Steppingblocks

Empowering Students with Essential Skills

A guide to Essential Skills and making sure your students are equipped for their careers

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More than ever, it is important for college students to develop essential skills, or skills that are durable, adaptable, and transferable. As technology evolves and workforce expectations change rapidly, essential skills are the key to ensuring students' long-term career success. In this eBook, learn more about essential skills and how to help students develop them.

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Why Essential Skills?

Most people have heard of "hard" or "technical" skills and their alleged opposite, "soft" skills. However, many career development practitioners and employers are shifting the focus to "essential" skills. In this age of rapidly evolving technology, employers want college graduates who have essential skills that can serve as a foundation for the makings of a great employee. These skills span industries and academic disciplines, and can help students guarantee their career success.
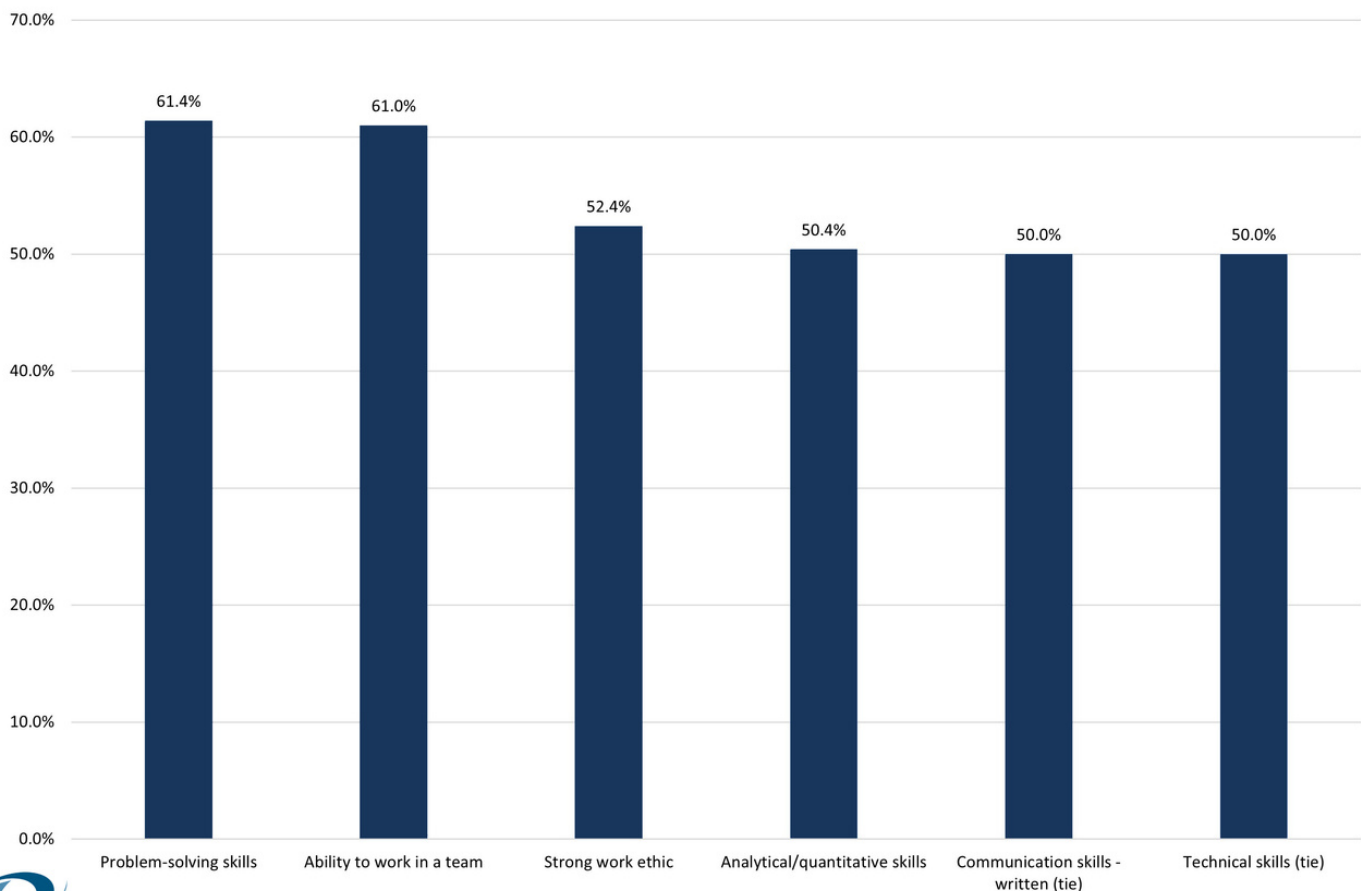
Essential Skills:

- **Are future-proof:** Technology and the world of work are changing constantly. With essential skills, students can ensure their long-term success. Essential skills will never go out of style.
- **Are adaptable:** In the current employment landscape, people jump between companies and industries more frequently than ever before. Essential skills are transferable across roles and fields, and allow people to thrive in a variety of environments.
- **Form the foundation of a successful professional:** With essential skills in their toolkit, students will become an invaluable asset in the workforce.

