide a transcript designation, and two responded that students who successfully complete soft skills training curriculum are awarded paper certificates. No colleges reported the awarding of electronic badges or publicity such as a local newspaper.

It was reported by one school that it awards both a paper certificate and a transcript designation and communicates with employer partners about students receiving recognition for soft skills development accomplishments. The alumni of some colleges will have a course on the transcript that will, by its title, infer that soft skills training was part of their education; for instance, one college requires a Professionalism class in its business curriculum.

Question 10: How is effectiveness of soft skills training measured?

There were twelve colleges of the 23 responding that make some attempt to measure the effectiveness of their soft skills development activities. Three colleges track employer data and three use student surveys. Two colleges have collected student success data and have determined that a relationship exists between this data and soft skills instruction. Five colleges responded “Other,” and one of those utilizes both employer data and student surveys. One of the “Other” respondents collects assessment results related to soft skills and analyzes those data. The review of journal assignments and pre- and post-test data is used by a responding institution, while another has embedded core soft skills competencies into its learning management system, so they are able to be tracked in that platform. The last college responding to this question has ongoing discussions with employer partners and program advisory boards about the soft skills acumen of their students and alumni.

College W does institutional-level assessments of eight core abilities:

- Communicate effectively;
- Demonstrate creative and/or critical thinking;
- Use technology effectively;
- Use mathematics;

- Manage information;
- Work cooperatively;
- Act responsibly; and
- Demonstrate social and/or cultural awareness.

At least one of these core abilities is addressed and assessed in each course by the collection and evaluation of a related artifact. The college's website lists the core abilities, the courses in which each is addressed and assessed, and the rubric used to assess that core ability.

Question 11: Please share any available data the college has regarding the effectiveness, or return on investment, of its soft skills training initiatives.

College A has compared retention rates of students taking its college success course to those who don't. They report retention rates ranging from 53% to 60% in the years 2011 to 2015 for students who took the course, compared to retention rates from 43% to 47% for those who don't. They have documented similar disparities in persistence rates in the same time frame: those who take the general studies course showed persistence rates between 76% and 83% between 2011 and 2015, while those who didn't take the course had persistence rates ranging between 67% and 70% during the same period.

College R has tracked data considered directly related to the effectiveness of its soft skills training program, delivered through a seminar course focused on soft skills. Data for credit attainment and GPA, comparing students before the implementation of the seminar course and after is reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Student Achievement Data for College R

ACHIEVEMENT MEASURE	2013-2014	2016-2017
Attempted credits completed	33%	47%
Earned fewer than 6 credits	19%	14%
Earned 6-29 credits	43%	46%
Earned 30 or more credits	38%	40%
GPA of 2.0 or higher	60%	66%

Two colleges shared documents regarding specific course content related to soft skills development. One course is a college success course required of all students, with soft skills being a significant unit in the course. The other is a business course required for all business majors and integrates soft skills extensively, under the label “professionalism.”

Question 12: Additional comments regarding your college and soft skills development.

Three colleges communicated a desire to improve what is being done to foster soft skills in their students, with one respondent indicating that his/her college seems slow to respond to this concern while others seem to be moving forward more quickly. Another expressed the touchy nuances of teaching soft skills, saying, “It is a tricky topic. Employers are interested and discuss often, but implementation can be hard and many of the topics are more subjective than the hard skills being taught in vocational classes.” A respondent indicated that soft skills development is a high priority in the college’s business department. Another views soft skills training as being of a type that lends itself to being more serendipitous in nature. In the same vein, one respondent said, “In first-year writing and public speaking... we do have rich discussions about soft skills, without really calling them by that name.” A dislike for the term *soft skills* was stated in one survey response.

A college offering a seminar class with a strong emphasis on soft skills reported that the efforts there began with a one-credit class for developmental students only. The respondent went on to say, "The persistence and credit accumulation data (course takers vs. non course takers) were so compelling that we decided to make this a required course for all new students." There is an effort underway at one college to make the first-year experience class and soft skills workshops required for all new degree-seeking students. One college has in its curriculum a class with an emphasis on soft skills taught by one of the survey respondents. This respondent said, "I believe we need to disperse the curriculum across all courses and departments!"

Question 13: Please share any advice for other colleges related to soft skills training.

One survey respondent said, "Soft skills are extremely important! Don't neglect them!" Another reported that employer partners have identified the need for soft skills competencies. The need for better assessment and faculty training was expressed by two respondents. It was suggested by one survey completer that a way be found to formalize soft skills outcomes and require a certain level of competency for graduation. It was also suggested that soft skills competencies might fit as an outcome for internship experiences, and that the building blocks of soft skills development efforts be incorporated across the curriculum. One respondent said of soft skills, "In the rush to get students into job providing programs, don't forget about them!"

The school with the seminar course and related data considers the eight "inner traits" of the On Course curriculum more foundational than academic skills such as note taking, test

preparation, or writing competency, stating, “If a student can’t say why s/he is in college, or isn’t inclined to go to classes and do assignments, then providing instruction in those academic hard skills may be of little value.” Another respondent got specific: “Experiential learning provides lots of space to teach these skills!”

One respondent provided several considerations in designing soft skills training:

Creating a system for teaching soft-skills can be challenging. Having faculty involvement and commitment is essential for the skills to be truly integrated into the students’ learning as a part of their program versus as a stand-alone concept. This is a large investment by the institution and needs to be appropriately supported both financially and within the culture of the organization. Finding a methodology that builds the skills while not over-burdening faculty, students, or the operational systems is essential.

A respondent from one college offered suggestions covering multiple aspects:

I would recommend a more concerted effort, with faculty discussions on the topic, and assessments tools provided to evaluate or measure increased skill levels. An effort could be made to identify other/all courses that include soft skills training or development.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to formulate and present a model for community colleges to use in establishing a robust, ongoing soft skills development program. The research conducted assesses the current state of soft skills development at Michigan’s community colleges, about which there is a scarcity of available literature. The elements of the soft skills development model presented in this study were grounded in theory informed by the findings of the research of Michigan’s community colleges and by best practices found in a review of the literature related to soft skills development efforts in other states and in other institutions.

Twenty-three of the twenty-nine community colleges in Michigan completed the present survey, with twenty-one of those colleges completing most or all of the survey and two completing a smaller proportion of the questions. A compilation of the responses, including narrative input, was reported.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to formulate and present a model for community colleges to use in establishing a robust, ongoing soft skills development program. The research conducted assesses the current state of soft skills development at Michigan's community colleges, about which there is a scarcity of available literature. The elements of the soft skills development model presented in this study were grounded in theory informed by the findings of the research of Michigan's community colleges and by best practices found in a review of the literature related to soft skills development efforts in other states and in other institutions.

While the picture is not 100% complete, the 23 responses provide a broad look at soft skills development in action at Michigan's community colleges. The sizes of the responding colleges covered a wide spectrum of Michigan institutions, from some of the largest to some of the smallest and many in between. Further, the responding colleges represented urban, suburban, and rural locations, and include colleges with multiple campuses along with those operating mostly within the context of a single campus location.

The survey respondents appeared appropriate to speak to the subject at hand. They included high-level executives, administrative personnel such as deans, and department chairs and faculty. Some colleges had more than one respondent in order to provide a broader picture. There were some responses providing less than a full picture and this should be

acknowledged; two survey respondents indicated that their college provides soft skills training but didn't complete subsequent questions, despite being offered the opportunity to do so in a follow-up contact. There were colleges that answered most, but not all, questions.

The researcher attempted to obtain survey responses from all 29 community colleges in Michigan and responses were garnered from 23 of the 29. The researcher found that all responding colleges have recognized the need to intentionally address soft skills either in selected courses, selected majors, selected departments, or for all students. Certain colleges stood out in regard to the degree of institutional commitment and in the use of data to track outcomes and support soft skills development efforts. The numbers and types of students to whom soft skills training was provided varied by college, as did the numbers of students who were considered to have successfully completed that training.

When comparing the review of literature about soft skills development at Michigan community colleges to that obtained in the survey used in this study, it should be noted that the information in many cases did not match. One reason for this apparent mismatch may be that all opportunities are not published online. However, this might also indicate that survey respondents did not in all cases provide a complete picture of soft skills development at their college. A possible explanation is that one person may simply not be aware of all efforts at one's own college due to the size of the institution or planning being done independently by division or department. Due to the fusion of available literature and the collection of survey information, the researcher feels this report paints the most complete picture to date of soft skills development at Michigan community colleges.

MODEL PRACTICES IN MICHIGAN

Among the colleges participating in the survey, some have been identified as having put into place what can be regarded as best practices. Those schools and their practices are described in this section.

College A

All students at College A are required to take a college success course that utilizes the *On Course* (Downing, 2014) curriculum and the course is set up in a face-to-face instructional model. Students must pass the course with a grade of C or better. College A has been able to show increased retention and persistence rates that correlate with the students who have taken the college success course. Soft skills are addressed in other selected areas such as communications classes and vocational training.

College H

College H serves as a good example of soft skills development in a given department. The business department at College H addresses soft skills intentionally through five avenues:

1. A one-credit business course dedicated to professionalism in the workplace;
2. A business communications course in which one of three modules is dedicated to soft skills;
3. A department initiative focused on professionalism across the curriculum;
4. Encouraging involvement in clubs, such as Women in Business, that address soft skills; and
5. Seminars on professionalism open to all students, faculty, and staff.

The business department at College H conducted research, identified goals and objectives, and is developing its own curriculum.

College M

Soft skills are considered part of College M's Common Degree Outcomes. All associate degree graduates are considered to have fulfilled the Common Degree Outcomes by meeting the college's general education requirements. The fact that soft skills are embedded in the college's common outcomes indicates the importance of these skills to the college.

College N

Soft skills are objectives in College N's general education requirements, and the college offers non-credit soft skills classes as well. Students may earn paper certificates and/or a transcript designation, depending on the course. Soft skills outcomes are assessed at both the course level and the program level.

College R

Hundreds of faculty members were trained at College R through the *On Course* (Downing, 2014) program to foster and facilitate soft skills development. A required course was instituted that addresses soft skills and is required of all degree-seeking students. The course has progressed from a one-credit course to a three-credit course based on documented student gains in achievement. The college tracks retention rates, credit accumulation, and GPA, and the data demonstrate the difference made by its soft skills work. The same college uses the *On Course* (Downing, 2014) text to deliver a consistent, longstanding, well-reviewed curriculum.

