



## The Design of Health Care Management Program For Chinese Health Care Professionals

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### Abstract

Business education has been booming in China due to the increasing demand of business graduates since China's economic reform. Chinese health care professionals are eager for business education to improve their competencies. The purpose of the study was to investigate the determinants of a successful health care management program for Chinese health care professionals.

In-depth personal interview was applied in the study. There were 40 Chinese health care professionals that participated in the study in Guangzhou City China. They came from five local hospitals. The findings indicated that the Chinese health care professionals considered some health care management program attributes to be more important than other health care management program attributes.

The study indicated that the flexible and practice-oriented health care management programs which are accredited by Chinese education authorities and provided by reputable schools were welcomed by the Chinese health care professionals.

**Keywords:** Health, Education, Program, Professional, Chinese

### 1. Introduction

Business education was initiated in the United States of America (Robinson, 1995). The world's first college-level business school, now known as the Wharton School, was established at the University of Pennsylvania in 1881. The purpose of the University of Pennsylvania's business school at that time was to deliver business education to respond to the industrialization in the country and to meet the needs of managers.

Typical MBA program curriculums focus on various functional business areas such as marketing, management, administration, accounting, and finance early in their program development (Haight & Kwong, 1999). The major emphasis of these programs is on skill development and tools of business practice. The teaching method provides students limited opportunities to integrate the various disciplines within the MBA program. Today, business schools expand their emphases on leadership, teamwork, communication skills, and globalization knowledge along with the traditional functional areas. Welch (2002) argued that the trend towards using information systems were used as management tools in the practice of conducting business in a global environmental setting had become much more common. Most importantly, students are taught how to act in an entrepreneurial practice both within large and small organizations.

China is a newly industrialized country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and its economy has been booming during the past two decades (Lanchovichina & Walmsley, 2005). China has gradually moved from the traditional planned economy system towards a free market economy system after it adopted the "open-door" policy in late 1978. After more than thirteen years of negotiation, China was admitted as the World Trade Organization's (WTO) 143<sup>rd</sup> member in December, 2001. All of these new economic environments have accelerated China's need for Western-trained managers with knowledge in business fields such as accounting, finance, management, marketing, international business, and international business law (Lavelle & Rutledge, 2006). Currently, there are about 20,000,000 total enterprises in China; however, it is estimated that by the year 2006, the total number of MBA graduates in China will only be 130,000. There is a huge gap between the demand for MBA graduates and the supply of MBA graduates in China. It is estimated that by 2010, China will need 75,000 trained managers with international experience; however, there are currently only about 5,000 managers with international experience in China.

In order to meet the increased demand of Western-trained managers, the Chinese government tried to launch more Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) programs in the nation (Hulme, 2004). In 1991, the Chinese government first recognized MBA programs. The Chinese Minister of Education had approved such programs in only nine of the top universities in the nation. The quota of students in these programs was assigned by the Chinese government, and only 86 students were enrolled at that time. The supply of MBA program graduates was still far below the demand. In 2001, the Chinese Minister of Education had approved 62 universities to establish MBA programs and by 2003, there were 10,000 students enrolled in China's MBA programs nationwide. The EMBA program was officially introduced in China in the year of 2002, and there are currently only 32 EMBA programs that have been approved by the Chinese Minister of Education. The amount of MBA programs in China and the numbers of enrolled MBA students continued to increase under the pressure of the increasing demand for MBA graduates. By 2004, there were more than 18,000 Chinese students enrolled in 96 MBA programs in the nation (Lavelle & Rutledge, 2006).

In 2007, other 31 MBA programs are approved by Chinese Minister of Education; currently, there are 127 officially approved MBA programs nationwide. However, most of these programs focus on general management topics such as Marketing, Finance, Human Resource Management, and Accounting; other management topics such as Health Care Management and Real Estate Management don't attract the business schools' attention (MBAhome.com, 2007).

