Employability Self-Assessment Stakeholder Survey Results

Fall 2020

Summary

As a part of its Employability Self-Assessment project with the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, the QA Commons put forward a survey of faculty and staff from the 18 participating programs from six two-year colleges and two four-year universities. The goal of the survey was to better understand the perceptions of faculty and staff on the topic of employability. Survey responses will be used to further inform those engaged in the CSCU Employability project. Responses were anonymous.

Demographics

- 150 CSCU faculty and staff members participated in the survey.

- 4.8% identified as of Hispanic or Latinx origin (vs. 95.2% who did not.), 87% of respondents identified as white, 8.2% identified as Asian, 5.5% identified as Black or African American, and 2.1% identified as American Indian or Alaska Natives.

- 53.3.% of respondents were full-time faculty members, 38% were part-time or adjunct faculty members, 2.7% were Academic Administrators (Deans, Directors or Coordinators), 2.7% were Career Services professionals, 2% were alumni, and 1.3% were Institutional Research professionals.

- 55.7% of respondents were female and 44.3% were male.

Quantitative Findings

Faculty and staff generally agreed that one of their responsibilities is to ensure that students are prepared with the employability skills required in the world of work. In general, they believe that they are doing a sufficient job with this preparation.

Faculty and staff were less confident in their work around the assessment of student Essential Employability Qualities, employer engagement, integration of career services throughout the program, and making graduation rates available to the public.

Areas of opportunity identified include:

- Faculty engagement with career services (over half of respondents had not engaged with career services during the past term),

- Input by alumni around program creation, revision, and continuous improvement
- Provision of direct and verifiable feedback to students, by employers, on their performance, and
- The provision of information to the public on workplace skills attainment requirements within the program.

Challenges

The question around challenges in providing students with the necessary employability skills to ensure they are successful in the workplace is rich with responses. **All of the responses are included (see page 4)**. Most of the comments fit into one (or more) of four broad categories:

1. **Needs or challenges they face**, which was the actual question. (e.g., students: aren't prepared when they enter/don't care/work too much/just want to get finished, etc.; faculty lack actual work experience; faculty have too little face-to-face time with students
2. **A misunderstanding or lack of understanding** (e.g., regarding "employability," the role of faculty, the purpose of their program, the need to integrate employability with academics)
3. **Lack of resources** (the institution's and/or students')   (e.g., having only one career counselor, career services' not responding, no career center; shortage of time and/or money)
4. **Administrative support** does not seem adequate to support employability initiatives, due to mandates/projects/pressure from the Board of Regents: that do not allow more resources for students; or to increase retention/graduation

Specific Findings

Quantitative Responses

Below are the statements to which participants responded. They are sorted in order of average score, from high to low. The scoring scale is:

4 = Completely Agree; 3 = Mostly Agree; 2 = Somewhat Agree; 1 = Do Not Agree

The percentage of "Don't Know" responses is notable for many statements.

| Statement	Average Score	Mostly / Completely Agree	Don't Know
It is one of my responsibilities to ensure students are prepared with the employability skills required in the world of work	3.22	69.3%	4.0%

There are ways for students to provide feedback to the program	3.11	59.4%	12.7%
The program includes sufficient training in employability skills that prepares students to be successful in the workplace.	3.08	70.7%	9.3%
The program is committed to ensuring students are trained in relevant employability skills	3.05	70.0%	4.7%
The program values the input of employers	3.01	50.0%	**20.0%**
Training in employability skills is embedded throughout the curriculum	2.94	62.0%	8.0%
Key assignments throughout the program are relevant to workplace contexts	2.85	55.3%	6.7%
The program makes information on workplace skills attainment requirements available to the public	2.48	27.3%	**34.7%**
Students are assessed at or near graduation to ensure they are proficient in essential employability skills	2.43	32.6%	**23.8%**
Alumni have input into the program, such as through creation, revision, and continuous improvement	2.37	26.7%	**33.3%**
Career services is integrated throughout the program	2.31	29.4%	**24.0%**
Employers provide direct and verifiable feedback to students on their performance	2.28	27.3%	**23.3%**
I engage regularly with employers	2.27	34.0%	1.3%
Employers have input into the program, such as through creation, revision, and continuous improvement	2.20	28.0%	**26.0%**
The program makes information, such as graduation rates, available to the public.	2.11	45.4%	**32.7%**

Additionally, participants were asked two additional questions:

1) Participants were asked to indicate the **number of times they engaged with career services during the past term**. 52.3% (79 respondents) had not engaged with career services during the past term. At

the other end of the spectrum, 8.6% (13 respondents) had engaged with career services over ten times during the past term. *(Note that four respondents were Career Services staff themselves.)*

