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 B: Phase One, Preliminary 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 the institution where our study is based, the University of Washington's Information School, so that we have the necessary approvals to conduct these interviews.

In our study, we are interested in how college students—and recent 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, and social enrichment and personal fulfillment. Do you have 35 minutes available now for the interview we have scheduled? (If potential participant agrees to participate, continue with: "let me give you a few more details.")

1. **Inclusion Criteria**: Are you 18 years old, or older? (If potential participants answer "no" to the question about age, and are younger than 18, thank them for their time and dismiss them from study involvement.)

2. **Inclusion Criteria**: Did you graduate with a BA and/or BS degree between the years of 2007 and 2012? Are you currently enrolled in a four-year institution this semester (e.g., a graduate program)? (If potential participants answer "yes" to the question about enrollment in graduate school, thank them for their time and dismiss them from study involvement.)

3. **Study Procedures**: I'm going to 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.

4. **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. If you decide to participate in this interview, you can withdraw any time you would like.

5. **Anonymity**: You should also know that any information that would identify you personally (e.g., your name or phone number) will be removed from the notes taken and the audio recording of this conversation. We will use a coding number to identify you in the notes that are taken today to maintain your anonymity.

6. **Privacy**: 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 shredded and destroyed and the audiotape erased once this study concludes.

7. **Incentive**: A $10 Amazon thank you gift card will be sent to you via email later today, whether or not you complete the entire interview.

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

9. **Risks and Benefits**: There are no direct risks or benefits for you or other participants involved in this study; however, there is the possibility of a great benefit to improving the training students receive during college for finding information for continued learning.

Interview Script (Phase One)

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
- Will not insert 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, knowledge, or competences.

Today, we're going to be talking to you about how you have continued to learn in your life since you have graduated from college. You may have wanted to learn something that builds on your college skills so you remain employable or competitive in the workplace. Or you may have wanted to learn something just because you were curious about finding out more and found that it fulfilled 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 at work, 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 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 getting involved in your community or civic life, and (3) learning for personal development or fulfillment.

Shall we begin? Any questions?

Q1.   When you think of learning have you have done since you have graduated from college, what purposeful learning activities for improving skills, knowledge, and competencies come to mind?

Prompt: Can you give me an example of what you needed to learn and why?

Prompt: Let's talk about three different kinds of learning that come up for individuals.

- Have you needed to do any continued learning to acquire knowledge or new skills to make you employable or competitive in the workplace?

- Have you needed to do any continued learning to acquire knowledge or new skills so that you could make something happen in your community or in civic life?

- Have you need to do any continued learning for enrichment or fulfillment in your personal life?

Q2.   What kinds of resources have you used to help learn about a topic (e.g., websites, books, friends, colleagues, mentors, forums, social media, libraries)?

Prompt: Can you give me an example from your life where you needed to use learning resources for gaining knowledge or skills?

Prompt: Did these learning resources satisfy your learning needs? How?

Q3.   What makes this kind of learning challenging for you? Is one of these kinds of continued learning more difficult to do than the others (i.e., continued learning for the workplace, in your community, or in your personal life)? Why?

Probe: Did any of the skills you learned in college help to prepare you for this kind of learning?

Probe: What new strategies have you developed for staying smart in the workplace, in your community, and in your personal life, since you graduated?

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 graduate from college with your undergraduate degree?

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

Q2.   What was your major (BA, BS, AA at community colleges)?

- Architecture and Engineering
- Arts and Humanities
- Business Administration
- Multiple Majors (e.g., Arts and Humanities + Social Sciences)
- General Education (includes AA, breadth requirements, undeclared majors)
- Occupational Training (includes Nursing, 2 yr. and/or 4 yr. programs)
- Social Sciences
- Sciences (includes computer 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+
- Declined to state

Q4.   What is your age today?

- 21–22 years old
- 23–25 years old
- 26–30 years old
- Over 30 years old
- Declined 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 interviewees for their participation and confirm that a $10 Amazon gift card will be emailed to them at the end of the day of the interview.

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. ❖