This appears to be the best comprehensive commitment and effort regarding soft skills development among Michigan's community colleges. Many other colleges have strong pieces in place, but there is no peer among respondents in the collection of data or in the resources committed to assisting student growth in the area of soft skills.

College W

College W has identified eight core abilities, the development of which are distributed across every course in the college's degree programs. The eight core abilities, of which five would be classified as soft skills, are:

1. Communicate effectively;
2. Demonstrate creative and/or critical thinking;
3. Use technology effectively;
4. Use mathematics;
5. Manage information;
6. Work cooperatively;
7. Act responsibly; and
8. Demonstrate social and/or cultural awareness.

Skills are intentionally taught based on faculty design with at least one of the core abilities embedded in each course. Student competency in the core abilities is measured in two ways: faculty evaluation at the course level and; faculty reviewer groups evaluate randomly-chosen student artifacts through rubrics developed by the college. This is an example of another exceptionally strong institutional commitment to develop the soft skills of all students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Placement in the Curriculum

It is clear that the message from employers that soft skills competency is crucial for future employees is being heard by Michigan's community colleges. At some colleges, all students are touched by soft skills training when soft skills are embedded in the college's general education outcomes or courses. On the other hand, some colleges report soft skills development as being something informal to be fostered by campus culture and through limited classroom expectations, rather than a comprehensive, intentional effort designed to reach all students.

A majority of Michigan community colleges responding to the survey incorporate soft skills training as part of certain designated courses, so it is part of the curriculum, sometimes in selected programs and sometimes within the general education requirements. Vocational programs are an area of soft skills focus for almost half the colleges, and approximately 40% of the colleges have a soft skills-dedicated course. There is not a common statewide practice for choosing which students receive training or which departments or programs are involved.

The wider review of the literature indicates that leaders at community colleges and other institutions and organizations outside of Michigan have judged soft skills development to be equally critical. The placement of soft skills development efforts nationwide and worldwide varies widely by institution as well, although there are examples of broader initiatives in place. The community college systems in the states of California, Missouri, New Hampshire, and Washington have established statewide initiatives for soft skills development (Community College System of New Hampshire, 2017; Missouri Community College Association, 2017;

Nelson, 2016; Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2017).

Seventeen community colleges in one region of Kansas have banded together to identify needs and do common planning (Project 17, 2017). The State of Michigan does not have a governing board for its collective community colleges, so a statewide effort would have to be a collaborative, self-directed effort.

The call from employers for increased soft skills acumen among workers and job applicants suggests that an effort should be made to reach every student, based on the importance of these skills and the vital position of the community college as a provider of future workers. After reviewing the current practices of Michigan's community colleges and the wider review of the literature, it is recommended that a first-year experience or college success course be required for all students, with soft skills development comprising a significant portion of course content. This recommendation is based primarily on the measurable improved academic outcomes reported by Michigan Colleges A and R, in the form of increased retention and persistence rates, credit accumulation, and grade-point average.

The I-BEST program in Washington found that students who reached what was termed the Tipping Point – the completion of one year of college and at least one other credential – provided a measurable return on investment for their employers (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2017) and improved academic outcomes for students (Advance CTE, n.d.). The conclusion of the Washington Board of Community and Technical Colleges (2017) was that soft skills instruction should be introduced as early as possible. If soft skills interventions lead to increased retention and persistence, then it stands to reason that

the positioning of those interventions early in a student's academic career will in turn lead to benefits for employers later.

It is further recommended that targeted soft skills development be sequenced and placed in appropriate places in every program of study, based on the research of Hirsch (2017), Carter (2011), and de Villiers (2010), with more sophisticated soft skills competencies introduced as the student progresses further in his or her curriculum. Carter (2011) cautions that courses dedicated to soft skills only tend to be unpopular with students.

The integration of opportunities outside the classroom – such as internships, mentoring, and co-op – should be given full consideration given the measurable positive outcomes reported by some institutions (Cowie, 2003; Davidson County Community College, 2017; DiBiasio, 2016; Ohio Northern University, 2017; Year Up, 2017).

Content Design

Fifteen of Michigan's community colleges use some form of internally-designed curriculum. An advantage of this approach is that knowledge of the local culture and labor market allows the college to craft a curriculum that can be more fully aligned with local needs. The *On Course* text authored by Skip Downing (2014) is the most common commercial curriculum cited; four of the five colleges purchasing curriculum from a commercial vendor used this text. The colleges not using a commercially-available curriculum have developed their own at either a course or departmental or institutional level.

There are some advantages to using a resource such as *On Course* (Downing, 2014). The curriculum will be well-defined and consistent from year-to-year and instructor-to-instructor.

The text is written specifically for college students and has been in print for over twenty years, being currently in its 8th edition. The author's credentials are strong: he was a community college instructor who studied counseling psychology to learn how to help students perform to their potential in the classroom (On Course Workshop, 2018). Colleges across the nation have provided data showing improved outcomes in retention, success, and persistence, and more than 100,000 students per year are using it (On Course Workshop, 2018). The text has a self-assessment embedded at the beginning and the end that may help students identify areas of strength and areas in need of growth (Downing, 2014). It is a tool that a student may keep and to which she or he may refer in the future after using the book formally in the classroom.

The limitations that cost might impose on a college may lead it to look at a self-designed model, or to seek out low- or no-cost models. The *Skills to Pay the Bills* curriculum developed by the U.S. Department of Labor (2017) is a free downloadable tool designed for ages 14-21. The soft skills addressed in this resource are:

- Communication;
- Enthusiasm and attitude;
- Teamwork;
- Networking;
- Problem solving and critical thinking; and
- Professionalism.

The book contains hands-on activities that are designed to be engaging to the targeted age group, with five activities for each of the soft skills. The document is easily accessible online

and may be downloaded by anyone. The expenses involved would be printing, any associated materials an institution decides to use, and institutional time and human resources.

It is recommended that in designing a college success or first-year experience course with a strong soft skills element, a text like *On Course* (Downing, 2014) or *Skills to Pay the Bills* (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017) be considered. Higher-level courses with fewer, more targeted soft skills components would be more appropriate places for self-designed curriculum.

Instructional Approach

The face-to-face approach to soft skills instruction is the most-utilized among Michigan's community colleges. Ten colleges use primarily face-to-face instruction in the delivery of soft skills curriculum and four use primarily online instruction. There are nine colleges that use both methods. The review of the wider literature supports face-to-face and active learning approaches for soft skills instruction (Charoensap et al., 2016; Connolly & Reinicke, 2017; Nealy, 2005; Ritter et al., 2017).

It is recommended that soft skills instruction have a strong face-to-face component. As one survey respondent said, "Face to face by its very nature stresses soft skills." This approach is supported by Georges (1996). It would seem that the cultivation of interpersonal skills would be best done interpersonally, yet it should be acknowledged that there may be additional costs in human resources when providing training to all students in a face-to-face setting. This may be an indication that a cross-curriculum effort is desirable, with some soft skills related to colleges success embedded in a first-year experience or student success course, and other

elements as part of course work in general education and in each program of study. This would disperse the time and human resources required.

The review of the literature identified active learning approaches as most desirable in soft skills training and that soft skills training requires time and practice (Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016; Connolly & Reinicke, 2017; Crosbie, 2005; Nealy, 2005; Nunn, 2013; Ritter et al., 2017; Yorke & Knight, 2006). It seems that listening and understanding are not enough to maximize soft skills growth; time and interactive opportunities must be provided.

Assessment of Student Learning

The earning of a certain grade in a course in which soft skills is a major or a minor component is the most common method reported among Michigan's community colleges to judge soft skills competence in a student. This does not ensure that a student has mastered those skills. It may be a less-than-ideal measure by which to make such a judgment but if the course, or a significant portion of it, is dedicated to soft skills instruction, that may be the most convenient and sensible method. This method might fit best in the first-year experience or college success course.

An interesting example from another state was that of students earning a credential by having multiple instructors sign off on a student meeting specified soft skills benchmarks (M. Kennamar, personal communication, July 6, 2017). The fact that this credential was optional and extracurricular resulted in a very small number of students pursuing and earning the credential. It is suggested for consideration that an improvement on this credential-earning

process could be an assignment near the end of a class dedicated to soft skills, with a heavy weight on that assignment's grade – perhaps even used as a final exam grade.

All measures of soft skills competency should be the result of aligning soft skills goals and objectives with course activities and outcomes. The researcher further recommends that these goals and objectives and measures of competency be developed by a cross-divisional team so that practices on campus meet the needs of many and are supported by faculty and staff.

Credentials and Recognition

Formal recognition and credentialing of soft skills competencies has not gained much traction among Michigan community colleges; 13 of 20 colleges responding to this question give no formal recognition or credential. A potential employer may or may not see a student's transcript, and a student would need to find a way to bring a paper certificate to the attention of a potential employer. It would be ideal for an employer to know that any graduate of a given community college had to attain a certain level of competency in soft skills. This would require communication and publicity initiatives by the college, and a reputation would have to be built over time. Some colleges do communicate with, and receive input from, partners in business and industry regarding soft skills training. These partnerships, through advisory boards, for instance, can go a long way in making employers aware of efforts at the college, and in informing practice at the college.

The review of the literature provided information on the Mozilla Open Badges Initiative (Mozilla, 2018) and an effort by the Seattle Jobs Initiative (Pritchard, 2013), to name two. One

problem encountered with the latter is that few local employers were aware of the organization's credential. It is clear that for a credential to be effective, employers must know of it and understand what it tells them about a future employee. There are concerns about the potential for fraud with credentials (Moltz, 2014).

The practices in Michigan seem to fall in line with the wider literature review, despite efforts by companies like Mozilla to develop platforms for soft skills credentials. The researcher suggests that formal recognition or credentialing is not necessary. Students who exhibit soft skills will likely perform better at job interviews and on the job and should be able to tell a potential employer about her or his soft skills training.

Evaluation of Program Effectiveness

Measures of the effectiveness of soft skills training should be established and used consistently to ensure goals and outcomes are in alignment (Nunn, 2013). The ability to document real positive change will provide the proof needed to justify the support and funding necessary to sustain a program (Wilson-Ahlstrom et al., 2014; Henville, 2012). The indicators used to measure effectiveness should be identified before designing the curriculum in order to foster efficiency and relevance of the curricular material (Redford, 2007). This practice, also called "backwards design," is supported by Ritter et al. (2017). It should be noted that one study reported that a faculty-designed assessment tool facilitated stronger faculty investment in the program (Ingols & Shapiro, 2014).

