It Takes More Than a Major:
What Employers Want to See in Student Learning Outcomes and College Graduates
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Over 300 employers feel that to be a successful graduate, that graduate needs competencies in a set of university learning outcomes that include a broad education in the liberal arts and sciences, beyond that solely offered in the student's major. While the major is essential, those broad learning outcomes should emphasize: 1) critical thinking and analytical reasoning, 2) complex problem-solving and analysis, 3) written and oral communication, 4) the application of knowledge and skills to real-world settings, 5) the location, organization, and evaluation of information from multiple sources, 6) innovation and creativity, 7) ethical decision-making and integrity, 8) collaborative and teamwork skills, especially with people from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds, and 9) capacity for continued professional development and life-long learning. Employers want to see a curriculum that addresses these learning outcomes.

While not denying the essential role of the major, nearly all those surveyed (93%) agree that, "a candidate's demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is *more important* than their undergraduate major." More than nine in ten of those surveyed say it is important that those they hire to demonstrate ethical judgment and integrity; intercultural skills; and the capacity for continued new learning.

A degree from the University of Idaho represents the culmination of the curriculum learned in the Major and in General Education, and in the co-curricular experiences gained outside the classroom, through involvement in clubs and organizations, service learning and social action, athletics, residential and Greek affiliations, and many other volunteer opportunities.

What employers want to see in their future hires and in a university's learning outcomes (expressed in percentages) align with our University of Idaho and the General Education Learning Outcomes as follows:

- **Learn and Integrate** – Through independent learning and collaborative study, attain, use, and develop knowledge in the arts, humanities, sciences, and social sciences, with disciplinary specialization and the ability to integrate information across disciplines.
    - The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings through other hands-on experiences 78%*
    - Location, organization, and evaluation of information from multiple sources 72%*
    - Acquire hands on or direct experience with methods of science 69%
    - The ability to work with numbers and understand statistics 55%

- **Think and Create** – Use multiple thinking strategies to examine real-world issues, explore creative avenues of expression, solve problems, and make consequential decisions.
    - Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills 82%

- The ability to analyze and solve complex problems 81%
- The ability to innovate and be creative 71%

- **Communicate** – Acquire, articulate, create and convey intended meaning using verbal and non-verbal methods of communication that demonstrate respect and understanding in a complex society.
  - The ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing 80%
  - Location, organization, and evaluation of information from multiple sources 72%*

- **Clarify Purpose and Perspective** – Explore one's life purpose and meaning through transformational experiences that foster an understanding of self, relationships, and diverse global perspectives.
  - The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings through hands-on experiences 78%*
  - The ability to understand the global context and cultures outside the United States 78%*

- **Practice Citizenship** – Apply principles of ethical leadership, collaborative engagement, socially responsible behavior, respect for diversity in an interdependent world, and a service-oriented commitment to advance and sustain local and global communities.
  - The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings through hands-on experiences 78%*
  - The ability to understand the global context and cultures outside the United States 78%*
  - Develop the skills to conduct research collaboratively 74%
  - Teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others in diverse group settings 67%
  - The ability to work through ethical issues and debates to form own judgments about the issues at stake 66%

These findings are from *It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning* (in *Liberal Education* 99 (2):22-290 Spring 2013; with original data from the April 10, 2013 publication by Hart Research Associates). It was a survey of employers conducted for the American Association of Colleges and Universities, from January 9 to 12, 2013, by Hart Research Associates. Founded in 1971, Hart Research Associates is one of the leading survey research firms in the United States and has been at the cutting edge of change in the field of public opinion for more than three decades. In that time, they have conducted well over 5,000 public opinion surveys and have administered and analyzed interviews among more than three million individuals. For this study, they interviewed 318 employers whose organizations have at least 25 employees and report that 25% or more of their new hires hold either an associates degree from a two-year college or a bachelor's degree from a four-year college. Respondents are executives at private sector and non-profit organizations, including owners, CEOs, presidents, C-suite level executives, and vice presidents.

*****Starred items are shown in multiple learning outcome categories because they apply to more than one.

NOTE: the five University of Idaho Learning Outcomes are the Learning Outcomes of the General Education curriculum.

Assembled by Rodney Frey, Director of General Education
rfrey@uidaho.edu 885-6268