Both Johnstone (1997) and Kamis (1996) stated that China's education market was booming and that it could become the world's largest new market for business education in the next few decades. Full-time working professionals have become the fastest growing segment in the higher education market in recent years (Smith, 2001). In China, the body of working professionals is huge; many of them are looking for business education to improve their business skills and knowledge in order to compete more effectively in today's global environments (Curtis & Lu, 2004). In China, the body of health care professionals is huge, the professionals include medical doctors, pharmacists, nurses, nutritionist, and lab technicians. Most of the Chinese health care professionals didn't receive business education in medical schools. They are eager for business education to improve their management skills and competition. It is critical for business schools to design proper health care management programs to meet the Chinese health care professionals' needs.

## 2. Literature review

Different nations are featured with different cultural values. The Eastern countries have quite different cultural characteristics compared to the Western countries (Hofstede, 1980). Hofstede identified four dimensions of culture in terms of Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism, and Masculinity. In another study, Hofstede (1991) identified the traditional Chinese culture—Confucianism as the fifth dimension of cultural measurement. Culture is the most complicated and the most profound factor that can influence various aspects of the society in the long run. The education system as well as other social systems in China have been forged and led by Confucianism for more than two thousand years (Kang, 2006).

From the establishing of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to 1978, China government adopted the central planned economy policy (Cai, 2004). Within this period, the event of the Cultural Revolution, which lasted for 10 years from 1966 to 1976, had seriously destroyed the higher education system in China. Admissions to the university which was dependent on University Entrance Examination and academic records during the pre-Cultural Revolution, then depended on the political backgrounds of the individuals and the recommendations of their working unions during the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese educational system, instead of having its own purpose and focus of education and training, was designed to serve the political movement during that period. During this period, business education was almost ignored (Alon & Lu, 2004).

In 1977, which was the second year after the termination of the Cultural Revolution in China, the higher education national entrance examination system was restored. This was the turning point of the China higher education system (Hu, 1988). The Chinese higher education system started to adopt the modern Western higher education model under the forces of the "open-door" policy and economic reform started in 1978.

The reason why China's higher education system focused on science and technology education instead of business education was due to the government's policy (Hu, 1988). In the late 1980s, the Chinese economy developed at an increasing pace. China successfully attracted many direct foreign investments in the southeastern coastal open cities and regions, especially the Four Special Economic Zones in terms of Shenzhen City, Zhuhai City, Xiamen City, and Shantou City (Linn, 1998). The Four Special Economic Zones, which were approved by China's central government in the early 1980s and supported by local governments, were opened to foreign investors on a trial basis by providing favorable policies such as tax-free and duty-free customs. The successful attracting of foreign direct investment led to the booming of foreign joint ventures and foreign direct-owned subsidiaries in China. The Chinese domestic enterprises had to start their structural reformations in response to the economic reform. The success of China's economic reform led to competition, which transferred China from a sellers' market structure towards a buyers' market structure. From that time, the demand of trained managers, especially the Western-trained managers with international business

experiences, increased rapidly. Business education and MBA education in China started to boom based on the market forces (Ralph, 2001).

The People's Republic of China was established in 1949. Before 1949, business and management were taught in universities throughout China (Zhou, 1991). At that time, the business education focused on the introduction of Western business and management theories and principles. After 1949, the Chinese central government controlled all the market activities because of the scarcity of resources in China. All the enterprises belonged to the State; all the enterprises received a quota from the governments and then focused on production. They were not consumer-oriented and therefore, they did not need to care about the distribution, pricing, promotion, and branding of the products because the governments would distribute all the products based on the State's needs. A seller's market was created at that time.

In 1978, China adopted an "open-door" policy, and started its economic reform. From that point, China worked hard to transfer its economic system from the centrally planned economy toward a market-oriented economy, which the Chinese government called a socialist market economy (Williams, Liu, & Shi, 1997). The success of China's economic reform created an unprecedented economy development. Today China is called the "world factory" because it functions as one of the world's largest merchandise producers and exporters. China is also one of the top countries which attract direct foreign investment. China's economic reform, which is coupled with the globalization, pushes China to a buyer's market (Lavelle & Rutledge, 2006).