The best models found among Michigan community colleges for the measurement of the effectiveness of soft skills training are those of two colleges that show student academic

achievement gains attributed to soft skills instruction. One college tracked retention, credit accumulation, and GPA as they instituted soft skills training and showed significant gains in those measures that correlated with the new training. Another college tracked retention and persistence rates of students taking a college success course and showed a correlation between those measures and students who completed the class. The researcher holds these two examples up as best practices found in the state of Michigan for others to emulate.

In the wider review of the literature, there were other American community colleges tracking similar measures to the aforementioned Michigan colleges that track retention, credit accumulation, and GPA. Other methodologies for measuring soft skills training effectiveness included pre- and post-training surveys, commercially-available instruments such as the ACT Tessera (ACT, Inc., 2017b), or internally-designed assessment instruments. As in Michigan, there is no widespread consistency in practice. One commercial data tool worth consideration is Emsi, which allows the tracking of the employment of college alumni (Emsi, 2017).

In the interest of generating measurable data that is easily accessible, the measurement of retention, credit accumulation, and GPA is the recommendation of the researcher.

OTHER COMMENTS AND ADVICE

Among the comments and advice offered by survey respondents, a few are worth mentioning again. More than one survey respondent warned against neglecting the soft skills and the wider review of the literature revealed that the soft skills are a nationwide and worldwide topic of importance.

It was said by one respondent that teaching soft skills is “tricky” and that soft skills can be seen as more subjective and nuanced. Colleges have found ways to quantify gains related to soft skills instruction, with retention, credit accumulation, and GPA tracking being more objective ways to measure the effectiveness of soft skills development efforts. One college found the objective data so compelling that their soft skills-focused course progressed from one credit to two credits to its current three credits.

The review of the literature yielded examples of soft skills being an intentional part of the organization-wide culture and some were able to cite data showing a correlation to these efforts and improved outcomes for the organization’s students or employees (Cascade Engineering, 2017; Chen, 2018; Fain, 2012; Kettering University, 2017; KIPP, 2017). Kotter (1995) cautioned that not having behaviors rooted in an organization’s culture and values can contribute to the failure of new initiatives.

A point made by one of the survey respondents is extremely important: the commitment and involvement of faculty is crucial if soft skills development efforts are going to facilitate positive change on a widespread basis. The activation of a cross-divisional committee can lay the groundwork for involving faculty across the college. Faculty may need training in soft skills teaching strategies (Ritter et al., 2017) and will need to stay abreast of new developments in soft skills needs (de Villiers, 2010). Hampson (2008) reported that top-down initiatives have a history of failure, reinforcing the need for faculty engagement.

When putting into place new programs, a concern likely to arise is cost. Wagenheim (2016) pointed out that more interactive training methods typically incur higher costs. There may be costs involved in training those who will facilitate soft skills development (Nattur

Technical Training Foundation, 2017). One avenue for funding that might be underutilized is that of grants (Dutton, 2017). There are federal grants being used regularly by colleges to improve technical skills, but soft skills have been successfully written in as a portion of grant proposals; for example, Missouri colleges were able to successfully obtain grants that were written to improve both technical and soft skills (Missouri Community College Association, 2017). Corporate sponsors exist to whom colleges can look for partnership and financial support, such as the Hewlett Foundation, which has been supporting what they term “deeper learning” since 2010 (Hewlett Foundation, 2017). The New World of Work soft skills program in California is funded by the community college chancellor’s office (Nelson, 2016) and open enrollment soft skills classes in New Jersey are funded by the state’s Business and Industry Association (Bergen Community College, 2017).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to formulate and present a model for community colleges to use in establishing a robust, ongoing soft skills development program. The research conducted assesses the current state of soft skills development at Michigan’s community colleges, about which there is a scarcity of available literature. The elements of the soft skills development model presented in this study were grounded in theory informed by the findings of the research of Michigan’s community colleges and by best practices found in a review of the literature related to soft skills development efforts in other states and in other institutions.

The number of responses obtained from colleges provides a wide view of practices in Michigan. The respondents were in positions to provide relevant and accurate information. These facts indicate that a quality picture has been painted of the state of soft skills development in Michigan's community colleges.

All responding colleges identified soft skills as important enough to put in place a culture, activities, and/or courses to foster the development of stronger soft skills. While there are variations in the numbers of students affected, placement in curriculum, types of content and resources, and instructional approaches, the identified need is not being ignored.

The establishment of effective measurement of student progress or success, and the effectiveness of the training provided, is in varying stages of development, with some colleges providing detailed objective data such as student retention, credit accrual, and grade-point average; some colleges are able to cite measures that are only loosely tied to soft skills competency, such as grades in classes that contain elements of soft skills as a small part of a course's content. The latter situation is closer to the norm for the majority of colleges.

At this time, Michigan's community colleges are largely "inventing the wheel" independently in regard to soft skills training. This study brings together the most comprehensive report of efforts currently underway in the state.

This list is a summary of the researcher's recommendations formulated in this study for the soft skills development of community college students:

- Placement of soft skills instruction in the curriculum
 - A required first-year experience or college success course early in the academic career, with basic soft skills development activities being part of the course content

- More advanced soft skills competencies addressed in targeted courses as the student progresses through the curriculum
- Maximize opportunities for internships, co-op, and mentorships
- Content design
 - A text such as *On Course* (Downing, 2014) or content such as *Skills to Pay the Bills* (U.S. Department of Labor, 2017) in the first-year experience or college success course
 - Custom-designed soft skills curriculum in subsequent coursework
- Instructional approach
 - Strong face-to-face component utilized when possible
 - Active learning approaches utilized when possible
- Assessment of Student Learning
 - First-year experience or college success course: course grade
 - Subsequent courses: significant soft skills assignment toward the end of the course
 - Soft skills goals and objectives should be designed by the committee before content and approach are determined
- Credentials and recognition
 - Formal recognition not necessary
 - Student will reap ongoing personal benefits from improved soft skills, and the ability to demonstrate strong soft skills will speak for itself to employers
- Evaluation of program effectiveness
 - Evaluation metrics identified by the committee before content and approach are determined
 - Suggested metrics are retention rates, credit accumulation, and grade-point average
- Other
 - Soft skills should be integrated into the organizational culture
 - Faculty play a crucial role in planning and executing the plan
 - Explore options to offset additional costs, such as grants, corporate partners, and governmental and educational agencies

It is hoped that the recommendations offered in this chapter and the new framework presented in the next chapter will provide useful to community colleges in Michigan and in other states to implement or improve soft skills training efforts.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to formulate and present a model for community colleges to use in establishing a robust, ongoing soft skills development program. The research conducted assesses the current state of soft skills development at Michigan's community colleges, about which there is a scarcity of available literature. The elements of the soft skills development model presented in this study were grounded in theory informed by the findings of the research of Michigan's community colleges and by best practices found in a review of the literature related to soft skills development efforts in other states and in other institutions.

This study is believed to present the most comprehensive picture to date of the soft skills development initiatives of Michigan's community colleges. Further, the review of the literature was widened to examine the history and practices of other organizations related to soft skills development; this served the purpose of complementing the sample of Michigan colleges and informing the creation of a model for planning or improving a soft skills initiative.

It is clear from the review of the literature that employers around the world have identified soft skills as critical competencies in their employees. Business and industry have reported that these skills are often lacking in today's job applicants. Employees with strong soft skills can positively impact productivity and efficiency and increase their own chances of

advancement. There is no shortage of employers and managers who have identified soft skills as a necessary aspect of hiring and occupational success.

Soft skills are competencies that can be developed in those willing to learn and the community college is a key player in today's job market supply chain. The American Association of Community Colleges (2018) reported that there are 1,103 community colleges in the United States with a total enrollment of more than 12 million students, and that over 800,000 associate degrees and over 500,000 certificates were awarded in the 2016-2017 school year. This amounts to a significant portion of the current and future workforce. If employers report the need for employees with stronger soft skills, the community college must be a part of the solution. Organizations with a desire to foster growth in soft skills must have an intentional, realistic plan and the right resources in place to effectively cultivate stronger soft skills.

A framework is presented in this chapter for developing, improving, and maintaining a community college soft skills program. The hope of the researcher is that this framework will give community colleges in Michigan and beyond a head start when addressing the soft skills development of its students.

DISCUSSION

When soft skills development efforts of community colleges outside of Michigan, at other institutions and organizations, and around the world are compared to those of Michigan's community colleges, there are many similarities. One of the similarities is the fact that there is wide variance in practice. Some organizations provide training that is optional, some to selected students or employees, and some to all students or employees. The curricula used for soft skills

training are varied, as are instructional methods and placement in the curriculum. Trainee assessment and recognition come in several forms. The evaluation of soft skills training effectiveness exists in different forms or may be nonexistent. The norm is that there isn't a norm.

It should be recognized that implementing a soft skills program is no small task and is not without its challenges. As one survey respondent said,

Creating a system for teaching soft skills can be challenging. Having faculty involvement and commitment is essential for the skills to be truly integrated into the students' learning.... This is a large investment by the institution and needs to be appropriately supported both financially and within the culture of the organization. Finding a methodology that builds the skills while not over-burdening the faculty, students, or the operational systems is essential.

How can community colleges, with limited resources, afford to create or grow programs? Can they afford not to, if it is in the best interests of students and if they are to stay relevant to employers? Colleges seeking to implement or expand soft skills training should exhaust all avenues of support – such as business and industry partners, governmental agencies, private donors, and foundations – as well as examine the college budget for possible reallocation of resources in order to create effective and robust programs to help students better prepare for today's workforce.

A MODEL FOR A COMMUNITY COLLEGE SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The practices of Michigan's community colleges and the available literature and reports of practices from across the United States and around the world have been considered and used to formulate a grounded theory framework for a community college seeking to establish or improve a plan to develop strong soft skills in its students. Figure 5 serves as a graphic

representation of the key components of this model. A key feature of this model is the circular design of the four key components, illustrating the ongoing work that must be done to foster a strong and relevant program.

