



Association of American Colleges and Universities

CREATING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

AAC&U Employer and Student Survey Findings

January 20, 2015

Dear Colleague,

We are looking forward to welcoming you tomorrow to our Centennial Symposium.

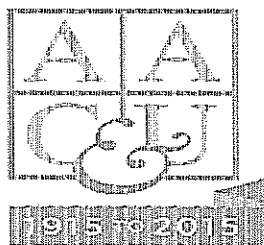
As promised, I am pleased to share with you this news release about findings from two recent surveys commissioned by AAC&U and conducted by Hart Research Associates. Following up on several previous surveys commissioned as part of AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative, we surveyed in November 2014 business and non-profit leaders at companies or organizations that employ many recent college graduates. We also, however, surveyed in November and December, 2014, current college students. The findings we released this morning highlight what we heard from both employers and students—and we will have several opportunities during the Symposium to discuss the implications of these findings for how we ensure that we prepare all college students for long-term success.

See below for the news release detailing the main findings from the surveys. See www.aacu.org/leap/public-opinion-research for the full report on this and earlier surveys commissioned by AAC&U.

I look forward to seeing you soon.

Carol

Carol Geary Schneider
President
Association of American Colleges & Universities



**Employers Judge Recent Graduates Ill-Prepared for Today's Workplace,
Endorse Broad and Project-Based Learning as Best Preparation for Career Opportunity
and Long-Term Success**

***National Surveys Show Need for Improvement in Students' Preparation for Success in
the Global Economy and Importance of Learning Outcomes that Cut Across Majors***

Washington, DC—January 20, 2015—The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) released today a report by Hart Research Associates, "*Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success*." The report summarizes selected findings from two different national surveys—one of business and nonprofit leaders and another of current college students. Consistent with findings from 5 earlier surveys commissioned by AAC&U as part of its ongoing Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) Initiative, employers overwhelmingly endorse broad learning and cross-cutting skills as the best preparation for long-term career success.

However, employers also give students very low grades on nearly all of the 17 learning outcomes explored in the study, including those deemed most important for career success. The separate survey of students conducted online in November and December 2014 shows that students understand what learning outcomes are most important in today's economy, but they judge themselves to be far better prepared for post-college success than do employers. Students and employers do agree on what are the five most important outcomes of college.

National Survey of Business and Nonprofit Leaders: Key Findings

- When hiring recent college graduates, employers place the greatest priority on a demonstrated proficiency in skills and knowledge that cuts across majors. Of 17 outcome areas tested, **written and oral communication, teamwork skills, ethical decision-making, critical thinking, and the ability to apply knowledge in real-world settings** are the most highly valued by employers. More than 8 in 10 employers give these outcomes a rating between 8 and 10 on a 10 point scale.
- Nearly all employers surveyed (91 percent) say that "a demonstrated capacity to **think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than [a candidate's] undergraduate major.**"
- The majority of employers say that **improvements are needed** to better prepare college graduates for success in the workplace. Fifty-eight percent of employers say that improvements are needed to prepare students for success in entry-level positions. More than 2/3 say that improvements are needed to prepare students for advancement and promotion in today's workplace.
- Only about one-quarter of employers say that recent graduates are well prepared in **critical thinking and analytic reasoning, written and oral communication, complex problem solving, innovation and creativity, and applying knowledge and skills to real world settings**. About 30 percent say they are well prepared in the area of **ethical judgment and decision making** and 37 percent say they are well prepared in **teamwork skills**—the highest rated learning outcome area.
- While 90 percent of employers say that **innovation is essential** to their company or organization's continued success, only 25 percent say that recent graduates are well prepared in the area of innovation and creativity.
- Employers strongly endorse an **emphasis on applied learning** and believe that requiring students to complete a significant applied learning project would improve the quality of their preparation for career success. Eighty-seven percent agree that they are somewhat or much more likely to hire a college graduate if she or he had completed a senior project while in college. 60 percent agree that all students should be expected to complete a **significant applied learning project** before graduating from college.
- Nearly all employers surveyed (96 percent) agree that, regardless of a student's major, all students should have educational experiences that **teach them how to solve problems** with people whose views are different from their own.

A National Survey of College Students: Selected Key Findings

- **Students largely agree with employers on what cross-cutting learning outcomes are essential for career success.** The outcomes students rank as most important (three-quarters or more giving a rating of 8-10 on a 10 point scale) are critical thinking and analytic reasoning (79%), the ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings (79%), oral communication (78%), teamwork skills (77%), written communication (75%), and ethical judgment and decision making (74%).
- **Students, however, feel far more prepared in key areas than employers think recent graduates are.** More than 60 percent of students rate themselves as well prepared in critical thinking and analytic reasoning, written communication, teamwork skills, information literacy, ethical judgment and decision making, and oral communication. As noted above, most employers consider students poorly prepared on all these outcomes.

For copies of the report, "*Falling Short? College Learning and Career Success*," e-mail: Carrie Johnson (johnson@aacu.org) or Debra Humphreys (humphreys@aacu.org).

About AAC&U

AAC&U is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,300 member institutions—including accredited public and private colleges, community colleges, research universities, and comprehensive universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education and inclusive excellence at both the national and local levels, and to help individual institutions keep the quality of student learning at the core of their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges.

About Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP)

Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) is a national advocacy, campus action, and research initiative that champions the importance of a twenty-first-century liberal education—for individuals and for a nation dependent on economic creativity and democratic vitality. LEAP responds to the changing demands of the twenty-first century—demands for more college-educated workers and more engaged and informed citizens. The Presidents' Trust is a leadership group within the LEAP initiative. The Trust consists of presidents from all sectors of higher education who are committed to advocating for the vision, values, and practices that connect liberal education with the needs of the twenty-first century. The mission and work of the Presidents' Trust are grounded in the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes.

Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found at www.aacu.org.

Questions about any of AAC&U's meetings? Email meetings@aacu.org.

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