China actually began to enroll students into formal business programs and business schools in 1978—the second year of the restoration of the university entrance examination, which was eliminated during the ten years of "Cultural Revolution" (Gang, 2000). One of the business schools that admitted students in 1978 was the Shanghai University of Economics and Finance. In the late 1970s, China restarted its business education programs with a poor quality of students and faculty members, as well as a lower-quality business education system.

In response to the increasing demand for business professionals beginning during the Chinese economic reform in 1978, more Chinese universities set up business departments or even business schools to offer business education programs (Alon & Lu, 2004). Not only did the body of business students expand, but the available business majors also expanded to include accounting, finance, marketing, management, international business, entrepreneurship, and management of information systems. The market force attracted a huge amount of top students who enrolled in business programs. The Chinese government's financial support also attracted many excellent faculty members to teach in business programs nationwide.

In order to improve China's business education rapidly and effectively, the Chinese government started to introduce modern business education models from North American and European countries in 1980s (Hulme, 2004). China has been eager for the business education partnership programs created by Chinese business schools with Western business schools, because this is the most effective way to introduce modern Western business education models directly to China.

While the business education in China grew quickly from the late 1980s, there are many challenges facing Chinese business education (Zhou, 1991). The lack of suitable business textbooks, qualified business faculty members, and teaching resources were the major issues in late 1980s and in the early 1990s. Although China can import many business textbooks today, most of these textbooks focus on Western business environments rather than Chinese business environments. Similarly, the direct import of Western faculty members can not solve the problem in the long-run because most of the Western faculty members do not understand the Chinese business environment very well. These problems existed both during that time period and during the present day and may well exist into the future as well.

Alan and Lu (2004) stated that there were three challenges facing China business education today. The first challenge emerges when the Chinese educational system transfers from the traditional Confucian culture to the modern Western thoughts. The second challenge is that China lacks business education resources and qualified business teachers. The third challenge emerges when most of the Chinese business programs depend on the importing of foreign business education materials, foreign business faculty members, and foreign business education pedagogies.

Hu and Grove (1999) pointed out that the transmission of Western business knowledge in today's China business schools was theory-oriented instead of practice-oriented. Chinese students are taught to remember the business theories, principles, and concepts. Chinese students are not trained to improve their analytical skill, problem-solving skill, and other job-related skills and knowledge.

Curriculum design is a challenge for Chinese business schools (Haight & Kwong, 1999). While most of Chinese business schools still focus on the teaching of traditional functional areas of business such as accounting, finance, marketing, management, and international business, many Western business schools have begun to emphasize leadership skills, teamwork skills, communication skills, entrepreneurship, critical thinking and global thinking in their

traditional curriculums. The curriculum design in China business schools must borrow from the successful Western design concepts and meanwhile reflect the unique business practices of China.

Students look for high quality business education and therefore, business education providers must understand what the determinants of quality are in business programs from the students' points of view. Different students may have their own preferences of business programs; therefore, business education providers must segment the business students based on their specific needs and expectations of business education, and then tailor business programs to meet their unique needs and expectations (Farquharson, 2005).

LeBlanc and Nguyen (1997) examined the concept of quality in business education settings. They identified seven factors which would influence students' evaluation of service quality in business education institutions. These seven factors were the school's reputation, the attitude of administrative personnel, the ability and attitude of faculty members, the curriculum design, the responsiveness of administrative personnel and faculty members, the school's physical environment and the access of facilities in the school. Other previous studies (Bitner, 1992; Hampton, 1993; Herbig, Milewicz, & Golden, 1994; Winters, 1991) also support LeBlanc and Nguyen's (1997) findings regarding quality factors in business education.