A Grounded Theory Model for the Soft Skills Development of Community College Students

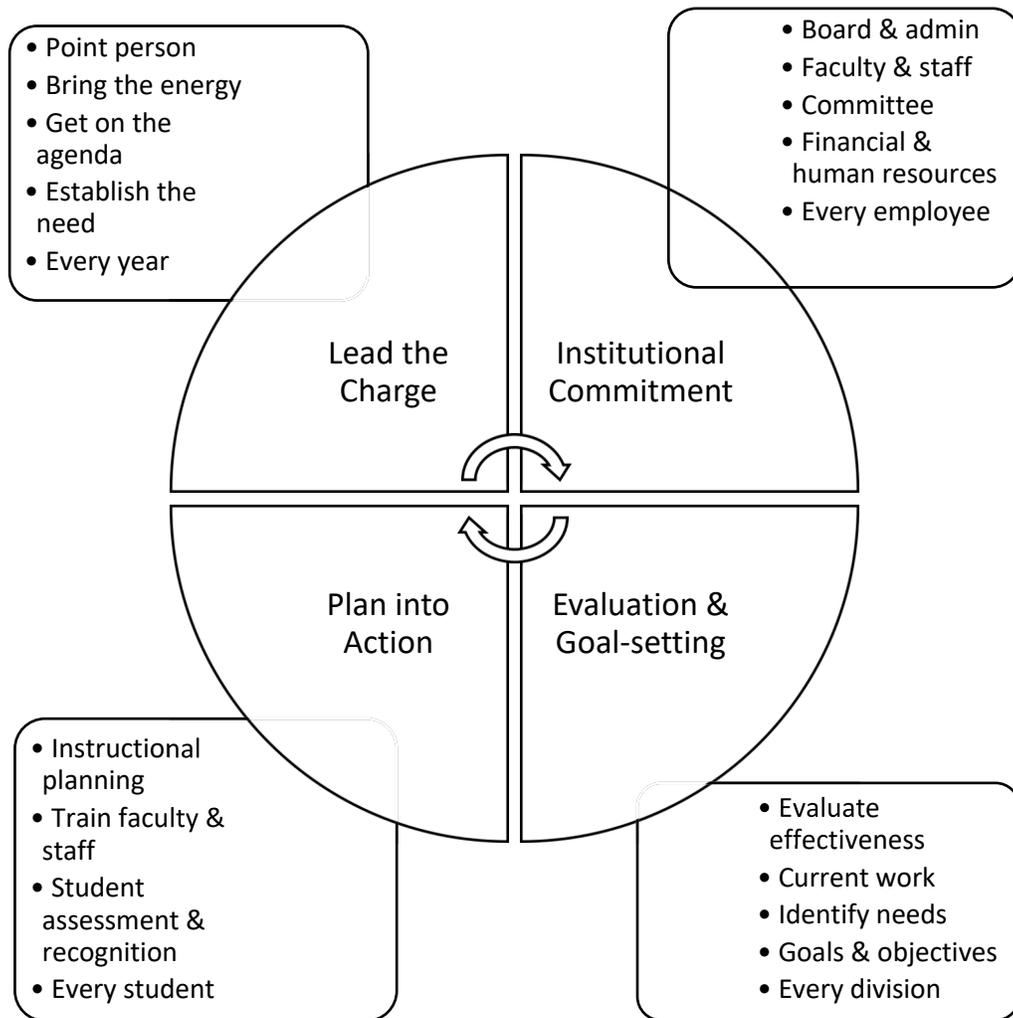


Figure 5. A grounded theory model for the soft skills development of community college students.

Lead the Charge

Someone at the college needs to be the champion of the cause and share with, and gain support from, the board, administration, faculty, and staff. This champion should be clearly identified as the point person, charged with driving the college's soft skills initiative from year to year. Rather than being a person to whom the task is delegated in the spirit of an "other duties as assigned" chore, this person should be a believer in the importance of soft skills in the workplace and in society and be willing and able to energetically spearhead the process on an ongoing basis. The point person should have access to the college's leadership team and be able to get on the agenda for planning and goal-setting.

Kotter (1995) cited several factors that can short-circuit the success of new initiatives, including a lack of vision, lack of support, lack of a plan, weak leadership, and skipping steps in the process. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) found that leadership is the second most important factor in student learning, next to teaching, and is instrumental in creating the conditions for teachers to be successful. New Leaders (2018) put it this way: "Leadership changes everything" (p.1) and elaborated by sharing their findings that effective leadership structures are essential in school improvement.

A key trait of the point person is the ability to effectively make a case for the need for soft skills being a crucial component of the college's curriculum. The leader of the charge must stay current with the literature and best practices. The point person should ensure that the soft skills curriculum is a part of the college's planning on an annual basis. The leader of soft skills development will need to be a well-organized, respected, dynamic individual in order to bring others on board, help everyone navigate change, and keep the program vital moving forward.

Institutional Commitment

Just as companies like Cascade Engineering have committed significant resources to the development of employee soft skills, the community college should prioritize soft skill development and make the financial and human resources commitments necessary to boost students' prospects for academic and future employment success. The case should be made for soft skills to be a part of the college's strategic plan, for sufficient training and funding to be budgeted, and for the requisite time and human resources to be dedicated to this part of the curriculum. Grants should be explored when possible to help with the financial challenges of implementing a new program.

The effort to foster strong soft skills must include college-wide planning and an understanding and commitment from all faculty and staff that these skills overlap into all coursework and all interactions with the college and correlate to increased student academic and occupational success. The key stakeholders must see this as a part of the college's culture and curriculum. Tierney (2006) described higher education as tending towards an internally-focused mindset that can be resistant to change and might benefit from more interaction with people and organizations outside of its walls. He suggested that a key leadership quality in shepherding effective change in higher education is that of finding ways to make those walls more penetrable by increased interaction with, and an increased responsiveness to, the wider community (Tierney, 2006). The college should begin by forming a committee of administrators and faculty from across divisions, with advisory members from local business and industry to generate support and provide timely perspective on employer needs.

Faculty, most often being the point of direct contact with students, are critical to the success or failure of a new initiative. Russell (2016) found that keys to transformation in one state's community colleges was the development of a shared vision and values and buy-in on the part of stakeholders on the frontlines of change: the faculty. In a study of the effects of teacher leadership on change, the evidence indicated that students learn more when teachers are involved in decision making (New Teacher Center, 2017). O'Banion (1997) asserted that faculty must be involved as agents if higher education is to experience fundamental change. The support and investment of faculty may make or break a soft skills initiative.

The demonstration of soft skills should be evident in the board, the president, the faculty, the bookstore staff, the custodial staff, work-study employees, and everyone else representing the college. It should be a way of life, part of the fabric of the campus and its employees. If the faculty and staff aren't modeling strong soft skills, the message to students is that these skills are not truly important. The college should work on incorporation of the soft skills competencies into the college's strategic plan and a framework should be put in place that prepares faculty and staff to be a part of a campus-wide culture of excellent soft skills.

Evaluation and Goal-setting

The committee should stay abreast of current literature and local and global employer expectations and develop a list of crucial soft skills competencies. The committee members should also monitor best practices used by other colleges and organizations to foster soft skills development. The next step is to identify all places in the college's curriculum that each of these competencies are being addressed already, which students receive that instruction, and

how the skills are developed and assessed. Once existing efforts are compared to desired outcomes, an overarching structure of goals and objectives should be established and shared with all stakeholders.

To monitor the effectiveness of the soft skills program in general, or specific components, markers of success should be identified and tracked. The college should track measurable metrics such as retention, credit accumulation, and student grade-point average. This is especially important as the process begins, so that the data can be used to support the continuation and even expansion of soft skills training initiatives. If available, the tracking of students' ratings on soft skills by their employers through internships, cooperative education, or traditional employment are valuable tools to track the effectiveness of the soft skills program as a whole and to identify specific areas for improvement.

Plan into Action

Instructional Planning

After the establishment of the college's soft skills goals and objectives, the detailed plan and its implementation must be formulated. The college will need to decide where the soft skills development activities fit into its curriculum, which content and delivery methods will be used, how to train faculty and staff, and how to assess and recognize students. The cross-divisional committee should be maintained for this part of the endeavor.

The researcher recommends the delivery of key soft skills development efforts early in a student's college career and placed in such a way as to touch every student. A required first-year experience or college success class has proven to be a successful vehicle for some colleges.

A required course does not have to be designed for soft skills alone. Certain competencies may be well-suited to student success in college in general and may best fit in freshman-level classes. Leadership competencies might belong later in the course sequence once students have learned more basic skills and are ready for skills that require more sophisticated thinking and maturity. Some skills may fit better in a communication class and others may fit best in a management class.

Programs offered through community education and workforce development classes can be used to reach wider populations of those in the college's sphere of influence, and the workforce side cannot be ignored, as illustrated by the fact that in 2016-2017 over 500,000 certificates were awarded by American community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018). Academic departments should make professionalism a part of every program, embedding soft skills suitable to their subject area and reinforcing those covered in a first-year experience or college success class.

Based on Georges' (1996) definition, colleges should think in terms of training for proficiency rather than just knowledge. Face-to-face instruction should be a key component whenever possible as soft skills seem best fostered by practice and modeling. Many of the soft skills are interpersonal in nature, so awareness or knowledge obtained online may or may not transfer to behavior. It is for this reason that the researcher believes that in-person education and high-impact practices outside of the classroom, such as internships, are highly desirable.

Train Faculty and Staff

A curriculum for faculty and staff such as *On Course* (Downing, 2014) or *Capturing Kids Hearts* (Flippen Group, 2016) can be a critical piece in establishing a new culture of soft skills as

part of the fabric of college culture. In the case of Michigan's "best practice" college, a large grant was obtained to provide training for hundreds of faculty members in the *On Course* (Downing, 2014) curriculum, a clear indication of a college-wide commitment to the development of soft skills.

Faculty must be knowledgeable about, and demonstrate, soft skills competencies. They must understand effective instructional methods and they must understand the importance of soft skills to employers, employees, and the society in general. The cross-divisional committee, with faculty representation, is instrumental in developing that culture and those skills.

Student Assessment and Recognition

The researcher suggests that, in the context of a college success or first-year experience course, an assignment or final exam be utilized to assess student soft skills competencies. The assignment should be worth a significant portion of the course grade and the expectations should be made clear from the first day of class. The assignment could be modeled after Northeast Alabama Community College's (M. Kennamar, personal communication, July 6, 2017) soft skills certificate, for which students must gather evaluations of different soft skills from different faculty and staff on campus.

