



## Well Prepared in Their Own Eyes

by Scott Jaschik / Inside Higher Education

It turns out that college students are well-prepared for their future careers -- at least in their own minds. Ask employers, however, and it's a very different picture.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) asked groups of employers and college students a series of similar questions about career preparation. They could be scary reading for many students and the college educators who are trying to prepare them for careers. AACU released its survey results in January 2015.

Consistent with past AACU surveys, this one found that employers are concerned about new graduates having a range of skills in areas like communication and team work -- and that employers aren't as obsessed as some governors with questions about students' choice of major. This year, AACU did a companion survey of college students -- 613 students at public and private two-year and four-year colleges. The employer results come from 400 respondents whose organizations have at least 25 employees and report that 25 percent or more of their new hires hold either an associate degree from a two-year college or a bachelor's degree from a four-year college.

### Employer Perspective

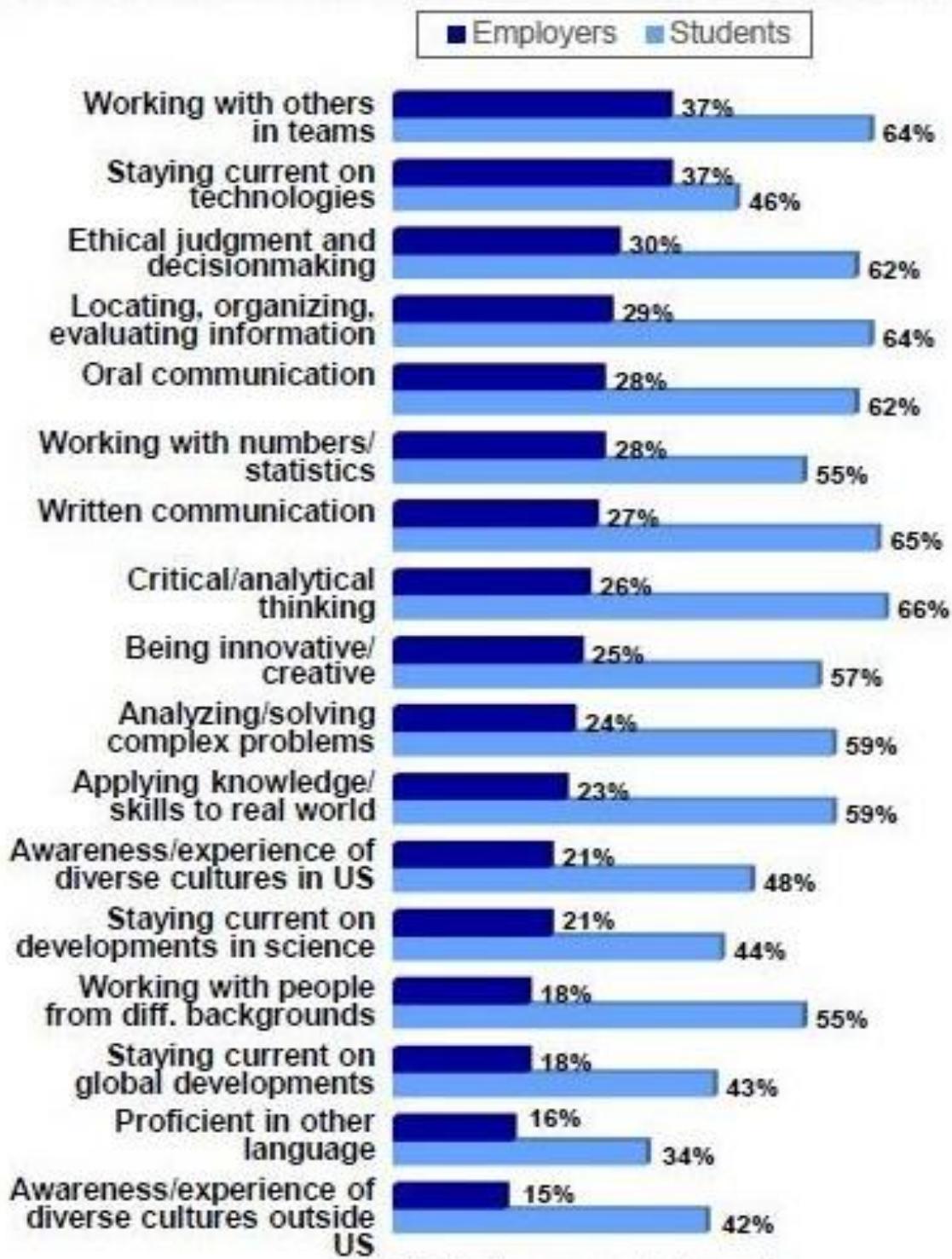
According to the data collected and analyzed by AACU, students consistently rank themselves as prepared in areas where employers do not agree. The area where students and employers are the closest to being aligned is in staying current with new technologies, where 37 percent of employers think students are well-prepared and 46 percent of students think that. But in a number of key areas (oral communication, written communication, critical thinking, being creative), students are more than twice as likely as employers to think that students are being well-prepared. And these are the kinds of qualities that many colleges say are hallmarks of a liberal education.

"When it comes to the types of skills and knowledge that employers feel are most important to workplace success, large majorities of employers do NOT feel that recent college graduates are well prepared. This is particularly the case for applying knowledge and skills in real-world settings, critical thinking skills, and written and oral communication skills — areas in which fewer than three in 10 employers think that recent college graduates are well prepared. Yet even in the areas of ethical decision-making and working with others in teams, many employers do not give graduates high marks," the AACU report says.

## Grading Today's Students

Employers Give college graduates low scores for preparedness across learning outcomes; students think they are better prepared.

*Proportions saying they/recent college graduates are well prepared in each area\**



\*8-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale

## **Survey Results**

Other parts of the employer survey may be more encouraging to many college educators, especially those who endorse the AACU view that there is more to college education than picking a major in a hot career field.

Employers were asked whether it was more important for new hires to have training in specific skills for a job, a "range of knowledge" or both specific skills and a range of knowledge. "Both" was the clear winner at 60 percent, followed by range of knowledge with 25 percent and specific skills at only 15 percent.

Further, the survey found that large majorities of employers at least somewhat agree with statements that suggest support for general education and a curriculum that extends beyond job training.

## **What Students Should Do**

Employers Who Strongly or Somewhat Agree with These Statements:

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree
All college students should have educational experiences that teach them how to solve problems with people whose views are different than their own.	59%	37%
All college students should gain an understanding of democratic institutions and values	32%	55%
Every college student should take courses that build the civil knowledge, skills and judgment essential for contributing to our democratic society.	33%	53%
Every college student should acquire broad knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences.	29%	49%
All college students should gain intercultural skills and an understanding of societies and countries outside the United States.	21%	57%

Source:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2015/01/20/study-finds-big-gaps-between-student-and-employer-perceptions>