Stefan, Roxana, and Markus (2004) conducted a survey at European universities and found that the following dimensions of quality were considered important by students in business school settings: corporate collaboration, information and responsiveness, courses offered, campus facilities, teaching practices, internal evaluations, external evaluations, computer facilities, collaboration and comparison, post-study factors, and library resources. Rapert, Smith, Velliquette, and Garretson (2004) conducted a survey to investigate the students' expectations of quality in business education, and found that the students' expectations of business education fell in two categories in terms of in-class environment and outside-class environment. In each category, there were numerous determinants which explained quality in business education. The in-class environment category included numerous determinants such as "encourages intellectual growth," "overall professionalism," "specialized training and instruction," "generalized/integrated training and instruction," "teamwork and group dynamics," "devoted and knowledgeable faculty members," and "classmate and faculty intimacy." The outside-class environment category included numerous determinants such as "integration with business community," "career preparation service," "availability of financial assistance," and "program clarity." Each determinant explained one aspect of expectations for quality business education; some determinants were composed of numerous specific attributes which students expected from quality business education.

Telford and Masson (2005) suggested a framework of quality values in higher education. In this framework, the following aspects of education processes contributed to the quality of higher education: course design, course marketing, student recruitment, induction, course delivery, course content, assessment monitoring, miscellaneous, and tangibles.

Mustafa and Chiang (2006) identified four key factors that reflect quality in business education, namely, teacher abilities, teacher attitude, course materials, and course load. Currently, most of the research topics on quality business education are conducted in Western developed countries in North America and in Europe and there are few studies that focus on China and other Asian countries. Sohail and Shaikh (2004) conducted a study in Saudi Arabia to explore the local students' expectations of quality in business education, and found that the local students identified six factors which contributed to their expectations towards quality business education. The six factors were "contact with personnel," "physical environment," "reputation," "responsiveness," "access of facilities," and "curriculum."

Kwan and Ng (1999) applied the SERVQUAL to examine the quality indicators in higher education from the points of view of students from Hong Kong and Mainland China, and found that students from both Hong Kong and Mainland China shared similar expectations towards higher education. Although both Hong Kong and Mainland China students considered factors such as course content, concern for students, facilities, assessment, medium of instrument, social activities, and people all contributed to the perceptions of quality of higher education, most of their expectations focused on study-related matters such as course content, and facilities rather than social life on campus.

Thompson (2002) stated that faculty members' ability, faculty members' attitude, and teaching style were important indicators of quality in business education. Since Chinese students have their own cultures and learning styles, they may have their own preferences regarding business teachers compared to those that Western students might have. Thompson (2002) investigated what factors contributed to a good business teacher from the point of view of Chinese students and found that the quality of a business teacher fell into five categories in terms of "teaching abilities," "personal qualities," "individual business credential," "individual academic credentials," and "course and class practice."

Huang (2005) argued that working professionals had their own expectations towards MBA education. A big challenge to these working professionals was that they had ongoing job responsibilities and family obligations and could not study the way as full-time students did. They needed flexibly designed MBA programs to fit their life styles. Huang (2005) conducted a survey in Taiwan to investigate the determinants of a successful MBA program from the points of view of working professionals. The survey found that there were eight attributes that must be integrated into an MBA program

in order to attract and satisfy Taiwan's working professionals when they were seeking MBA education. The eight attributes were "capacity of faculty," "tuition fees," "delivery method and time availability," "on- or off-campus," "time required to complete," "country of origin," "reputation of school," and "degree accredited by Taiwan's ministry of Education." Among these eight attributes, the attribute of "degree accredited by Taiwan's Ministry of Education" and the attribute of "reputation of school" were ranked as the most important attributes by Taiwanese working professionals in seeking an MBA education.

In recent years, full-time working professionals have become the fastest growing segment in the higher education market (Smith, 2001). Johnstone (1997) and Kamis (1996) stated that China's education market was booming and it could become the world's largest new market for business education in the next few decades. Wang (2006) estimated that there only 5% of students were enrolled in full-time MBA programs. One reason was that the job market in China was competitive and working professionals were afraid of losing their jobs if they enrolled in full-time programs. The other reason was that most of the Chinese working professionals tried to keep their current jobs and their family lives while enrolled in MBA programs. That is why working professionals have their own needs and expectations of business programs (Southworth, 1999).

What are the determinants of a successful health care management program for health care professionals in China? This is the general research question in the study.