The options for student recognition include transcript designations and electronic badging, but these approaches don't seem to be gaining a lot of traction at the time of this report. There would be a question as to how many employers look carefully enough at a student's college transcript and would see that sort of designation. It may be in the graduate's best interest to incorporate information about learning and ability to use soft skills in his or her

resume or curriculum vita. Credentials that can be loaded into a platform such as LinkedIn might prove useful and contribute to additional momentum for electronic badges.

CONCLUSIONS

The researcher recommends a point person be identified to lead the soft skills initiative and keep these efforts in the forefront every year. For a soft skills program to be successful, there must be buy-in by the administration, the board, and faculty and other staff; it must become part of the culture of the college, and part of its budget. A cross-divisional committee should lead the way in goal setting, program design, and monitoring the effectiveness of soft skills instruction based on carefully-crafted objectives.

The researcher recommends a first-year experience or college success course for all first-year degree-seeking students, with integrated units addressing soft skills competencies related to college and career success. Learning should be experiential and interactive in nature. Each academic department should develop a plan to incorporate the higher-level or more-specialized skills in a way that reaches all students as they progress to higher-level courses.

The language and curriculum of soft skills should be common and planned to support directly the desired soft skills outcomes. Students should be readied to share their soft skills accomplishments and progress in the job application letter, the résumé, and the job interview.

The researcher offers the model shown in Figure 5 as a representation of the process of building and improving a soft skills program at a community college, with an emphasis on this being a circular model based on continuous improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

It would be helpful to study soft skills efforts of community colleges outside of Michigan in more detail to see what may be learned about initiatives in place that are not published at this time. There may be a lot to learn that the researcher was not able to find in the review of the literature or in the study of Michigan's community colleges. It would also be useful to learn more about other elements related to soft skills development:

- How do colleges foster institutional commitment at all levels?
- What are successful soft skills initiative funding models?
- What are successful practices in spearheading successful soft skills initiatives?
- How is faculty training best accomplished?

A great deal of information might be gained by more in-depth interviews with colleges having soft skills development initiatives in place. Conversations about the history of a college's soft skills program, its successes and failures, and connections to others with more information to offer might prove to bring more specificity to the model and save time in designing and implementing programs. It may be that intentionally targeting for research vocational education programs at community colleges would bring to light even more valuable information on soft skills development, as most of the input obtained in this study seems to be from academic divisions.

Another useful area of future study would be a thorough investigation of whether there is in existence a solid model for the assessment of student soft skills that is cost-effective and

functional for a community college. The same sort of exploration might help identify a strong design for program evaluation.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to formulate and present a model for community colleges to use in establishing a robust, ongoing soft skills development program. The research conducted assesses the current state of soft skills development at Michigan's community colleges, about which there is a scarcity of available literature. The elements of the soft skills development model presented in this study were grounded in theory informed by the findings of the research of Michigan's community colleges and by best practices found in a review of the literature related to soft skills development efforts in other states and in other institutions.

A comprehensive grounded theory model for a community college soft skills program has been presented and is exhibited in Figure 5. It is hoped that the findings of this study and the model presented for soft skills development will help community colleges cultivate in their students these qualities modeled so well by the researcher's mother-in-law and so in demand by today's employers. May it also solidify the researcher's position as favorite son-in-law, a coveted and always hotly-contested title in the family.

REFERENCES

- ACT, Inc. (2017a, July 15). Career Ready 101 · ACT Career Curriculum. Retrieved July 15, 2017, from <http://www.keytrain.com/careerready101.asp>
- ACT, Inc. (2017b, November 4). ACT Tessera - Social and Emotional Learning. Retrieved November 4, 2017, from ACT website: <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/act-tessera/methodology.html>
- Adecco Staffing, USA. (2013, September 23). Lack of soft skills negatively impacts today's U.S. workforce. Retrieved July 3, 2017, from Adecco website: <https://www.adeccousa.com/about-adecco-staffing/newsroom/press-releases/lack-of-soft-skills-2013/>
- Adhvaryu, A., Kala, N., & Nyshadham, A. (2017). The skills to pay the bills: Returns to on-the-job soft skills training (p. 77). Retrieved from University of Michigan, Harvard University, Boston College website: https://www.dropbox.com/s/5o9lx0gsjvsgcg1/PACE_june2017.pdf?dl=0
- Adroit Learning & Manpower. (2017, July 17). Soft Skills. Retrieved July 17, 2107, from Adroit Learning & Manpower website: <http://www.adroittrainers.in/soft-skills.htm>
- Advance CTE. (n.d.). Washington: Integrated Basic Education Skills Training (I-BEST) | Advance CTE. Retrieved March 3, 2019, from <https://careertech.org/resource/washington-i-best>
- Amer, B. (2008). Soft skills at work: Technology for career success (1st ed.). In *New Perspectives* (1st ed.). Course Technology.
- American Association of Community Colleges. (2018). Fast Facts. Retrieved from AACC website: <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/research-trends/fast-facts/>
- American Association of Community Colleges. (2019). Community College Finder. Retrieved from American Association of Community Colleges website: <https://www.aacc.nche.edu/college-finder/>
- Andreas, S. (2018). Effects of the decline in social capital on college graduates' soft skills. *Industry and Higher Education*, 32(1), 47–56. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950422217749277>
- Andrews, J., & Higson, H. (2008). Graduate Employability, 'Soft Skills' Versus 'Hard' Business Knowledge: A European Study. *Higher Education in Europe*, 33(4), 411–422. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03797720802522627>

- Ash, K. (2012a, June 13). Colleges use “digital badges” to replace traditional grading. *Digital Directions*. Retrieved from http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2012/06/13/03badges-s1.h05.html?qs=digital+badges+inmeta:Cover_year%3D2012
- Ash, K. (2012b, June 13). “Digital badges” would represent students’ skill acquisition. *Digital Directions*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2012/06/13/03badges.h05.html?r=1947988313&print=1>
- Asnuntuck Community College. (2012, May 15). *Soft Skills for a Digital Workplace*. Retrieved November 4, 2017, from Asnuntuck Community College website: <https://asnuntuck.edu/course/soft-skills-for-a-digital-workplace/>
- Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. (2017). *Eligibility procedures and accreditation standards for business accreditation*. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. (2012). *Understanding by Design® framework*. Retrieved from https://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/publications/UbD_WhitePaper0312.pdf
- Balcar, J. (2016). Is it better to invest in hard or soft skills? *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 27(4), 453–470. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1035304616674613>
- Baron, L., & Morin, L. (2010). The impact of executive coaching on self-efficacy related to management soft-skills. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 31(1), 18–38. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437731011010362>
- Barrington, L., Wright, M., & Casner-Lotto, J. (2006). Are they really ready to work? Employers’ perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 12th century U.S. workforce (p. 64).
- Beard, D., Schwieger, D., & Surendran, K. (2008). Integrating soft skills assessment through university, college, and programmatic efforts at an AACSB accredited institution. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 19(2), 229–240.
- Benjamin, R., & Carroll, S. J. (1996). Impediments and imperatives in restructuring higher education. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 32(Supplemental), 705–719.
- Bergen Community College. (2017, November 4). *Bergen Community College - NJBIA Funded Open Enrollment Soft Skills Classes*. Retrieved November 4, 2017, from <http://bergen.smartcatalogiq.com/en/2016-2017/Fall-Continuing-Education/Business-and-Industry/NJ-Community-College-Consortium-for-Workforce-and-Economic-Development/NJBIA-Funded-Open-Enrollment-Soft-Skills-Classes>

- Berry, P. (2009). Redesign of the undergraduate business curriculum: The way forward, a paradigm shift. *American Journal of Business Education*, 2(8), 55–64.
- Boyatzis, R. E., Stubbs, E. C., & Taylor, S. N. (2002). Learning cognitive and emotional intelligence competencies through graduate management education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 1(2), 150–162.
- Boyatzis, Richard E. (2008). Competencies in the 21st century. *The Journal of Management Development*, 27(1), 5–12.
- Bradberry, T., & Greaves, J. (2009). *Emotional intelligence 2.0*. San Diego, CA: TalentSmart.
- Cappelli, P. H. (2015). Skill Gaps, Skill Shortages, and Skill Mismatches: Evidence and Arguments for the United States. *ILR Review*, 68(2), 251–290.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793914564961>
- CareerBuilder. (2014, April 10). Overwhelming majority of companies say soft skills are just as important as hard skills, according to a new CareerBuilder survey. Retrieved June 29, 2017, from <http://www.careerbuilder.com/share/aboutus/pressreleasesdetail.aspx?ed=12/31/2014&id=pr817&sd=4/10/2014>
- Carter, L. (2011). Ideas for adding soft skills education to service learning and capstone courses for computer science students. Presented at the SIGCSE '11, Dallas, TX. Retrieved from <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=1953312&prelayout=flat>
- Cascade Engineering. (2017, August 2). Cascade Engineering. Retrieved August 2, 2017, from <http://www.cascadeng.com/>
- CASEL. (2018, March 29). CASEL. Retrieved March 29, 2018, from <https://casel.org/>
- CBS. (2016, May 3). CBS News. In Do you have the “grit” it takes to succeed? Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/psychologist-angela-duckworth-book-grit-the-power-of-passion-and-perseverance/>
- Charoensap-Kelly, P., Broussard, L., Lindsly, M., & Troy, M. (2016). Evaluation of a soft skills training program. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 79(2), 154–179.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490615602090>
- Chen, G. (2018, April 27). Workplace Readiness Skills to Be Graded at N.C. Community College. Retrieved June 28, 2017, from CommunityCollegeReview.com website:
<https://www.communitycollegereview.com/blog/workplace-readiness-skills-to-be-graded-at-n-c-community-college>
- Cherniss, C., & Goleman, D. (2001). *The emotionally intelligent workplace: How to select for, measure, and improve emotional intelligence in individuals, groups, and organizations*.

Retrieved from https://www.amazon.com/Emotionally-Intelligent-Workplace-Intelligence-Organizations/dp/0787956902/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1522335422&sr=8-1&keywords=the+emotionally+intelligent+workplace

CNBC Make It. (2018). Jenny Blake on why active listening is an important leadership trait [YouTube]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2WPXKIfVSU>

Colorado State University. (2017, May 23). Online soft skills training courses. Retrieved May 23, 2017, from Goodwill Industries of Denver's Soft Skills for Employment website: https://www.online.colostate.edu/badges/essential-soft-skills/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=8-esse-170215-cpc-google&gclid=CLS_kcHihNQCFQMcaQodb8sAlw

Community College System of New Hampshire. (2017, July 17). WorkReadyNH. Retrieved July 17, 2017, from Community College System of New Hampshire website: <http://www.ccsnh.edu/workforce-training/workready-nh>

Community College Workforce Alliance. (2017, November 4). Are there gaps in your workforce plan? Retrieved November 4, 2017, from <http://ccwatraining.org/are-there-gaps-in-your-workforce-plan/>

Conference Board, Inc., The partnership for 21st century skills, corporate voices for working families, & the society for human resource management. (2006). Are they really ready to work? Employers' perspectives on the basic knowledge and applied skills of new entrants to the 21st century U.S. workforce. Retrieved from http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/FINAL_REPORT_PDF09-29-06.pdf

Connolly, A. J., & Reinicke, B. (2017). How to teach emotional intelligence skills. *Information Systems Education Journal*, 15(4), 4–16.

