Defining a Liberal Arts and Sciences Educational Experience

A liberal arts and sciences education is not a "fluffy" education, or an education reserved for the elite. The Founding Fathers embraced a liberal arts education as a way to create informed, virtuous citizens capable of self-governance. For them, the goal of an education was not to merely provide technical or vocational training; the goal was to teach citizens how to think and analyze.

Ithaka S+R (a nonprofit that builds evidence-based tools to broaden access to postsecondary education, improve student and workforce outcomes, and advance scholarship) developed metrics for measuring the degree to which an institution offers a liberal arts and sciences educational experience [Liberal Arts and Sciences Educational Offering (LASEO) Framework] and metrics for measuring the degree to which students are exposed to a liberal arts and sciences educational experience [Liberal Arts and Sciences Educational Experience (LASEE) Framework]. The three key components of the LASEO and LASEE are:

Pedagogy - Deep engagement with content experts in and out of the classroom

- Majority of faculty are undergraduate faculty who are teaching-focused and have a doctoral degree.
- Instruction fosters active learning, in classroom settings that facilitate such learning:
    - Undergraduate courses have fewer than 20-25 students.
    - Undergraduate courses facilitate active learning through significant writing requirements, multiple drafts of written work, class discussions, essay midterm/final exam, group projects, student presentations, and student evaluations of each other's work.
- Deep engagement with instructors outside the classroom:
    - Undergraduate students form meaningful relationships with faculty members.
    - Teaching-focused, full-time undergraduate faculty provide academic advising and career mentoring for students.

Curriculum - Meaningful exposure to the liberal arts and sciences, and to breadth and depth of academic disciplines

- Students are exposed to multiple disciplines (breadth) through a large core curriculum exposing students to many discipline perspectives.
- Requirements to take undergraduate courses in the traditional disciplines of the liberal arts and sciences (e.g., arts, foreign language, humanities, math, science, and social sciences).
- Learning experiences in the curriculum require deep and sustained engagement in particular disciplines (depth) including a required capstone course/senior project for all undergraduate students.
- Multiple opportunities for student-guided approaches to the curriculum including student-designed majors and participation in research/independent study courses or working with a faculty member on research.

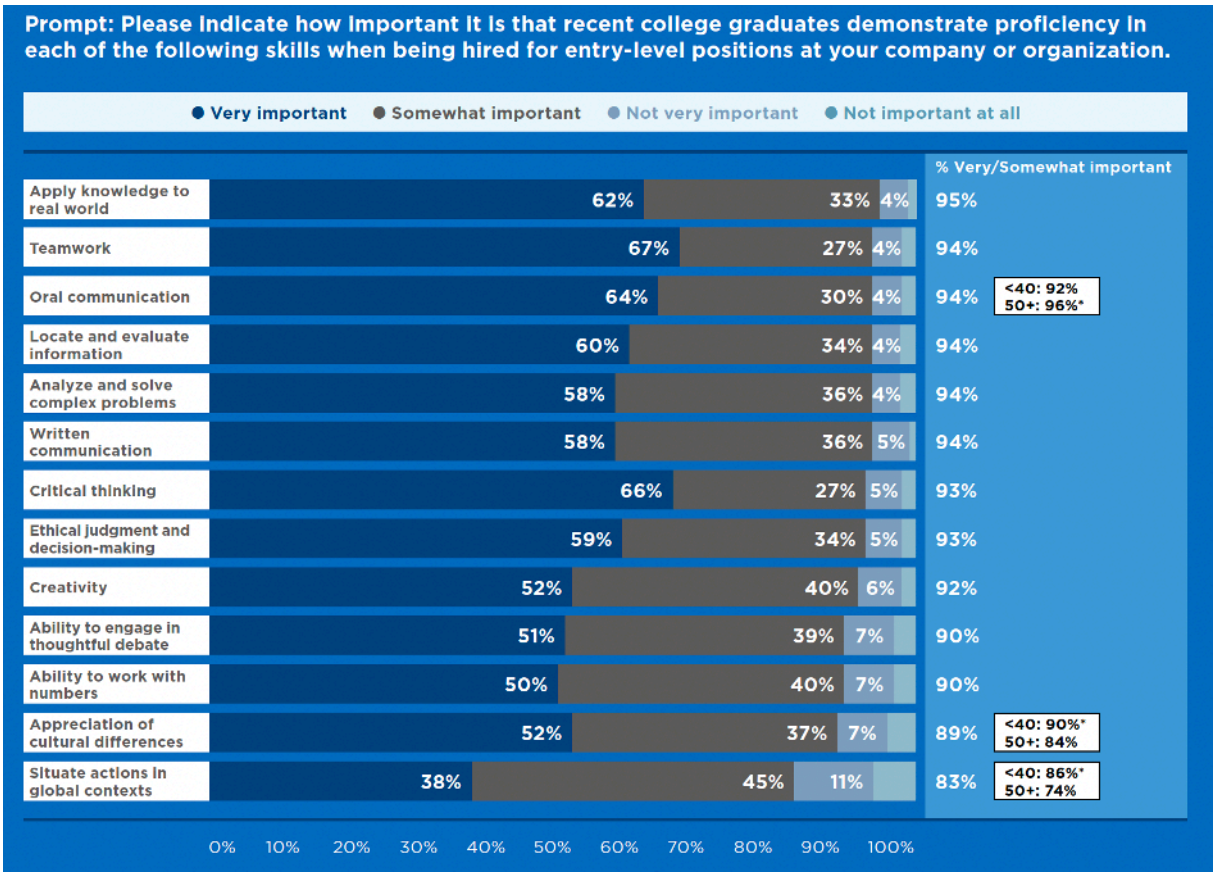
Community - Experiences that offer deep exposure to diverse perspectives, skills, and opportunities

- Students experience sustained social interactions amongst a diverse set of peers:
    - The university is primarily a residential campus with on-campus housing designed to accommodate the majority of undergraduate students.
- Significant student participation in experiences that offer knowledge and skills beyond direct course of study such as study abroad programs, cooperative (work-study) programs or internships, off-campus study (i.e., consortia, exchange programs), and participation in Army, Navy, or Air Force ROTC.
- Significant student participation in a diverse array of extracurricular activities.

Impact of a Liberal Arts and Sciences Education on Workforce Preparation

Since 2006, the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has regularly surveyed employers about how well universities are preparing students for the workforce. In terms of the overall value of a liberal arts education, *93% of employers value critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills more than an applicant's undergraduate major and 80% of employers agree that all students should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences*.

Employers also strongly value the specific skills that are the foundation of a liberal arts and sciences education:



Deloitte Access Economics predicts that jobs requiring these skills are expected to grow 2.5 times faster than other job types and by 2030, two-thirds of all jobs will require these skills. Deloitte calls these the "New Hard Skills" as they are essential, transferable skills that are valuable for business success and cannot be easily replaced by AI. Employers value these skills as they are harder to teach than technical skills. *These skills are the foundational skills taught in a liberal arts education.*

These skills support business success. In Deloitte's 2024 Global Human Capital Trends report, 73% of respondents say that human capabilities need to move in step with technological innovation, but only 9% say they are achieving that balance. When organizations can achieve the balance, they are 1.8 times more likely to achieve their desired business outcomes than organizations that are unable to bridge the gap.