Since the school reputation and the program accreditation are important determinants when students consider a business program (Huang, 2005; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001), the Chinese health care professionals' opinions towards school reputation and program accreditation must be investigated in the study. Therefore, the research question 1 is asked:

How important do the Chinese health care professionals consider the school reputation and the program accreditation when they choose a health care management program?

Since the business program formats, such as the combination of on-campus learning and distance learning, the guest lecturer teaching, the case method pedagogy, and the company internship program opportunity, are all considered important determinants when students choose an business program (Chen, Lin, & Lee, 2004; Jennings, 1997; Mackay & Stockpot, 2006; Patel & Patel, 2006; Ulrich, 2005), the Chinese health care professionals' preferences towards health care management program format must be investigated in the study. Therefore, the research question 2:

What kinds of program formats do the Chinese health care professionals prefer when they choose a health care management program?

Since school administrative services such as friendly and courteous administrative staff, easy access to library resources, easy access to computer facilities, and alumni networking are considered important determinants when students choose a business program (Sahney, Banwet, & Karunes, 2004; Stefan, Roxana, & Markus, 2004; Telford & Masson, 2005), the Chinese health care professionals' expectations of school administrative services must be investigated in the study. Therefore, the research question 3:

What kinds of administrative services do the Chinese health care professionals expect from the business school when they choose a health care management program?

Since faculty member's capabilities such as the teaching experience, the business background, the ability to stimulate class discussion, the research ability, and the academic qualification are considered important determinants when students choose a business program (Rapert, Smith, Velliquette, & Garreston, 2004; Thompson, 2002), the Chinese health care professionals' expectations towards faculty capability must be investigated in the study. Therefore, the research question 4:

What kinds of capabilities do the Chinese health care professionals expect from the program faculty members when they choose a health care management program?

A business program's outcome is to improve students' business skills and knowledge including skills such as analytical skills, managerial knowledge, communication skills, teamwork skills, and creative ability (Mustafa & Chiang 2006; Pariseau & McDaniel, 1997; Rapert, Smith, Velliquette, & Garretson, 2004). Since the understanding of what kinds of business skills and knowledge the students expect to improve can help faculty members design updated curricula and apply effective pedagogies to meet the students' expectations, the Chinese health care professionals' expectations towards business skills and knowledge improvement must be investigated in the study. Therefore, the research question 5:

What kinds of business skills and knowledge do the Chinese health care professionals expect to improve when they choose a health care management program?

In order to explore more Chinese health care professionals' expectations of health care management program, the research question 6 asks:

Beyond the above five questions, can you recommend more expectations that you have of a desirable health care management program?

### **3. Methodology**

In order to investigate what the determinants of a successful health care management program are from Chinese health care professionals' point of views, an in-depth personal interview was conducted with Chinese health care professionals. The purpose of the interview was to discover some qualitative information regarding the Chinese health care professionals' opinions towards the determinants of a successful health care management program.

There were 40 health care professionals participated in the in-depth personal interview in 2007. These 40 health care professionals were recruited from 5 hospitals in Guangzhou City, China by referrals. They were all full-time working professionals. 10 interviewees were medical doctors, 10 interviewees were nurses, 10 interviewees were pharmacists, 5 interviewees were nutritionists, and 5 interviewees were lab technicians. Among these 40 interviewees, 18 were female professionals, 32 were male professionals. The interview was a face-to-face, in-depth personal interview held by the researcher. Each interview lasted for about half an hour.

For the purpose of ease, expression, relaxation, and effectiveness, the interview was conducted in Chinese, the local language. The six interview questions were asked by the researcher in order during the interviews, and the interviewees were encouraged to express their own opinions freely. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher confirmed if the interviewee was a full-time health care professional, however, the interviewee's other personal information was not asked. The interviewees' answers and opinions were recorded on notes written by the researcher instead of by audio taping or video taping.

### **4. Findings**

Regarding the interview question 1: How important do you consider the school reputation and the program accreditation when you choose a health care management program? All 40 interviewees said that they considered school reputation and program accreditation were very important when they chose a health care management program.