Côté, S., & Miners, C. T. H. (2006). Emotional Intelligence, Cognitive Intelligence, and Job Performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 51(1), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.51.1.1>

Cowie, G. (2003). The importance of people skills for project managers. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 35(6/7), 256–258.

Creswell, J., & Miller, D. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124–130.

Crosbie, R. (2005). Learning the soft skills of leadership. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 37(1), 45–51. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00197850510576484>

- Culpin, V., & Scott, H. (2012). The effectiveness of a live case study approach: Increasing knowledge and understanding of 'hard' versus 'soft' skills in executive education. *Management Learning*, 43(5), 565–577. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507611431530>
- Davidson County Community College. (2017, June 28). Community college emphasizes soft skills through real world projects. Retrieved June 28, 2017, from <https://www.davidsonccc.edu/news/community-college-emphasizes-soft-skills-through-real-world-projects>
- Davis, B. D., & Muir, C. (2004). Learning soft skills at work: An interview with Annalee Luhman. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 67(1), 95–101. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1080569903261973>
- Dayton, E. (2017, July 13). Understanding soft skills.
- de Villiers, R. (2010). The incorporation of soft skills into accounting curricula: preparing accounting graduates for their unpredictable futures. *Meditari Accountancy Research*, 18(2), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10222529201000007>
- Deming, D. J. (2015). The growing importance of social skills in the labor market [Working Paper]. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w21473>
- Devedžić, V., & Jovanovic, J. (2015). Developing open badges: A comprehensive approach. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 63(4), 603–620. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-015-9388-3>
- DiBiasio, D. (2016, September 3). Dr. Daniel DiBiasio: Preparing students for workplace success. *The Lima News*. Retrieved from <http://limaohio.com/opinion/columns/201289/dr-daniel-dibiasio-preparing-students-for-workplace-success>
- Downing, S. (2014). *On course: Strategies for creating success in college and in life* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.
- Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (1 edition). New York: Scribner.
- Dutton, G. (2017, May 23). Taking Soft Skills for Granted? | Training Magazine. Retrieved May 23, 2017, from <https://trainingmag.com/content/taking-soft-skills-granted>
- Eastern Florida State College. (2017, June 28). Core scholar program. Retrieved June 28, 2017, from <http://www.easternflorida.edu/academics/core-scholar/>
- Eastwood, B. (2018, February 24). Soft skills, partnerships needed to bridge economic divide - MIT Sloan School of Management. Retrieved February 24, 2018, from

<http://mitsloan.mit.edu/newsroom/articles/soft-skills-partnerships-needed-to-bridge-economic-divide/>

- Eggleston, M. (2014, July 21). Millennials need soft skills training. Retrieved March 5, 2017, from Training Industry website: <https://www.trainingindustry.com/blog/blog-entries/millennials-need-soft-skills-training.aspx>
- Ellis, M., Kisling, E., & Hackworth, R. G. (2014). Teaching Soft Skills Employers Need. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 38(5), 433–453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2011.567143>
- Emsi. (2017, August 1). Alumni Insight: Changing the World of Tracking Outcomes & Engaging Alumni. Retrieved August 1, 2017, from Emsi website: <http://www.economicmodeling.com/alumni-insight/>
- Fain, P. (2012, December 13). Grading personal responsibility. Retrieved June 28, 2017, from Inside Higher Ed website: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/12/13/nc-community-college-issue-grades-certificates-soft-skills>
- Fallows, S., & Steven, C. (2000). Building employability skills into the higher education curriculum: A university-wide initiative. *Education & Training; London*, 42(2/3), 75–83.
- Fede, J. H., Gorman, K. S., & Cimini, M. E. (2018). Student Employment as a Model for Experiential Learning. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 41(1), 107–124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825917747902>
- Flippen Group. (2016, August 16). Flippen Group. Retrieved March 31, 2018, from Flippen Group website: <https://flippengroup.com/>
- Flowers, S. M. (2016). Folkehøjskole: A Scandinavian model can help our students succeed in college. *The New England Journal of Higher Education*.
- Fong, B. (2004). Looking forward: Liberal education in the 21st century. *Association of American Colleges & Universities*, 90(1). Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/looking-forward-liberal-education-21st-century>
- Fong, J., Janzow, P., & Peck, K. (2016). Demographic Shifts in Educational Demand and the Rise of Alternative Credentials (p. 24).
- Freifeld, L. (2013). Bridging the skills gap. *Training*, (Mar-Apr 2013). Retrieved from <https://trainingmag.com/trgmag-article/bridging-skills-gap>
- Fulghum, R. (2014). All I Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten: Uncommon Thoughts on Common Things.
- Georges, J. C. (1996). The myth of soft-skills training. *Training*, 33(1).

- Georgia Department of Labor. (2017, July 18). GeorgiaBEST. Retrieved July 18, 2017, from Georgia Department of Labor website: <https://dol.georgia.gov/georgiabest>
- Gibson, W. J., & Brown, A. (2009). *Working with Qualitative Data*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Gillespie, L. (2012). Workplace culture: Targeting soft skills yields hard returns for employers. *Employee Benefit News*, 26(5), 18.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Goleman, Daniel. (2004). What makes a leader? *Harvard Business Review*, 82–91.
- Goleman, Daniel, & Boyatzis, R. E. (2017). Emotional intelligence has 12 elements. Which do you need to work on? *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2017/02/emotional-intelligence-has-12-elements-which-do-you-need-to-work-on>
- Grand Canyon University. (2018). Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching. Retrieved November 24, 2018, from Qualitative Approaches website: https://cirt.gcu.edu/research/developmentresources/research_ready/qualitative/approaches
- Habacon, A. E. (2017, May 23). Soft skills training for newcomers & internationally trained professionals. Retrieved May 23, 2017, from Alden E. Habacon website: <http://www.aldenhabacon.com/soft-skills-training-for-newcomers/>
- Hampson, I. (2008). Skills and training: Reflections on a recent British contribution to current debates. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 19(1), 129–144.
- Haywood Community College. (2017, November 4). Soft Skills. Retrieved November 4, 2017, from <https://www.haywood.edu/learning-support-services/learning-strategies-handbook/soft-skills>
- Henville, N. (2012). Hard vs soft skills training. *Training Journal*, 41–44.
- Hewlett Foundation. (2017, July 14). Deeper learning. Retrieved July 14, 2017, from Hewlett Foundation website: <http://www.hewlett.org/strategy/deeper-learning/>
- Higher Engineering Education Alliance. (2017, July 18). HEEAP faculty applying soft skills in teaching. Retrieved July 18, 2017, from <https://heep.org/news/heep-faculty-applying-soft-skills-teaching>
- Hirsch, B. J. (2017). Wanted: Soft skills for today's jobs. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 98(5), 12–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721717690359>

- Hurrell, S. A. (2016). Rethinking the soft skills deficit blame game: Employers, skills withdrawal and the reporting of soft skills gaps. *Human Relations*, 69(3), 605–628.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726715591636>
- Ingols, C., & Shapiro, M. (2014). Concrete steps for assessing the “soft skills” in an MBA program. *Journal of Management Education*, 38(3), 412–435.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562913489029>
- Jackall, R. (1983). Moral mazes: bureaucracy and managerial work. *Harvard Business Review*, 61(5), 118–130.
- Jones, M., Baldi, C., Phillips, C., & Waikar, A. (2016). The hard truth about soft skills: What recruiters look for in business graduates. *College Student Journal*, 50(3), 422.
- J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development. (2017, April 14). Bleckley 4-H SHAPES students learn leadership, soft skills from Fanning faculty. Retrieved July 18, 2017, from J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development website:
<https://www.fanning.uga.edu/bleckley-4-h-shapes-students-learn-leadership-soft-skills-fanning-faculty/>
- Kang, Y., & Ritzhaupt, A. D. (2015). A Job Announcement Analysis of Educational Technology Professional Positions: Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 43(3), 231–256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239515570572>
- Kentucky Workforce Investment Board. (2017, July 3). Kentucky Work Ready Communities. Retrieved July 3, 2017, from Kentucky Work Ready Communities website:
<http://www.kwib.ky.gov/workreadyresources.htm>
- Kettering University. (2017, July 15). Kettering University. Retrieved July 15, 2017, from <https://www.kettering.edu/about>
- Khasanzyanova, A. (2017). How volunteering helps students to develop soft skills. *International Review of Education*, 63(3), 363–379. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-017-9645-2>
- KIPP. (2017, July 19). KIPP. Retrieved July 19, 2017, from KIPP website:
<http://www.kipp.org/schools/>
- Kirkpatrick Partners. (2017, August 2). The Kirkpatrick Model. Retrieved August 2, 2017, from Kirkpatrick Partners website: <http://www.kirkpatrickpartners.com/Our-Philosophy/The-Kirkpatrick-Model>
- Klaus, P. (2008). *The Hard Truth About Soft Skills: Workplace Lessons Smart People Wish They’d Learned Sooner* (1 edition). New York, NY: HarperBusiness.

