



PROJECT

Information Literacy

PRESS RELEASE

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Grads Challenged by All They Need to Learn After College

Most of today's college students who think they only need to land a good job once they graduate are blindsided by all they don't know about life skills and surviving in the workplace once they're out of college, according to a new national research report released today.

"Clearly, a wide gap exists between the life skills grads have and the ones they still need to learn," said Alison J. Head, a principal research scientist at the [University of Washington's Information School](#) and the director of [Project Information Literacy \(PIL\)](#). "Most of the grads we studied scrambled to learn such essential new skills as money-management, household repairs, how to advance in their careers and communicate better on the job.

The report, "[Staying Smart: How Today's Graduates Continue to Learn Once They Complete College](#)," is the eighth report from PIL, based at the University of Washington's Information School. The ongoing research study examines how Millennials find and use information for solving information problems they have in the digital age.

In their latest study, 1,651 recent college graduates from 10 US colleges and universities were questioned about the challenges they face, and the information-seeking strategies they develop, use, and adapt as they make the transition from college to their personal and professional lives.

Researchers found three fourths of the graduates they studied sought how-to information—quick fixes they could use to solve urgent problems in their personal lives. Over half spent much of their time trying to improve their delegation and negotiation skills with older coworkers, or extending the very short shelf life of technical skills learned in college only a few years before.

Not surprisingly, grads were heavy users of Google search when trying to find learning sources. Social media sites like YouTube, Facebook, Pinterest, and TED Talks were go-to sources—but MOOCs, like Coursera and Udemy were not. Notably, they turned to friends, coworkers, and family with their learning needs almost as much as the Web.

Even though grads have more information outlets than all of the generations before them, learning after college still posed challenges for them. Most struggled to carve out available time in their busy lives to keep learning.

Others could not afford the expertise they wanted from professionals like career advisors, attorneys, or accountants. Still others had trouble staying motivated to learn everything they thought they should know to stay current from the volumes of information around them.

While three-quarters of the graduates believed college had sharpened their cognitive skills for finding and evaluating information, only about a quarter thought their college experience had helped them learn how to frame and ask their own questions.

All in the all, the findings from this two-year study suggest that colleges and universities are turning out graduates that are specialized, employable, and relatively proficient information seekers. Yet, they also reveal the failure of higher education to prepare lifelong learners who know how to identify and ask their own questions, which may be the one skill they need most in their post-college lives.

“As more and more college students are specializing in their majors so they are more employable, they are taking fewer courses in liberal arts, where general inquiry and problem solving are part of the curriculum,” Head said, “our study reveals some of the shortcomings of an education that is solely focused on financial rewards at graduation.”

Graduates in the study sample had completed college during 2007 and 2012 and had attended one of 10 US liberal arts or research colleges or universities: Belmont University (TN), Ohio State University, Phoenix College, University of Redlands (CA), Trinity University (TX), University of Central Florida, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Washington.

The lifelong learning research study was supported with a National Leadership Grant (LG-06-13-0186-13) from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

The full report for [“Staying Smart: How Today’s Graduates Continue to Learn Once They Complete College”](#) is available here (112 pages, 6.9 MB, PDF)

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