Regarding the interview question 2: What kinds of program formats do you prefer when you choose a health care management program? There were 35 interviewees who said that they considered the following three program attributes to be important when they chose a health care management program: foreign joint venture programs, on-campus and distance learning blended programs, and some classes taught by guest lecturers from the industry. There were 28 interviewees who said that they considered the following three programs attributes to be important when they chose a health care management program: the course created in cooperation with businesses, the program provides corporate internship opportunity, and some classes taught by overseas faculty. There were 20 interviewees who said that they considered the following four program attributes to be important when they chose a health care management program: some classes taught in English, small class format, group project study format, and the program provides overseas study opportunities. There were five interviewees who said that they considered short programs run by professionals to be important when they chose a health care management program.

Regarding the third interview question 3: What kinds of administrative services do you expect from the business school when you choose a health care management program? There were 38 interviewees who said that they considered the following three program attributes to be important when they chose a health care management program: convenient campus location, alumni networking, and career preparation services. There were 29 interviewees who said that they considered the following three program attributes to be important when they chose a health care management program: networking with the business community, reasonable faculty/student ratio, and faculty members can be contacted by students outside of class times. There were eight interviewees who said that they considered the following three program attributes to be important when they chose a health program: reasonable tuition rate, availability of financial assistance, and program clarity.

Regarding the fourth interview question 4: What kinds of capabilities do you expect from the program faculty members when you choose a health care management program? There were 35 interviewees who said that they considered the five following program attributes to be important when they chose a health care management program: courteous and devoted faculty, faculty holds doctorate degrees, faculty has overseas education backgrounds, faculty has local Chinese business experiences, and faculty can stimulate class discussion. There were 25 interviewees who said that they considered the following four program attributes to be important when they chose a health care management program: the faculty has international business experiences, the faculty has college teaching experiences, the faculty has excellent Chinese language skills, and the faculty has excellent English language skills. There were six interviewees who said that they considered the following three program attributes to be important when they chose a health care management program: faculty member graduates from top university, open-minded faculty members, and faculty members' welcoming of criticism.

Regarding the interview question 5: What kinds of business skills and knowledge do you expect to improve when you choose a health care management program? There were 40 interviewees that considered that the ability of the curriculum of the programs in improving analytical and managerial skills and knowledge of the students was important when they chose a health care management program. There were 36 interviewees that considered that the curriculums could improve the communication and teamwork skills. There were 32 interviewees that considered that the ability of the curriculum of the program to help improve interpersonal skills and negotiation skills was an important factor in choosing a health care management program. There were 20 interviewees that considered that the ability of the curriculum design of the program to help improve the students' entrepreneurial ability as well as global business skills and knowledge was important in choosing a health care management program. There were two interviewees that considered the ability of the program to improve the students' research skills was important to consider when they chose a health care management program.

Regarding the interview question 6: Beyond the above five questions, can you recommend more expectations towards a desirable health care management program? There were eight interviewees that considered that the evaluation of courses and faculty members were important factors to consider when choosing a health care management program. There were five interviewees that said that they considered the following three program attributes to be important in choosing a health care management program: frequent feedback on students' performance, keeping work outside of the classroom to a minimum and proper course loads.

The 40 interviewees expressed a total of 48 program attributes that they considered to be important elements for a successful health care management program. The researcher categorized the 48 program attributes into three groups: the most frequently mentioned program attribute group (program attributes were mentioned by 31 to 40 interviewees), the frequently mentioned program attribute group (program attributes were mentioned by 11 to 30 interviewees), and the less mentioned program attribute group (the program attributes were mentioned by one to 10 interviewees).