- Kollinger, J. (2017, June 28). How community colleges can close the soft skills training gap. Retrieved June 28, 2017, from <https://www.eab.com/research-and-insights/community-college-executive-forum/expert-insights/2017/health-care-training-gap>
- Kotter, J. P. (1995). *Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail*. Harvard Business Review.
- Kurtinitis, S. L. (2018). Driving the workforce. *Community College Journal*, 89(3).
- Laker, D. R., & Powell, J. L. (2011). The differences between hard and soft skills and their relative impact on training transfer. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 22(1), 111–122. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.20063>
- Laredo Community College. (2017, November 4). Laredo Community College: Soft Skills Suite - Product Detail. Retrieved November 4, 2017, from <https://www.ed2go.com/laredo/online-courses/soft-skills-suite?tab=detail>
- Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How Leadership Influences Student Learning. Review of Research*. The Wallace Foundation, Five Penn Plaza, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10001.
- Lynda.com. (2017, July 18). Learn a new skill online, on your time. Retrieved July 18, 2017, from Lynda.com website: <https://www.lynda.com/>
- Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide*. Retrieved from <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/Qualitative%20Research%20Methods%20-%20A%20Data%20Collector%27s%20Field%20Guide.pdf>
- Matsouka, K., & Mihail, D. M. (2016). Graduates' employability: What do graduates and employers think? *Industry and Higher Education*, 30(5), 321–326. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950422216663719>
- Matteson, M., Anderson, L., & Boyden, C. (2016). "Soft Skills": A Phrase in Search of Meaning. *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 16(1), 71–88.
- Maxwell, J. (1992). Understanding and Validity in Qualitative Research. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(3), 279–300.
- McClelland, D. C. (1973). Testing for competence rather than for "intelligence." *American Psychologist*, 28(1), 1–14. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.ferris.edu/10.1037/h0034092>
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Midlands Technical College. (2017, March 5). Soft skills and the workplace. Retrieved March 5, 2017, from Midlands Technical College website: <http://www.midlandstech.edu/student-resources/student-employment-services/soft-skills-and-workplace>
- Missouri Community College Association. (2017). Community Colleges: The key to bridging the gaps in Missouri's workforce. Retrieved from <https://www.mccatoday.org/assets/Workforce%20Report.pdf>
- Moltz, B. (2014, September 15). Are resumes going the way of the dinosaur? Retrieved July 17, 2017, from American Express OPEN Forum website: <https://www.americanexpress.com/us/small-business/openforum/articles/are-resumes-going-the-way-of-the-dinosaur/>
- Morgan, G., & Adams, J. (2009). Pedagogy first: Making web-technologies work for soft skills development in leadership and management education. *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*, 20(2), 129–155.
- Morse, J., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification Strategies for Establishing Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), 13–22.
- Mozilla. (2018, April 5). About Open Badges. Retrieved April 5, 2018, from Open Badges website: <https://openbadges.org/about/>
- Mt. Hood Community College. (2017, March 24). MHCC adult high school diploma program to provide national soft skills training bootcamp. Retrieved May 23, 2017, from Mt. Hood Community College website: <https://www.mhcc.edu/03242017/>
- National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2015). Job Outlook 2016: The Attributes Employers Want to See on New College Graduates' Resumes (p. 45). Retrieved from National Association of Colleges and Employers website: <http://www.naceweb.org/career-development/trends-and-predictions/job-outlook-2016-attributes-employers-want-to-see-on-new-college-graduates-resumes/>
- National Soft Skills Association. (2017, May 23). Welcome to the National Soft Skills Association. Retrieved May 23, 2017, from National Soft Skills Association website: <http://www.nationalsoftskills.org/research-publications/>
- National Work Readiness Council. (2017, July 14). National work readiness council. Retrieved July 14, 2017, from National Work Readiness Council website: <http://www.workreadiness.com/>
- Nattur Technical Training Foundation. (2017, July 18). Faculty development: Training of trainer (TOT). Retrieved July 18, 2017, from NTTTF website: <http://www.nttftg.com/corporate-training/faculty-development-centre.html>

- Nealy, C. (2005). Integrating soft skills through active learning in the management classroom. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*, 2(4), 1–6.
- Nelson, A. (2016, December 8). Community college soft skills program scales to meet growing employer demand. Retrieved May 23, 2017, from California Economic Summit website: <http://caeconomy.org/reporting/entry/community-college-soft-skills-program-scales-to-meet-growing-employer-deman>
- New Leaders. (2018). Prioritizing Leadership: An Analysis of State ESSA Plans. Retrieved from New Leaders website: [https://eric.ed.gov/?q=prioritizing+leadership+an+analysis+of+state+essa+plans+new+eaders&id=ED591503](https://eric.ed.gov/?q=prioritizing+leadership+an+analysis+of+state+essa+plans+new+leaders&id=ED591503)
- New Teacher Center. (2017). School Leadership Counts. Retrieved from New Teacher Center website: <https://p.widencdn.net/dgpbke/School-Leadership-Counts-Brief>
- Nieswiadomy, R. M., & Bailey, C. (2017). Qualitative Research Designs. In *Foundations of Nursing Research* (7th ed.). Retrieved from <http://health.prenhall.com/nieswiadomy/pdf/NIESWIADOMY10.pdf>
- Northwest Mississippi Community College. (2014, June 3). Northwest collaborates with area business leaders. Retrieved June 28, 2017, from Northwest Mississippi Community College website: <http://www.northwestms.edu/index.php/?p=9514>
- Nunn, R. (2013, November 22). More on the Soft Skill Deficiencies of College Graduates. Retrieved March 5, 2017, from Workforce Solutions Blog | St. Louis Community College website: <http://workforcesolutions.stlcc.edu/2013/time-soft-skill-deficiencies-college-graduates/>
- O'Banion, T. (1997). *A learning college for the 21st century* (1st edition). Phoenix, Ariz: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Ogeechee Technical College. (2011). Governor's Workforce Development Town Hall Series. Retrieved July 18, 2017, from Ogeechee Technical College website: <http://www.ogeecheetech.edu/student-organizations?id=439>
- Ohio Northern University. (2017, March 19). ONU on top. Retrieved July 1, 2017, from Ohio Northern University website: http://www.onu.edu/front/onu_on_top
- On Course Workshop. (2018). On course workshop. Retrieved from On Course Workshop website: <http://oncourseworkshop.com>
- Overcomer Consulting LLC. (2017, May 24). Soft skills training for college students. Retrieved May 24, 2017, from <http://www.overcomerconsulting.com/>

- Paul D. Camp Community College. (2017, November 4). Soft Skills. Retrieved November 4, 2017, from Paul D. Camp Community College website: <https://www.pdc.edu/workforce-development/soft-skills/>
- Pazhani, S. S., & Priya, T. S. (2012). Need for soft skills development towards management efficiency. *International Journal of Management Research and Review*, 2(11), 1895–1901.
- Phillips, J. J., Phillips, P. P., & Ray, R. (2015). Derive hard numbers from soft skills: It is possible to measure the impact and ROI of soft skill programs. *TD Magazine*, 69(9). Retrieved from <https://www.td.org/Publications/Magazines/TD/TD-Archive/2015/09/Derive-Hard-Numbers-from-Soft-Skills>
- Pine, J., & Tingley, J. C. (1993). ROI of soft-skills training. *Training*, 30(2), 55.
- Pritchard, J. (2013). The importance of soft skills in entry-level employment and postsecondary success: Perspectives from employers and community colleges. Retrieved from Seattle Jobs Initiative website: </paper/The-Importance-of-Soft-Skills-In-entry-level-employment-pritchard-Kaz/d345fa4980172b772479ccc6bfd80c0f4068ff7d>
- Project 17. (2017, July 2). Improve “soft skills” of workforce. Retrieved July 2, 2017, from TWS Project 17 website: <http://www.twsproject17.org/get-connected/education-workforce/improve-soft-skills-of-workforce/>
- Pulaski Technical College. (2017, June 28). Soft Skills. Retrieved June 28, 2017, from http://www.uaptc.edu/career_services/soft-skills
- Purdue University. (2018, April 5). Welcome to Passport. Retrieved April 5, 2018, from Passport website: <https://www.openpassport.org/Account/Login?ReturnUrl=%2f>
- Redford, K. (2007, July 17). How to measure the impact of soft skill training. Retrieved from Personnel Today website: <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/how-to-measure-the-impact-of-soft-skills-training/>
- Ritter, B. A., Small, E. E., Mortimer, J. W., & Doll, J. L. (2017). Designing management curriculum for workplace readiness: Developing students’ soft skills. *Journal of Management Education*, 1052562917703679. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562917703679>
- Roane State Community College. (2017, November 4). Soft Skills. Retrieved November 4, 2017, from <https://www.roanestate.edu/?10933-Soft-Skills>
- Robles, M. M. (2012). Executive perceptions of the top 10 soft skills needed in today’s workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(4), 453–465. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1080569912460400>

- Rowthorn, V., Olsen, J., & Hirshon, J. M. (2014). Introduction. *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics*, 42(2 suppl), 5–8. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jlme.12181>
- Russell, J. T. (2016). *Coordinated Transformation among Community Colleges Lacking a State System*. ProQuest LLC.
- Saddleback College. (n.d.). 21st Century Skills. Retrieved from <https://www.saddleback.edu/counseling/21st-Century-Skills>
- Schulz, B. (2008). The importance of soft skills: Education beyond academic knowledge. *Journal of Language & Communication*. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0006-3207\(93\)90452-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0006-3207(93)90452-7)
- Shuman, L. J., Besterfield-Sacre, M., & McGourty, J. (2005). The ABET “professional skills” - Can they be taught? Can they be assessed? *Journal of Engineering Education*, 94(1), 41–55.
- Smith, James. (2016, December 13). Sentimentality in Medical Professionalism. Retrieved August 2, 2017, from Reflective MedEd website: <https://reflectivemeded.org/2016/12/13/sentimentality-in-medical-professionalism/>
- Sri Lankan Aviation College. (2017, July 17). Faculty of soft skills & corporate training. Retrieved July 17, 2017, from Sri Lankan Aviation College website: <http://www.srilankanaviationcollege.com/aviation-professional-training/faculty-of-soft-skills-and-corporate-training>
- Sullivan, F. M. (2013). New and alternative assessments, digital badges, and civics: An overview of emerging themes and promising directions [Working Paper]. Retrieved from The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement website: https://civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/WP_77_Sullivan_Final.pdf
- Tate, E. (2017). Liberal arts college tries new approach to teaching soft skills. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/01/30/liberal-arts-college-tries-new-approach-teaching-soft-skills>
- Tierney, W. G. (2006). The Changing Nature of Organizational Leadership and Culture in Academic Work. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 1(1), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1177/194277510600100114>
- Tobak, S. (2016, September 6). Why employers are facing a “soft skills” gap. Retrieved October 10, 2016, from FOXBusiness website: <http://www.foxbusiness.com/features/2016/09/06/why-employers-are-facing-soft-skills-gap.html>
- Tupes, E. C., & Christal, R. (1992). Recurrent Personality Factors Based on Trait Ratings. *Journal of Personality*, 60(2), 225–251. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1992.tb00973.x>