Number of times participants engaged with career services during the past term:
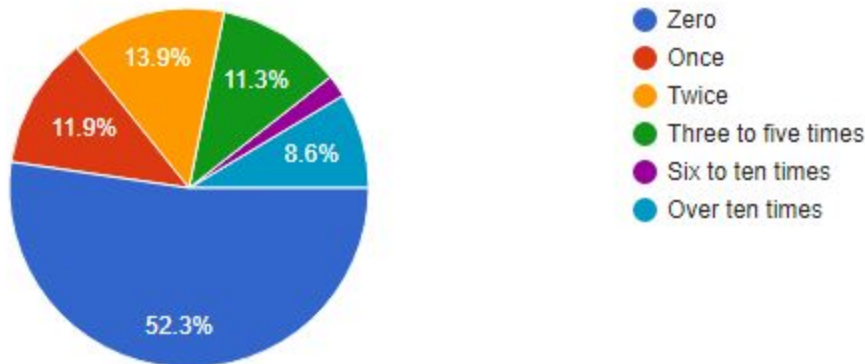
2) Participants were asked to indicate **how important they believe the preparation of students in employability skills to be**. 64.6% responded that they believe technical and employability skills to be equally important. 25.2% believe that employability skills are somewhat or much more important than technical skills.

Qualitative Responses

Participants were asked what challenges they face in providing students with the necessary employability skills to ensure they are successful in the workplace. All responses are listed below:

- None

- I am the only career counselor. I am also the veteran counselor, retention specialist, and STEM advisor.

- n/a

- Students need improvement in communicating in writing and speaking, need training in logical thinking, analysis of texts and historical backgrounds

- Helping students understand alignment of the degree with specific career opportunities.

- None, as English is by definition teaching to those skills

- My class is project based and skill development based so I feel there is always room for improvement but I haven't had many challenges except some students are not as comfortable with using the computer and programs like Blackboard.

- Soft skills are greatly overlooked in courses that students are not aware of what is needed to be successful in a job.

- As a Career Center Director, access, engagement and capacity to the student body.

- lack of a career center

- I am not sure what a lot of this means

- I am not in the corporate workplace. The workplace is defined as corporate only, not academic nor non-profit.

- mental health and perception of life

- A clear goal by the students as to what they want to do

- There is a lack of diversity among the faculty, all faculty are white and mostly male. And, not surprisingly, the students are also essentially white. Consequently, there is little or no opportunity for our students to engage classmates from different cultural backgrounds or worldviews, or to see them as peers.

- My engagement with career services meant sending emails that received no response. I teach at a liberal arts university, not a vocational center. The attention to employability by administration is without support, context, leadership, or vision.

- None. The college does a great job supporting the Adjunct faculty and local employers.

- Balancing skills and knowledge in a limited time-frame

- communicating to them the skills they are gaining so they can communicate them to potential employers

- none at this time.

- Students entering with low skills in English. Mental health/anxiety issues are a barrier for many. Students have little prior experience with accepting correction/criticism.

- valuable internship opportunities

- My greatest hope is to engage students in creative problem solving

- Keeping current in employability skills. Downplaying the negative media/social media attention to the job. Teaching critical thinking skills and the new challenges that affect the workplace.

- Getting students to learn the BASIC learning skills are of paramount importance. Writing skills are a primary focus from beginning to end.

- Do not have sufficient staffing or institution support to accommodate student's career/employability needs

- There are not that many 2-year associate level jobs in the field at this time

- Brevity of face to face time.

- Often not enough lab or practical time to cover

- the most essential skills desired by employers. Making students motivated to learn and having more help available for them during and outside of classes - more instructors and educational assistants is tied directly to the program quality and the capacity to which instructors can serve students effectively. Lastly, a need for more times to meet with local employers during the school year - this is a challenge to find time or get it scheduled (lucky to happen once or twice a semester or academic year).

- Student writing abilityThere is too much pressure from the administration to hand out A's because faculty have been given the message that enrollment and retention are all that matter. The anti-intellectual culture at the CSUs and the top down interference prevents faculty from holding students to college standards which is the best way to prepare them for the workplace and for global citizenship in the 21st c. We need the freedom to teach them college level writing and thinking and to allow them to learn the hard lessons now when the stakes are not as high (ie. failing a class) as they are in the professional world (ie. being fired). Interference from the BOR and the administration prevents these students from developing the ability to think or to be creative or effective as individuals. Learning outcomes, competencies and rubrics are destroying their intellectual abilities and their chances of becoming responsible citizens. Our meager resources should not be squandered on BOR projects outspend the students. We are a university not a trade school.

- Aside from programs that are skill based or have internships, it is not on anyone's radar, especially in the current conditions.

- Lack of opportunities in the workplace. COVID-19 has limited the necessary face to face interaction.

