S T A Y I N G   S M A R T :

How Today's Graduates Continue to Learn Once They Complete College

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Abstract: This report presents findings about the information-seeking behavior of relatively recent college graduates used for lifelong learning in personal life, the workplace, and the local communities where they lived. Included are results from online surveys of 1,651 respondents and telephone interviews with 126 study participants who graduated from one of 10 US colleges and universities between 2007 and 2012. Findings indicated that most graduates needed to learn a combination of basic and complex life skills during the past year, such as money-management, how to make household repairs, and how to advance in their careers and communicate better on the job. They consulted friends, family, and coworkers almost as much as the Web. Graduates preferred information sources that had currency, utility, and interactivity. They also placed a high premium on curated information systems that were organized and kept up-to-date, such as libraries, museums, and bookstores. A model of *shared utility* is introduced for explaining graduates' use of contemporary social media technologies as well as personal connections they had established with trusted allies. Graduates reported four barriers to their continued learning efforts: lack of time, finding affordable learning sources, staying on top of everything they needed to know, and staying motivated to keep learning after college. As a whole, graduates prided themselves on their ability to search, evaluate, and present information, skills they honed during college. Yet, far fewer said that their college experience had helped them develop the critical thinking skill of framing and asking questions of their own, which is a skill they inevitably needed in their post-college lives. Ten recommendations are presented for improving educational strategies, resources, and services that foster lifelong learning.

Appendix D: Phase Three, Follow-Up Interview Script

Introduction

Hello, I'm _____ (PIL Team Member's name). I am a researcher working on an academic research study. I will be conducting an interview with you today to hear your ideas, opinions, and beliefs for a new study we are conducting. We have obtained appropriate human subject approval at your institution as well as at the University of Washington's Information School, where our study is based, so that we have the necessary approvals to conduct these interviews.

In our study, we are interested in how college graduates find and use information in the digital age and how these skills and strategies develop over time for use in the workplace, civic involvement, social enrichment, and personal fulfillment. Do you have 15 or 20 minutes available now for the interview we have scheduled?

Before we begin, let me ask you a few quick questions:

1. **Inclusion Criteria**: Are you 18 years old, or older? [If the potential participant answers "no" to the question about age, thank him or her for his or her time and dismiss him or her from study involvement.]

2. **Inclusion Criteria**: Did you graduate with a BA and/or BS degree between the years of 2007 and 2012? [If the potential participant answers "no, thank him or her for his or her time and dismiss him or her from study involvement.]

3. **Inclusion Criteria**: Are you currently enrolled in a four-year institution this semester (e.g., a graduate program)? [If the potential participant answers "yes" to the question about enrollment in graduate school, thank him or her for his or her time and dismiss him or her from study involvement.]

4. **Recording**: Do I have your permission to record this interview? We will use a coding number to identify you in the notes that are taken today to maintain your anonymity.

Now, let me provide you with a few more details about this study:

5. **Study Procedures**: During the interview, I will ask you a series of questions about how you have engaged in continued learning, for whatever reason, to acquire knowledge and skills you can use in the workplace, in your community, or for personal fulfillment.

6. **Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal**: Before we get started, I should tell you your participation is entirely voluntary. During this interview, you can choose to answer any of the questions asked of you, or not, and can withdraw from the interview at any time.

7. **Privacy and Anonymity:** Once the study ends, your comments from today will be grouped with other participants' comments and used in a summary of overall findings. Research notes will be shredded and destroyed and the audiotape erased once this study concludes.

8. **Incentive**: A $10 Amazon thank you gift card will be sent to you via email within three working days, whether you complete the entire interview, or not, or withdraw from the study.

9. **Contact Information**: If you have any further questions about the research, you may contact the Lead Researcher, Dr. Alison Head, at ajhead1@uw.edu. Findings from the final report will appear in a summary on the Project Information Literacy website (http://projectinfolit.org) in January 2016.

10. **Risks and Benefits**: There is minimal risk by being involved in this study. Yet, there is the benefit of receiving a $10 gift card for being part of our study, whether you complete the interview or not. There is also the possibility of the anonymous comments that you make during the interview having a benefit of improving the training that college students receive = for finding information for continued learning.

Interview Script (Phase Three)

Before we begin — here are some things that will make our discussion more productive:

- No wrong answers
- Don't hold back
- Feel free to share your opinion and experiences
- Interested in negative as well as positive experiences
- As to timing – 35 minutes
- Assured confidentiality (name will not appear in results)
- Results will be brought together and analyzed for use in understanding continued learning practices recent graduates may use

My role:

- Ask questions
- Listen
- Won't interject my own opinions into the actual discussion

Let's begin. We're conducting a study about today's recent college students and their lifelong learning practices. Lifelong learning is purposeful learning that occurs on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving skills or knowledge.