- University of Iowa. (2018, March 29). Leadership Studies Certificate. Retrieved March 29, 2018, from <https://careers.uiowa.edu/students/leadership-certificate>
- U.S. Department of Labor. (2017, June 28). Skills to pay the bills - mastering soft skills for workplace success. Retrieved June 28, 2017, from <https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/>
- Virginia Highlands Community College. (2017, November 4). Building Soft Skills Through Experiential Learning. Retrieved November 4, 2017, from <http://www.vhcc.edu/faculty-staff/qep/our-process-/proposal-1-building-soft-skills-through-experiential-learning>
- Wagenheim, J. (2016). There's nothing soft about these skills. Ed. Magazine, (Winter). Retrieved from <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/ed/16/01/theres-nothing-soft-about-these-skills>
- Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. (2017, July 14). Integrated basic education skills training (I-BEST). Retrieved July 14, 2017, from <https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/programs-services/i-best/default.aspx>
- White, E. R., & Crawford, A. M. (2018). First-Generation Workers in Indian Country. *Tribal College Journal of American Indian Higher Education*, 29(3).
- Whitehurst, G. J. "Russ." (2016a). Hard thinking on soft skills. Retrieved from Brookings Institution website: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/hard-thinking-on-soft-skills/>
- Whitehurst, G. J. "Russ." (2016b, June 9). More on soft skills: Time to Flit the grit. Retrieved October 22, 2017, from Brookings website: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/more-on-soft-skills-time-to-flit-the-grit/>
- Wilcox, L. (2015, July 6). Emotional intelligence is no soft skill. Retrieved July 30, 2017, from Harvard Division of Continuing Education Professional Development website: <https://www.extension.harvard.edu/professional-development/blog/emotional-intelligence-no-soft-skill>
- Wilhelm, W. J., Logan, J., Smith, S. M., & Szul, L. F. (2002). Meeting the demand: Teaching "soft" skills. Retrieved from Delta Pi Epsilon website: <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=soft+skills+gap&pg=2&id=ED477252>
- Wilson-Ahlstrom, A., Yohalem, N., DuBois, D., Ji, P., Hillaker, B., & Weikart, D. P. (2014, January 22). From soft skills to hard data: Measuring youth program outcomes. Forum for Youth Investment.
- Wonderlic. (2017, May 23). Competency matters. Retrieved May 23, 2017, from Competency Matters website: <http://www.wonderlic.com/wonderlic-education-solutions/course-and-program-mastery/soft-skills>

Wyner, J. S. (2014). *What Excellent Community Colleges Do: Preparing All Students for Success*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press.

Year Up. (2017, July 14). Year Up. Retrieved July 14, 2017, from Yearup website:
<http://www.yearup.org/>

Yorke, M., & Knight, P. T. (2006). Embedding employability into the curriculum. The Higher Education Academy.

YourDictionary. (n.d.). Urbanicity. In YourDictionary. Retrieved from
<https://www.yourdictionary.com/urbanicity>

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



Date: July 24, 2018

To: Sandra Balkema

From: Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair

Re: IRB Application for Review

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, "Soft Skills Development at Michigan Community Colleges" and determined that it does not meet the Federal Definition of research on human subjects, as defined by the Department of Health and Human Services or the Food and Drug Administration. This project does not meet the federal definition of research on human subjects because the study objectives and the questionnaire attempt to determine the characteristics and deployment of curricula for a given college. The unit of analysis is the college and not the individual; the student does not meet the individual level definition for human subjects. As such, approval by the Ferris IRB is not required for the proposed project.

This determination applies only to the activities described in the submission; it does not apply should changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities are research involving human subjects, submit a new request to the IRB for determination. This letter only applies to Ferris IRB Review; it is your responsibility to ensure all necessary institutional permissions are obtained and policies are met prior to beginning the project, such as documentation of institutional or department support. Note that quality improvement project findings may be published, but any findings presented or published should be clearly identified as part of a quality improvement initiative and not as research.

Your project will remain on file with the Ferris IRB for purposes of tracking research efforts at Ferris. Should you have any questions regarding the determination of this letter, please contact the IRB.

Regards,

Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair

Ferris State University Institutional Review Board Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX B: SOFT SKILLS LISTS USED FOR REFERENCE IN THIS RESEARCH

Andrews and Higson (2008):

- Professionalism
- Reliability
- The ability to cope with uncertainty
- The ability to work under pressure
- The ability to plan and think strategically
- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through networking
- Good written and verbal communication skills
- Information and communication technology skills
- Creativity and self confidence
- Good self-management and time-management skills
- A willingness to accept responsibility

Davis and Muir (2004):

- Teamwork
- Multitasking
- Critical and creative thinking
- Adapting to social and operational contexts
- Communication skills
- Conflict management
- Negotiation
- Acting strategically

de Villiers (2010):

- Communications skills
- Problem-solving and thinking skills
- Leadership and teamwork skills
- Ethical and moral values
- Self-management

Ellis, Kisling, and Hackworth (2014):

- Allocate time
- Allocate money
- Allocate human resources
- Interpret information
- Serve clients and customers
- Participate as a member of a team
- Work with diversity
- Exercise leadership
- Negotiate a decision
- Teach others

- Listening
- Speaking
- Problem solving
- Reasoning
- Knowing how to learn
- Decision making
- Creative thinking
- Seeing in the mind's eye
- Integrity/honesty
- Responsibility
- Self-management
- Social skills
- Self esteem

National Work Readiness Council (2017):

- Communication Skills
 - Speaking so others can understand
 - Listening actively
 - Read with understanding
 - Observe critically
- Interpersonal Skills
 - Cooperate with others
 - Resolve conflict and negotiate
- Decision-Making Skills
 - Use math to solve problems and communicate
 - Solve problems and make decisions
- Lifelong Learning Skills
 - Take responsibility for learning
- Related Entry-Level Competencies and Qualities (selected)
 - Monitor and correct performance
 - Serve clients
 - Integrity
 - Self-management
 - Adapt to change

The Conference Board (2006):

- Critical thinking/problem solving
- Oral communications
- Written communications
- Teamwork/collaboration
- Diversity
- Information technology application

- Leadership
- Creativity/innovation
- Lifelong learning/self-direction
- Professionalism/work ethic
- Ethics/social responsibility

APPENDIX C: SOFT SKILLS SURVEY FOR MICHIGAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my doctoral research project exploring Soft Skills Development at Michigan Community Colleges!

The following information explains the goals of the study, and the expectations for your participation.

Principal Investigator: Ken Parker

Email: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Phone: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Faculty advisor: Sandra Balkema, PhD **Email:** XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

PURPOSE

This research study is exploring current practices in soft skills development at Michigan's community colleges. The researcher is interested in reporting current practices and making recommendations for best practices.

PARTICIPATION

You are eligible to participate in this study because you are a community college administrator identified as having knowledge of your college's soft skills initiatives. If you agree to be part of this study, you will be asked to complete a survey. The study will take approximately ten minutes to complete, and your participation in this study will be over when you have completed the survey.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

There are no known risks associated with this study because the data collection is completely anonymous, and the topic is not sensitive.

While there are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, others may benefit from your participation because results will be shared with all participants and recommendations made as to best practices.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records of your participation in this research study will be maintained and kept confidential as required by federal regulations. Your identity will not be revealed on any report, publication, or at scientific meetings.

To keep your information safe, the researchers will save participant information and responses in a password-protected electronic file. The researcher will retain the data for three years from the end of the study. The researcher will dispose of your data by permanently deleting the electronic files. The data will not be made available to other researchers for other studies following the completion of this research study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

You are free to leave the study at any time. If you leave the study before it is finished, there will be no penalty to you.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The main researcher conducting this study is Ken Parker, a graduate student at Ferris State University. If you have questions later, you may contact Ken Parker, at XXXXXXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr Sandra Balkema if you have questions or concerns. Email: XXXXXXXXXXXX. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a subject in this study, please contact: Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants, 1010 Campus Drive, FLITE 410G, Big Rapids, MI 49307. (231) 591-2553 or IRB@ferris.edu

By clicking NEXT, you are indicating your awareness of the study goals and expectations and are giving your consent to participate in the study.

You may wish to print a copy of this page for your records.

1. Please provide the following information:

- College
- Your name
- Position
- Contact information

Soft skills are known by several other names such as applied skills, personal and interpersonal skills, noncognitive skills, employability skills, character, 21st century skills, emotional intelligence, and grit, to name a few. For the purpose of this survey, soft skills are described as personal and interpersonal skills required for success in the workplace and include general themes such as communication, attitude, teamwork and networking, problem solving and critical thinking, professionalism, etc.

2. Does your college provide soft skills development activities to students?

- Yes
- No

3. To whom is soft skills training offered, or for whom is it required? Check all that apply.

- Required of all students
- Students in a course dedicated to soft skills training
- Students in a selected course(s) of which soft skills is a component
- Students in vocational training
- Students in community education courses
- Students who pursue optional extracurricular training
- Informal training as part of campus program or culture

Please specify:

4. What curriculum/curricula are used for soft skills training? Check all that apply.

- Commercial vendor
- Custom-designed by the college
- Other

Please specify:

5. What instructional methods are used? Check all that apply.

- Face-to-face instruction
- Online training
- Other

Please provide any additional relevant information:

6. How many students participated in soft skills training in the 2017-2018 school year?

7. How many students successfully completed at least one soft skills training program in the 2017-2018 school year?

8. Describe the criteria for a student to successfully complete soft skills training.

9. How are successful trainees recognized or credentialed? Check all that apply.

- Electronic badges
- Paper certificates
- Transcript designation
- Publicity, e.g., newspaper
- No formal recognition is given

Please provide any additional relevant information:

10. How is the effectiveness of soft skills training measured? Check all that apply.

- Employment data
- Income data
- Employer data
- Student surveys
- Other
- This college does not currently measure the effectiveness of soft skills training

Please provide any additional relevant information:

11. Please share any available data the college has regarding the effectiveness, or return on investment, of its soft skills training initiatives. You may email any related documents to XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX if that is more convenient.

12. Additional comments regarding your college and soft skills development:

13. Please share any advice for other colleges related to soft skills training:

Thank you very much for participating in, or considering participation in, this survey on soft skills development in Michigan's community colleges. Those who participate will receive a copy of the survey outcomes once aggregated and identifying information is removed. Your assistance is very much appreciated!