- Basic reading and writing skills

- Our students, like the population as a whole, have various skill sets and levels of competency. I am an adjunct who is also a potential employer of our students. Many of our students come to us poorly prepared by their high schools and much time and effort is directed at bringing them to the level they should have attained in high school. This is especially so in writing and critical reasoning. I frequently observe students substituting personal anecdotes or unsupported opinion for factual analysis. Another challenge that I face in teaching our students is their need to balance work, family, and education. Frequently, it is the course work that gets neglected when the need to earn a living or care for a family fills their available hours in the day. We need to be understanding in these contexts, and I do provide extensions for the completion of assignments, but frequently the student's work suffers because he or she will do enough to get by, but not really make an effort to master the material. This undermines their purpose for entering the criminal justice program in search of a career in the field and puts them at a disadvantage vis-a-vis students in a tradition 4 year full time undergraduate program in competing for employment.

- Lack of coordination. Other institutions have coordinators responsible for placement and career services for all students in various programs. Unfortunately, that is not the case here at my college.

- From my understanding of hiring and general business practices, technical skills can be trained on the job, but people skills (empathy, communication, likability, integrity, teamwork, and networking) are not taught directly as "employability skills" - they are often deemed to be "personality traits" or "soft skills

learned at home" or at least outside of the classroom. In my experience, they can be effectively fostered in students when students participate in campus life and take on leadership roles. Long term, one of the greatest "career services" a college can offer is a strong alumni support network and both a career services center and dedicated faculty that will continue to support its alumnae for years after graduation. For many students, especially first-generation college students, the network they do or do not build while in college will be a significant factor in determining their long-term employability. Employability is often less about who or what you know and more about who knows you and who they can connect you to. I make a point of letting my students know they can reach out to me for references and referrals.

- None that I know of

- We don't have set skills mapped to the curriculum the way the General Education goals are. Some employability skills overlap with Gen Ed, though.

- It is not clear what this survey defines as "employability skills." Our courses in the humanities and the arts develop skills in critical thinking, critical reading, creativity, teamwork, problem solving, identifying and using reliable information, and more. But these may not be taught explicitly in the context of success in the workplace.

- Also, looking ahead to the next question, I don't know how the survey defines technical skills.

- I'm assuming tech skills are skills specific to a profession, whereas employability skills are the kinds listed in my comments above.

- I have no idea what the workplace is going to look like in 4 years, and neither do you.

- Many faculty in our department have little experience working outside of academia and so don't have a clear sense of how to help students translate what they learn in our courses into other contexts. Also, other than teaching, there is no one direct career path that the majority of English majors take after college, and so it is difficult to establish relationships with employers.

- Lack of focus on soft skills

- Labs need to be updated and new resources need to be added

- Engagement, Access, Resources....and integration of experiential education into the general curriculum; the Career Center has created three courses for career education, and hoping that we can get this through the faculty process; we then hope it can get resourced.

- Developing students' critical thinking abilities.

- Employable skills are only one portion of what we teach.

- Identifying and utilizing systems of documentation in the nursing homes and having availability to train students on them.

- Mostly getting students (and, conspicuously, employers) to understand that the skills students are honing through their study of a seemingly "impractical" subject—critical thinking, the ability to engage in open-ended conversations about complex topics full of ambiguity, the ability to do research and combine multiple perspectives, the ability to communicate clearly and precisely—really *do* lay the foundations for career success. I call this "education" rather than "training." [Note: I can't answer the last question on this survey, in part because it presents a false dichotomy, but also because neither of its terms is actually applicable to what my students or I do.]

- Key contacts with hiring managers in a range of industries

- In recent years, many opportunities have been eliminated due to budget restraints (career fairs, guest speakers), and staffing restraints (agency/department outreach is at a minimum when we have mostly PT). Really, it comes down to resources.

- The Online environment provides unique challenges. Also, I have found that many of our students find it difficult to put the time in that is required to do collaborative projects and other assignments.

- Student engagement and connection to seeking career services.

- Variety of skills that students come in with and at various levels of success.

- None- constant feedback from employers is used to drive program improvements throughout the year.

- Soft Skills and student buy-in

- Our Career Services Department is overwhelmed and understaffed

- They already work full time at low-paying jobs and do not have time to take on internships that would further their skill set.

- This survey does not define "relevant skills" or "employability skills" - it is therefore left up to the individual instructor to incorporate correlative and transferable skills.