There were 19 attributes included in the most frequently mentioned program attribute group: the school has a high reputation, the program is accredited by the Chinese Minister of Education, foreign joint venture programs, on-campus and distance learning blended program, some classes taught by guest lecturers from industry, convenient campus location, alumni networking, career preparation services, courteous and devoted faculties, faculty holds doctorate degrees, faculty has overseas education backgrounds, faculty has local Chinese business experiences, faculty can stimulate class discussion, the curriculums can improve my analytical skills, the curriculums can improve my managerial skills and knowledge, the curriculums can improve my communication skills, the curriculums can improve my teamwork skills, the curriculum can improve my interpersonal skills, and the curriculums can improve my negotiation skills,

There were 16 attributes included in the frequently mentioned program attribute group: course created in cooperation with business, the program provides corporate internship opportunity, some classes taught by overseas faculty, some classes taught in English, small class format, group project study format, the program provides overseas study opportunities, networking with business community, reasonable faculty/student ratio, faculty members can be contacted by students outside of class times, the faculty has international business experiences, the faculty has college teaching experiences, the faculty has excellent Chinese language skills, the faculty has excellent English language skills, the curriculums can improve my entrepreneurial ability, and the curriculums can improve my global business skills and knowledge.

There were 13 attributes included in the less mentioned program attribute group: short program run by professionals, reasonable tuition rates, availability of financial assistance, program clarity, faculty members graduated from top universities, open-minded faculty members, faculty members' welcoming of criticism, the curriculums can improve my research skills, evaluation of course, evaluation of faculty member, frequent feedback on student's performance, keeping out-of-class work to a minimum, and adequate course loads.

## **5. Summary and conclusions**

In the interview, the participants consider that both the program accreditation and the school reputation are important program attributes. In the survey conducted by Huang (2005) in Taiwan, the programs accredited by the Taiwanese Ministry of Education and the programs offered by a reputable school were considered the two single most important program attributes by Taiwanese working professionals. This study indicated similar results. The reason is that an accredited business program offered by a reputable school ensures the quality of the program, and consequently, the future job opportunities of the graduates.

Most of the prestigious joint venture business programs in China are accredited by the Chinese Ministry of Education and offered by reputable schools (Scallberg 2001). Based on current Chinese education law, joint venture business programs are the only format which can obtain accreditation from the Chinese Ministry of Education if foreign education investors want to set up business programs in China to recruit local Chinese students. In order to establish a

successful business program for the Chinese working professionals, foreign education institution should partner with a reputable Chinese business school and apply for program accreditation from Chinese education authorities.

The study reveals that the relative important program formats include foreign joint venture program, on-campus and distance learning blended program, some classes taught by guest lecturers from industry, and programs that provide corporate internship opportunities.

Since business education in China lags behind its Western counterparts (Chao & Dubas, 1995), Chinese working professionals prefer foreign joint venture programs, which could offer a better quality education. On-campus format is the basic study format because pure distance learning program is not currently accredited by the Chinese Ministry of Education. Blended programs with distance learning components are welcomed by working professionals, because the professionals have ongoing job responsibilities and family obligations. Because they can not study like full-time students do, the distance learning format is a valuable supplement to the on-campus format. Working professionals come from industries and prefer practice-oriented program formats (Huang, 2005) and that is why they consider guest teaching and corporate internships as important program attributes.

The study reveals that the relative important administrative services include the alumni networking, career preparation services, networking within the business community, convenient campus locations, and reasonable Faculty/student ratio.

Business education provides good business opportunities and career opportunities to students (Thompson & Gui, 2000). Networking is important in China because it provides various opportunities between people who become connected in networking opportunities (Kang, 2006). That is why participants consider alumni networking, business community networking, and career preparation service to be important school administrative services. Traveling consumes time, money, and energy, Chinese health care professionals prefer a campus with a convenient location. A reasonable faculty/student ratio is a signal of quality education and was considered to be an important program attribute by Chinese health care professionals. Financial issues were not a major concern in the study; it is understandable that health care professionals can afford the tuition because they have income from working.

The study reveals that the relative important faculty member capacities include the capability of case method teaching, holding a doctorate degree, an overseas education background, local Chinese business experience, international business experience, excellent Chinese language skills, and the ability to stimulate class discussion.

