

Competencies Most Desired by Area Employers
 Career Advisory Council Meeting 30 March 2007

The following is a summary of the results of a workshop that Dave James and Jeff Jablonski conducted with the Career Services Center’s Career Advisory Council on March 30, 2007.

The Career Advisory Council is made up of [summary of attendance at meeting]

The employers and Career Services Center staff were arranged into groups and given a worksheet with the following question: “What competencies in new college graduates are most critical to success in the workplace?” The groups were asked to list up to ten competencies and then rank the top three. After a group discussion, a total of 15 sheets were collected. Since not all of the sheets ranked the competencies, the lists were tabulated and grouped according to the following categories Table 1.

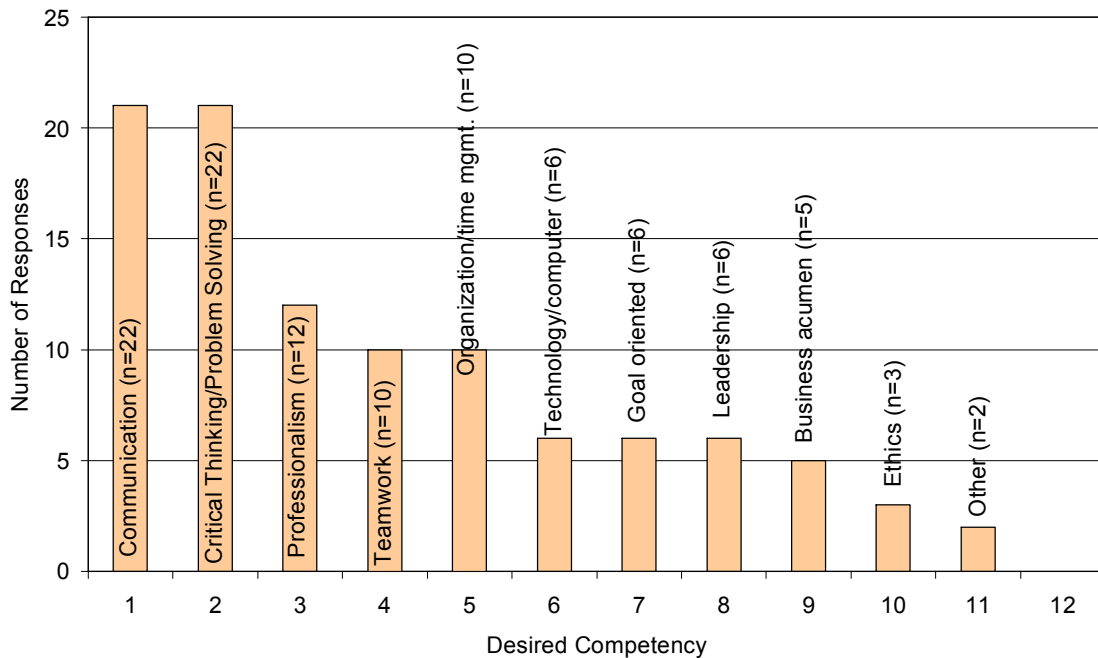
Table 1. Competencies Identified at 30 March 2007 Workshop, Arranged by Category	
Category	Competencies Identified by Employers/CSC Staff
1. Communication	Writing skills, public speaking, presentation skills, business writing skills, technical writing skills, technology to communicate, English grammar, organize data
2. Critical thinking/problem solving	Critical thinking, ability to translate theory to practice, cognitive skills, cognitive ability to translate intellectual pursuits to real world, ask questions, creativity, open-mindedness, applying studies learned in college, raise awareness to problems
3. Professionalism	Work discipline, work ethic, workplace readiness, professionalism, responsibility, business maturity, work experience, personal discipline, accountability
4. Teamwork	Teamwork, listening skills, communication with coworkers, team player
5. Organizational/time management	Organizational skills, time management, task completion, multi-tasking, flexibility
6. Technology/computer	Computer skills, technology skills,
7. Goal oriented	Goal setting, goal oriented, attitude to achieve, true interest in knowledge gain, self-starter, motivated
8. Leadership	Leadership, change and change agent, show initiative
9. Business acumen	Customer service skills, financial knowledge, financial responsibility, sales skills, good broad based business background
10. Ethics	Ethics, character
11. Other	Skills directly related to primary tasks performed, high intellect

A few of the above competencies could be arranged in one or more categories. For instance, “flexibility,” an attribute we assigned to “organizational/time management,” might be assigned to the critical thinking category. While we assigned “character” to

“ethics,” some might assign it to the “professionalism” category. A few competencies might deserve their own category, such as “creativity” or “change agent.” Overall, however, we believe the main categories listed above are generally consistent with the competencies associated with them.

As Figure 1 shows, the employers and Career Services Center staff identified communication skills and critical thinking/problem solving skills as the most important competencies by a large margin (n=22 each). Of the rest of the competencies, professionalism was the second most important (n=12). Teamwork and organizational/time management skills were tied for the third most important (n=10 each). Technology/computer, goal oriented, and leadership were tied for fourth most important (n=6 each), followed by business acumen (n=5) and ethics (n=3). Two responses did not fit into any of the above categories and were listed as “Other” (see table 1 above).

Figure 1. Results of UNLV Career Advisory Council Workshop 30 march 2007



The results clearly indicate that Las Vegas area employers’ desire strong communication skills in recent college graduates, including writing, speaking, and “presentation” skills. Employers equally value critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Most of the rest of the attributes favored by employers would be ones that are not traditionally associated with a general or liberal education, including professionalism, teamwork, organization/time management, goal oriented, leadership, and business acumen. One might include ethics in this list; however, ethics are more and more mentioned as a worthy goal for higher education, both generally and in the major.

It is noteworthy that the employers did not put more emphasis on job-related technical skills, but it is likely this omission is based on the context of the workshop that elicited these results, as we were explicitly discussing general education.

These results suggest that employers have a different conception of “general education” than the one held by most professors, who believe the purpose of general education is to expose students to a breadth of knowledge from courses outside the student’s major. However, both employers and professors seem to agree on the basic skills that college graduates should possess, including communication and critical thinking. Employers and professors might agree on other goals listed above, such as technology, ethics, and leadership.

To what extent outcomes such as professionalism, time management, goal oriented, and business acumen should be part of general education, most professors would argue that these are either basic skills that should be mastered prior to college or that these are skills reserved for business majors. However, as the Association of American Colleges and University has argued in its *Greater Expectations* report, a case could be made that some or all of these so-called “practical” competencies could be constitutive of the skills necessary for students to become *intentional* and *integrative* about their learning, which is an outcome increasingly being called on by AAC&U and other higher education organizations.