

What Do College Students Learn In College?

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More people are attending colleges than ever before. What once was a virtually automatic route to a good job as a result of a college degree is less so today due to the increased number of college graduates. Students need to acquire superior marketing skills in order to assure themselves maximum benefits of their college education in the job market. This article suggests that much is learned outside the classroom that is valuable in job seeking.

Social, political, and psychological learning takes place in the college setting and what is learned outside the classroom needs to be sold to potential employers. These non-classroom skills constitute the "edge" aware students have over their contemporaries. Most employers believe they know what classroom learning students have when they graduate. It is the value added learning that offers job applicants opportunities to rise above the average job competitor; but only if the job applicant effectively sells what skills they have to offer.

College offers students opportunities to socialize, to lead, and to diversify their activity repertoire. Most employers seek job applicants who have social skills such as: sensitivity to others, social grace, empathy, getting along with others, understanding privacy and confidentiality, and being approachable.

Potential employers also seek applicants who show leadership potential. Leadership characteristics such as: decision-making; vision; prioritizing abilities; adaptability and flexibility, being able to guide and influence others; responsibility; garnering trust and confidence; knowing how to inspire and motivate others; and being dependable are valuable assets in job searches.

College educated job applicants also are expected to be able to demonstrate psychological traits such as: supportiveness, tact, empathy, task focus, appropriate disclosiveness, patience with others, assuming varying roles, tolerance of new people and ideas, pride in what they do, and personal modesty.

Political skills such as: negotiating and compromise; loyalty to employer and fellow employees; mediating; delegating; coordinating people and activities; enforcing and obeying rules and policy; understanding and avoiding harassment, intimidation, and demeaning behavior; and networking are yet more skills needed to be a superior job applicant.

These are not exhaustive lists; rather, they are representative of what, beyond the classroom, is commonly expected of college graduates when they apply for jobs. What classes teach these skills? Few class that I know of

specifically teaches these needed skills. Some of these skills can be learned, to some degree, in select classes; however, it is outside the classroom that these skills are commonly learned. I do not argue that classroom learning is deficient or defective; I do argue that classroom learning alone leaves students behind many contemporaries in what they can offer prospective employers.

Students need to be active outside the classroom to acquire and sharpen the skills listed above. Skills suffer entropy; that is, they tend to decay without periodic stimulus warding off their demise. Joining student organizations; accepting responsibilities of leadership tasks in such groups; joining, forming, and leading study groups; serving on campus and community committees and panels; volunteering for service to campus or community organizations; serving on student government; being a peer tutor; and being an RA or RD in the residence halls all provide students venues for adding and sharpening skills requisite for job search competition.

Being involved in this way actively demonstrates time management, versatility, commitment, a sense of community, and a high energy level. These, too, are highly sought after qualities in job applicants.

Having academic credentials and the skill repertoire discussed above is insufficient without being able to recognize and articulate how these relate to each other and relate to the job being sought. The wider the set of student experiences out of class, the better prepared are students to market the convergence of their learning and skills to convince employers that they are offering the expected and demanded value added college package.

In acquiring and sharpening the skills discussed in this article, students are taking the active part in their own education that enhances their job seeking goals. Being able to market this personal involvement is an added facet of superior job seeking.