It Takes More Than A Major:

Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success

Key findings from survey among 318 employers
Conducted January 9 – 13, 2013

for

Association of American Colleges and Universities
Methodology

- Online survey among 318 executives at private-sector and nonprofit organizations that have 25 or more employees

- Each reports that 25% or more of their new hires hold an associate degree from a two-year college or a bachelor’s degree from a four-year college.
Key Findings

- **Innovation is a priority** for employers, and they report that the challenges their employees face today are more complex and require a broader skill set than in the past.

- Employers recognize **capacities that cut across majors** as critical to a candidate’s potential for career success, and they view these skills as **more important than a student’s choice of undergraduate major**.

- Employers recognize the **importance of a liberal education** and the liberal arts. The majority agree that having both field-specific knowledge and skills and a broad range of skills and knowledge is most important for long-term career success.

- Employers endorse education practices that involve students in active, effortful work and the **application of skills**.

- Employers express **interest in e-portfolios** and **partnerships** with colleges to ensure college graduates’ successful transition to the workplace.
Consensus among employers is that innovation, critical thinking, and a broad skill set are important for taking on complex challenges in the workplace.

Our company puts a priority on hiring people with the intellectual and interpersonal skills that will help them contribute to innovation in the workplace.

Candidates’ demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, & solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.

Our company is asking employees to take on more responsibilities and to use a broader set of skills than in the past.

Innovation is essential to our company/organization’s continued success.

The challenges employees face within our company are more complex today than they were in the past.
A majority of employers agree that both specific knowledge and a broad range of skills are necessary for advancement and long-term career success.

Which is more important for recent college graduates who want to pursue advancement and long-term career success at your company?

- Having both field-specific knowledge and skills AND a broad range of skills and knowledge: 55%
- Having a range of skills and knowledge that apply to a range of fields or positions: 29%
- Having knowledge and skills that apply to a specific field or position: 16%
The majority of employers think that higher education is doing at least a good job in preparing students for success.

Thinking about the economy overall, and not just about your own company or organization, how good a job do you think higher education is doing in preparing graduates to succeed and contribute in this economy?

- Excellent job: 56%
- Good job: 47%
- Only fair job: 40%
- Poor job: 4%
- Excellent/Good job: 56%
Two in three employers believe most college graduates have the skills/knowledge to succeed in entry-level positions; they feel fewer graduates have what it takes to advance.

What proportion of applicants for positions at your company in the past few years possess the full set of skills and knowledge needed for this?

- All/most college grads
- About half of college grads
- Only some/very few college grads

**Success in entry-level positions**
- 67% (All/most college grads)
- 23% (About half of college grads)
- 10% (Only some/very few college grads)

**Advancement/promotion**
- 44% (All/most college grads)
- 28% (About half of college grads)
- 28% (Only some/very few college grads)
Employers value cross-cutting skills and qualities when hiring.

- **Ethical judgment and integrity**: Very important (76%), Fairly important (96%)
- **Comfortable working with colleagues, customers, and/or clients from diverse cultural backgrounds**: Very important (63%), Fairly important (96%)
- **Demonstrated capacity for professional development and continued new learning**: Very important (61%), Fairly important (94%)
- **Interest in giving back to the communities in which our company is located or those that it serves**: Very important (26%), Fairly important (71%)
- **Knowledge of global cultures, histories, values, religions, and social systems**: Very important (16%), Fairly important (55%)

Employers value cross-cutting skills and qualities when hiring.
Majorities of employers want colleges to place more emphasis on selected outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>More emphasis than they do today</th>
<th>The same emphasis</th>
<th>Less emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking/analytical reasoning</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ability to analyze/solve complex problems</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effective oral communication</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective written communication</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply knowledge/skills to real-world settings</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locate, organize, evaluate info from multiple sources</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation/creativity</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teamwork/collaboration in diverse group settings</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to connect choices and actions to ethical decisions</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>9%</td>
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Majorities of employers want colleges to place the same or more emphasis on other outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>More emphasis than they do today</th>
<th>The same emphasis</th>
<th>Less emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of science and technology</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work w/numbers and understand statistics</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proficiency in a language other than English</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge of global issues/developments &amp; implications for the future</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of U.S. role in world</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of cultural diversity in America/other countries</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic knowledge/participation, community engagement</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of democratic institutions and values</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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Employers are in agreement with a broad set of college learning goals that extend beyond workplace preparation.