Essential Skills are crucial to students' career success!

What Are Employers Looking For?

In a 2023 study, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) surveyed employers to identify the top skills and competencies they look for when hiring recent graduates.

FIGURE 1: TOP 5 ATTRIBUTES EMPLOYERS SEEK ON CANDIDATE'S RESUME

Percent of respondents identifying attribute as very/extremely important
Source: Job Outlook 2023, National Association of Colleges and Employers

It is important for colleges and universities to know what the top essential skills are from the employer side, and share the information with their students. And, in turn, colleges and universities should be communicating to employers their students' top essential skills, and highlight what makes them uniquely suited for the workforce.

What Are Students' Top Essential Skills?

So what are the essential skills that recent graduates are bringing to employers? Here are the top 5 most popular essential skills among recent graduates, straight from the Steppingblocks Data.

1 ## Interpersonal Communication

No matter the industry or job function, employers want employees who can communicate effectively with others. This means communicating well with peers, supervisors, clients, patients, etc., and includes written and verbal communication methods.

2 ## Teamwork

Employers need employees who can work well with others. No matter how skilled a person is technically, they can negatively affect productivity and effectiveness if they cannot work well with a team.

3 ## Leadership

Leadership is a valuable skill for graduates to have, as employers want to hire people who can take on new projects, lead their peers, and eventually move up within the organization.

4 ## Multitasking

Most work environments require employees to be able to handle multiple projects and deadlines at a time, and to be able to manage them with autonomy.

5 ## Public Speaking

Employers value employees who feel comfortable and confident speaking in front of others, whether it's in a staff meeting or a client presentation.

Comparing Skills Data: Recent Graduates & Employers

When we compare the top essential skills cited by employers in the NACE survey with the top essential skills represented in Steppingblocks data of recent graduates, we see some similarities and some differences.

Top Skills Desired by Employers (NACE 2023)	Top Skills of Recent Graduates (Steppingblocks 2023)
Problem-Solving Skills	Interpersonal Communication
Ability to Work in a Team	Teamwork
Strong Work Ethic	Leadership
Analytical/Quantitative Skills	Multitasking
Communication Skills & Technical Skills (Tie)	Public Speaking

Steppingblocks skills data represents the skills that recent graduates have *digitally articulated.* This means that recent graduates are including these skills on their resumes, social media pages and posts, and other online profiles. So when we wonder why some of the top skills desired by employers are not represented in data from recent graduates, we can consider the following:

- **Do students have the skill, but aren't articulating them?** Graduates may have excellent problem-solving skills, but if they're not demonstrating that in their resume or elsewhere in their application materials, employers may not factor these skills into their candidacy. It is important to teach students how to articulate and demonstrate their skills in their application materials, in their online profiles, and in how they talk about themselves to potential employers.
- **Do students need opportunities to develop these skill?** Throughout a student's higher education journey, they should have plenty of opportunities to develop their essential skills, whether in the classroom, a research experience, an internship or co-op, etc. It is up to colleges and universities to help students develop and then articulate the skills that employers are looking for.

Help Your Students Develop Their Skills

Embed Skills into the Curriculum

Faculty across campus should integrate essential skills into the curriculum. This can come in the form of group projects, research assignments, opportunities to problem solve, and more. The classroom is a great environment for students to harness and understand the value of essential skills.

Prioritize Career Development & Career Services

Supporting students' career readiness is EVERYONE'S responsibility. To ensure that students have the career tools they need, career services should be integrated into all areas of campus, thus demonstrating to students the importance of their career development.

Require Experiential Learning Opportunities

Students can also develop their essential skills outside the classroom. Requiring students to engage in experiential learning and leadership opportunities is a great way to ensure that students are building their skills. catalog. These opportunities can include internships, research projects, networking, extracurricular activities, campus employment, and more.

Engage with Employers

Colleges and Universities should be in constant contact with their employers. In conversations with their top employers, colleges and universities can learn more about what skills employers are seeking to hire, and can also share their students' top skills with employers.

Help Your Students Tell Their Story

As students develop their essential skills, it is important that they learn how to articulate these skills and share the story of their abilities and goals. Oftentimes, students possess a number of these essential skills, but don't even realize it. Faculty and staff can help students articulate their accomplishments in a number of ways.

Take Stock of Their Experiences

Help students tell their story by first encouraging them to identify their experiences and accomplishments. Have them take stock of everything they've done so far in their professional journey, including classes they've taken, assignments they've completed, internships they've finished, projects they've worked on, clubs they've led, jobs they've had, etc.