- buy-in from all faculty

- One of the worst examples of a missed opportunity for student career success was the new logo at my university. The administration chose to hire an expensive external design firm to design a new logo. Why not ask the students to design a new one? Why not make it a contest and guarantee the winner publicity and recognition? This would have been the best way that the administration could have shown the students that they matter. This would have ensured that students could have written something meaningful and relevant and true on their resumes. The student who designed the new University logo would have been well positioned to be employed in a relevant field. The BOR and the administration pay lip service to claiming that students matter, but their actions belie that claim- as this example illustrates. Abolish the BOR so that the administration will turn its attention back to its own campuses, back to the students rather than trying to please Hartford and playing politics all the time. Spending the state's limited budget on expensive third-party firms that do not know us and are not invested in us just for the sake of making the BOR seem important harms actual education and actual students who are often making great sacrifices to be here. Abolish the BOR so that money can be spent on students and learning and intellectual engagement rather than meaningless optics. Take politics out of public education. Spend university money on university students. Support the faculty rather than attacking us. A proper Liberal Arts education is what prepares students for the workplace.

- Students do not sometimes want to do what it takes to practice the skills most essential to employability.

- You need a structured program to embed employability skills. General studies is not a structured program and students can take a huge variety of classes that may not have the embedded skills.

- Although I teach many "soft skills" and expect my students to employ these skills and behaviors while a student (be on time, submit work by deadlines, pay attention to detail, not to use excuses when something was not submitted or student was late, overall professionalism), there are still some students who do not follow these basic soft skills, especially during their externship, and earn low marks on their evaluation in the area of professionalism/soft skills.

- Having students understand the ability to work independently (find the solutions/research on their own), meeting deadlines, teamwork, punctuality.

- Not all students show up on time or consistently, and many are inconsistent with submitting work. Occasionally, there are some behavior issues that would not be acceptable in the workplace (or in school, for that matter). Technology, spoken and written communication skills, and critical thinking lacking are lacking in some students. All of these issues in some students (NOT all) are indicative of future problems with employability. Students who are eager to learn, have a strong work ethic, and want to succeed, have a level of maturity that demonstrates more potential for employability. It's a mixed bag with too many variables to account for. Our job as faculty is to reach all students as equally as possible to prepare them for post-graduation options, whether that may be more schooling or a career.

- The textbook favors examples of large, publicly traded companies. That is not the size company that most students will work for or own.

- Getting meaningful collaboration

- I teach a 1 credit lab section. I am limited as to what the lab covers.

- Fixing all the necessary skills into the program and to finish timely.

- Clarity on specific skills required. We all include various activities that incorporate employable skill sets (critical evaluation of data, calculation, data representation). It is likely that we touch on similar skills which, with agreement, would facilitate reporting back on those skills.

- lack of training in specific fields

- We probably cover all skills, but it's not deliberate/organized or planned

- N/A

- Expecting that all students will be successful, or at least meet whatever their vision of success is.

- lacking sufficient classroom space, lack of refurbished analyzers, reagents and materials to perform classroom exercises

- The language and metrics used to evaluate employability skills do not lend themselves to the skills the program features, including writing, critical reading, and critical analysis.

- I do include professional development as a theme in my courses. I could do more to help connect students to specific careers and how the skills they are learning will be useful in those careers. I think we could do more, overall, to help students determine their next step after graduation. I think we need to do more to keep them in the pipeline to a career in biology vs. letting them graduate without a clear idea and potentially moving into a less fulfilling and less lucrative career path.

- Students are not particularly interested in that kind of conversation, they want to learn the material and get out.

- I teach entry level composition. Students often do not realize the importance of written communication to their success on the job.

- No one thinks of our programs as being geared to workplace preparation

- Technology skills for older students is a consistent problem. Writing is another widespread weakness.

- They're incredibly negative attitudes, laziness, entitlement, addiction to their phones, and lack of work ethic. They expect to be handed a job upon graduation, they have no interest in actually obtaining the

skills necessary to get that first job. Perhaps 10% get it, 90% do not… But this is a cultural issue, having nothing to do with university or the program.

- Teaching mathematics relevant to the workplace.

- Accessibility

- Translating history skills into workplace language

- none right now.

- siloed class formation

- We teach the students many of the skills needed in the workplace as 80% of the accounting professors are professionals in the field. There is no assessment prior to graduation, the internship is not required, and there is no person in career services 100% dedicated employment for graduates.

- With COVID, placement has been a bit more challenging.

- Most of class time is dedicated to technical skill building. Employability skills tend to be a secondary consideration.

- I don't interact with Career Services

- Staffing/Time

- Part of my challenge is that my students' skill levels are diverse from very low, to exceptional, and everything in between. The employability training with such a spectrum of skill ability is difficult, but there is great opportunity for soft-skill development.

- During COVID, face to face clinical time

- Commitment on the part of students is key to their coursework and ultimate success as a professional. Sometimes students are unable to make such a commitment due to finances, family obligations, mental health issues, or lack of transportation.

- Lack of feedback from the employers on the employability skills

- Lack of full-time faculty, lack of funding for software, equipment and subscriptions

- Required math is too low and no math pathways exist

- Lack of basic writing skills learned in high school; lack of work ethic