All students should have educational experiences that teach them how to solve problems with people whose views are different from their own

- Strongly agree: 57%
- Somewhat agree: 91%

All students should learn about ethical issues and public debates important in their field

- Strongly agree: 43%
- Somewhat agree: 87%

All students should have direct learning experiences working with others to solve problems important in their communities

- Strongly agree: 41%
- Somewhat agree: 86%

All should take courses that build knowledge, judgment, commitment to communities, ensure integrity/vitality of democracy

- Strongly agree: 27%
- Somewhat agree: 82%

All students should acquire broad knowledge in liberal arts and sciences

- Strongly agree: 32%
- Somewhat agree: 80%

All should learn about societies and cultures outside the U.S. and global issues and developments

- Strongly agree: 26%
- Somewhat agree: 78%
Employers believe a variety of emerging educational practices have the potential to help graduates succeed.

Expecting students to develop the skills to research questions in their field and develop evidence-based analyses

- Will help a lot to prepare college students for success after graduation: 83%
- Will help a fair amount: 45%

Students complete significant project before graduation, demonstrating knowledge in major & analytical, problem-solving, communication skills

- Will help a lot to prepare college students for success after graduation: 79%
- Will help a fair amount: 42%

Students complete internship or community-based field project to connect classroom learning with real-world experiences

- Will help a lot to prepare college students for success after graduation: 78%
- Will help a fair amount: 47%

Expecting students to develop the skills to conduct research collaboratively with their peers

- Will help a lot to prepare college students for success after graduation: 74%
- Will help a fair amount: 33%

Students acquire hands-on experience with the methods of science to understand how scientific knowledge is developed

- Will help a lot to prepare college students for success after graduation: 69%
- Will help a fair amount: 39%

Expecting students to work through ethical issues and debates to form their own judgments about the issues at stake

- Will help a lot to prepare college students for success after graduation: 66%
- Will help a fair amount: 34%
Employers say that an electronic portfolio of students’ work and knowledge areas would be useful in evaluating candidates for hire.

In addition to a recent college graduate’s résumé and college transcript . . . how useful would it be to see an electronic portfolio of student work that demonstrates accomplishment in key skill and knowledge areas (effective communication, knowledge in their field, evidence-based reasoning, ethical decision-making)?

- Very useful: 43%
- Fairly useful: 40%
- Only somewhat useful: 13%
- Not useful: 4%
A notable proportion of employers say that their company offers internships to college students; fewer partner with colleges in other ways tested but many express interest.

**Offer internships/apprenticeships in partnership with nearby college or university**

- My company/organization does this: 47%
- Does not do this but have high/medium interest in doing: 42%

**Work closely with career services office of nearby college to help prepare students to transition into the workplace**

- My company/organization does this: 26%
- Does not do this but have high/medium interest in doing: 51%

**Partner with two-/four-year college(s) in local area(s) to better align curriculum/learning outcomes with skills/knowledge you are looking for in new hires**

- My company/organization does this: 22%
- Does not do this but have high/medium interest in doing: 54%

**Sponsor program at two-/four-year institution in local area to get students involved in more “real-world” or hands-on learning while they are still in college**

- My company/organization does this: 18%
- Does not do this but have high/medium interest in doing: 53%
Employers endorse the concept of a liberal education.

**How important is it for today’s colleges to provide this type of education?**

“This approach to a college education provides both broad knowledge in a variety of areas of study and knowledge in a specific major or field of interest. It also helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as intellectual and practical skills that span all areas of study, such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.”

- **Very important**: 51%
- **Fairly important**: 43%
- **Only somewhat important**: 6%
If you were advising your child or a young person you know about the type of college education they should seek to achieve in order to achieve professional and career success in today's global economy, would you recommend they pursue an education like the one described below?

Three in four would recommend the concept of a liberal education to their own child or a young person they know.

74%
I would advise a young person to pursue [a liberal education]

19%
Depends

7%
Would not

“This approach to a college education provides both broad knowledge in a variety of areas of study and knowledge in a specific major or field of interest. It also helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as intellectual and practical skills that span all areas of study, such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.”