Take Stock of Their Skills

Once students have identified their experiences, they can begin to take stock of the skills they developed through each experience. Did they delegate tasks in their group project? Did they manage competing deadlines in their internship? Did they solve a problem at work? Did they communicate effectively with the members of their club? This is where students can start to identify their essential skills.

Articulate Their Skills

As students identify their essential skills, they'll need to articulate them in a number of places. This could be in their resume, in a cover letter, in an interview, in networking scenarios, in their research, and more. More importantly, they'll need to be able to provide evidence and tell stories about each skill.
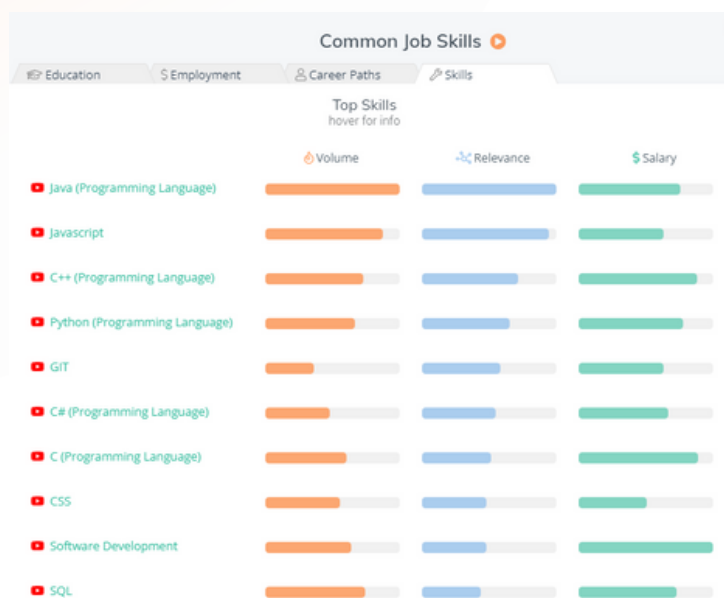
Craft Their Story

Throughout this process, students will start to craft the story of their career: past, present, and future. By identifying their top essential skills and the experiences that developed them, students will be able to connect their accomplishments to their future career goals. This is a crucial skill for students to develop as they embark on their career journey.

Maximize Steppingblocks Skills Data

Steppingblocks has a wealth of skills data in both the Graduate Insights and Digital Career Counselor platforms. You can leverage this data in a number of ways to support the essential skill development of your students.
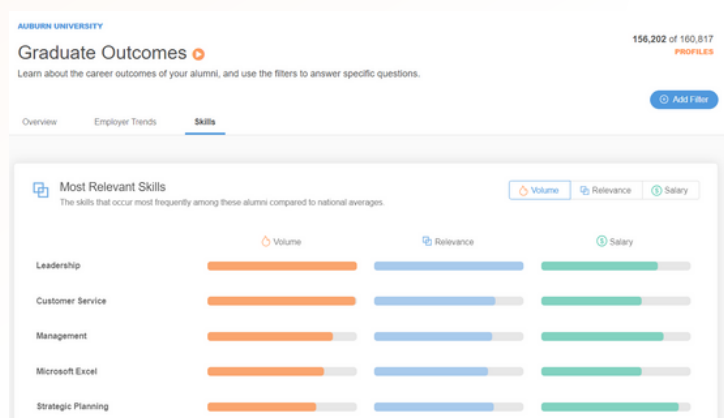
DIGITAL CAREER COUNSELOR

Digital Career Counselor is Steppingblocks' student-facing platform designed to help students explore career paths and outcomes. In the "Outcomes" module, students can view the top skills of their fellow alumni, and can filter by major, employer, and/or job type. In Search 360, students can search Steppingblocks' entire dataset of 135+ million people to view the top skills for graduates of a particular major, or for people with a particular job title. They can also view top skills by employer.

GRADUATE INSIGHTS

Graduate Insights is Steppingblocks' platform designed for faculty and staff. In both the Graduate Outcomes and Graduate Explorer dashboards, users can view the top skills of their graduates, and add a variety of filters to further explore. This is great for a number of use cases:

- Program Review & Development
- Accreditation & Reporting
- Employer Relations
- Admissions & Enrollment
- Marketing & Communications

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Resources and Contact Information

Check out our other resources for working with alumni:

Essential Skills Student Infographic

DataU: Essential Skills

General Resources

Steppingblocks Case Studies & Interviews

CLICK HERE

Steppingblocks DataU Podcast Series

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Steppingblocks Blog

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Steppingblocks Data Overview

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Partner Success Team

At Steppingblocks, we greatly value the insights and ideas of our stakeholders. We warmly welcome any feedback or suggestions you may have. Whether you have comments or questions, please do not hesitate to contact any member of the Partner Success Team!

Contact Us:
support@steppingblocks.com

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