Today we're going to be talking to you about how you have continued to learn in your life since your college graduation. You may have wanted to learn something that builds on your college skills so that you will remain employable or competitive in the workplace. Or you may have wanted to learn something just because you were curious about finding it and found that it enriched your life somehow. Or you may have had something happen in your life that required you to learn about a topic or circumstance.

For whatever reason, you have taken the initiative to continue to learn so that you may acquire knowledge and skills to, as we sometimes say, "stay smart" in your workplace, community, or personal life. We know there are lots of ways and reasons to take part in continued learning—formally, by taking a class, and informally, too, by doing some research about something that interests you, such as learning a language for a trip, how to design an online game for fun, or how to find out about issues so you can vote in an election. To fulfill your continued learning needs you might use the Web, friends, and colleagues, books, search engines, forums, social media, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), bookstores, learning fairs, extension courses, museums, or libraries.

Today, we want to hear about your learning needs for "staying smart." We're specifically interested in hearing more about three different kinds of continued learning you may have been doing since you graduated from college: (1) learning to succeed and stay competitive in the workplace, (2) learning for personal development or fulfillment, and (3) learning for involvement in your local community or civic life.

Shall we begin? Any questions?

Q1.   Let's start by talking about different kinds of continued learning that individuals do once they finish college. Sometimes graduates need to learn additional skills of all kinds. Or, sometimes it's learning to shore up certain knowledge gaps. What kinds of continued learning needs have related to the workplace? What need were you trying to fulfill, what sources did you use?

Q2.   Now, can you give me an example from your life where you needed to gain some knowledge or improve your skills for use in your personal life? What was the need, what sources did you use?

Q3.   Lastly, can you give me an example from your life where you needed to gain some knowledge or improve your skills for use in your local community? What was the need, what sources did you use?

Q4.   What kinds of information sources have you used that have helped you learn the MOST about a topic (e.g., websites, books, friends, coworkers, mentors, forums, social media, libraries)?

Q5.   Do you use many online sources for continued learning in your life, whether it's in the workplace, your personal life, or your local community? Do some sources work better than others? Why? What sources are they (by name)?

Q6.   What is the ONE THING that makes learning after college the most challenging for you?

Q7.   Which is more difficult? Learning and improving skills for staying competitive in the workplace, involved in your local community, or fulfilled and enriched in your personal life? Why?

Q8.   Would you say that you learned certain critical thinking skills in college that helped you with continued learning today? What skills were they?

Demographic Data Collection

Would it be possible for you to provide us with a little bit of background about yourself? The information you provide will be used to describe our study sample, as a whole, and not you individually.

Q1.   What year did you complete your undergraduate degree?

- 2012
- 2011
- 2010
- 2009
- 2008
- 2007
- Other:_____

Q2.   What was your undergraduate major? (Check all that may apply)

- Architecture and Engineering
- Arts and Humanities
- Business Administration
- Computer Science
- Education
- General Education (includes AA, breadth requirements, undeclared)
- Mathematics
- Occupational Training (includes Nursing, 2 yr. and/or 4 yr. programs)
- Social and Behavioral Science
- Life and physical sciences)
- Other:_____

Q3.   What was your GPA when you graduated from college?

- Below 1.7
- 1.7–2.0
- 2.1–2.3
- 2.4–2.6
- 2.7–3.0
- 3.1–3.3
- 3.4–3.7
- 3.8–4.0+
- Don't remember
- Decline to state

Q4.   What is your age today?

- 21–22 years old
- 23–25 years old
- 26–30 years old
- Over 30 years old
- Decline to state

Conclusion and Debriefing

Inform the interview participant of privacy and confidentiality measures. Inform the participant that findings will be reported in a synthesized format, descriptive of the sample, as a whole, and posted on the PIL website in summary form in early 2016. Thank the interviewee for his or her participation and confirm that a $10 Amazon gift card will be emailed to the interviewee at the end of the interview day.

After the Interview

Send an email thank you to the interview participant and the Amazon $10 gift card thank you within two hours of each interview ending. Add in any missing data as notes are reviewed. Remove name and/or any personally identifying characteristics from notes and assign coding numbers to each participant. Destroy and shred research notes and erase the audio recording once the study concludes. ❖