Compared to theory teaching, case method teaching is practice-oriented. Case method teaching was initiated in Harvard Business School and adopted by many worldwide business schools today (Contardo & Wensley, 2004). Chinese health care professionals prefer faculty members that can teach by the case method and by stimulating class discussion. Chinese health care professionals also prefer that faculty members have both Chinese business experience as well as international business experience. The faculty members' capability to bring real world business experience and case study into the classroom is welcomed and valued. The Chinese health care professionals also considered that an overseas education background and doctorate degree can ensure the qualification of the faculty members, and hence they are important attributes of a successful health care management program. On the contrary, academic qualifications such as graduated from top universities and research ability are not considered important by Chinese health care professionals.

The study reveals that the relative important business skills and knowledge improvement considered by Chinese health care professionals include analytical skills, managerial skills and knowledge, communication skills, teamwork skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, negotiation skills, entrepreneurial ability, and global business skills and knowledge.

A business program's outcome is to improve students' business skills and knowledge (Mustafa & Chiang 2006; Pariseau & McDaniel, 1997). It is understandable that most of the participants considered different business skills and knowledge improvement to be important. Most of the skills and knowledge improvements considered important by the participants are practice-oriented. Faculty members must develop practical program courses and teaching materials to meet the Chinese health care professionals' needs. Case method teaching, in-class discussion, group project study, and corporate internship program are valuable for the improvement of many business skills and knowledge.

In conclusion, School reputation and program accreditation are crucial for recruiting, retaining, and satisfying business students. Foreign education institutions should choose to partner with a reputable Chinese business school as part of the market entry strategy in China. The joint venture program is the exclusive program format which can guarantee accreditation from Chinese education authorities if foreign education institutions want to establish business programs to recruit students in China.

Compared to full-time students, Chinese health care professionals do have their own expectations and preferences toward business education. Chinese health care professionals are characterized as having time constraints and a practice-orientation, which is why they prefer flexible and practical health care management program. The on-campus



and distance learning blended programs are suitable for working professionals because they can overcome the barriers of time constraints and travel problems. Programs held in convenient locations such as in cities can attract more students. Guests from industries could bring real world business experiences into classroom, and are welcomed by students. Working professionals come from industries and prefer those faculty members who have business experiences, can apply case method teaching, and can stimulate class discussion. School administrators and faculty members should design flexible business programs, and apply practice-oriented pedagogies to meet the Chinese health care professionals' needs.

Career development is a major concern of business students. Business schools should provide career preparation services to students. Alumni networking and business community networking are crucial for Chinese health care professionals' career development; business schools should build a network to connect the current students, alumni, and the greater business community. Networking is a part of social life and it is very important for career development and in doing business in China (Szeto, Wright, & Cheng, 2006).

Some business skills and knowledge which the Chinese health care professionals eager to improve include communication skills, teamwork skills, analytical skills, managerial skills and knowledge, leadership skills, interpersonal skills, global business skills and knowledge, and negotiation skills. Faculty members should develop appropriate courses and teaching materials and apply appropriate pedagogies to improve the corresponding business skills and knowledge. Courses developed in cooperation with business, case method teaching, group project study, class discussion, guest teaching, overseas faculty teaching, overseas study, and corporate internship are some of the effective ways to improve students' business skills and knowledge.

#### **6. Limitations and recommendations**

Two limitations should be noted in this study. First, the major limitation of the study is that the samples were not randomly selected. The using of a convenience sampling technique may lead to the selection bias, which could influence the generalization of the findings. Since the samples were drawn in Guangzhou City solely, they can not represent the Chinese health care professionals in other areas very well. Second, employers are major stakeholders of business education, their opinions are critical for the evaluation of the success of a health care management program. The samples did not include employers, constituting a drawback of the study. The validity of the study was compromised due to the unrepresentative samples in the study.

There are several opportunities for future research that are suggested from this study. Since most of the business graduates will enter the job market, employers' opinions are crucial to def business program. Therefore, employers' expectations of business program should be explored in future research. Online learning is an important component of flexible business programs for working professionals; today, online learning is becoming popular worldwide (Moskal, Dziuban, Upchurch, Hartman, & Truman, 2006). Online learning is new for Chinese working professionals; the design of online learning courses and integration of online learning components into business program should also be addressed in future research.

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