

STAYING SMART:

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



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THE PASSAGE STUDIES

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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 C: Phase Two, Survey Instrument

### University and Graduation Year

Q1. What is the name of the college or university where you received your undergraduate degree?

- Belmont University
- The Ohio State University
- Phoenix College
- Trinity University
- University of Central Florida
- University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- University of North Carolina at Charlotte
- University of Redlands
- University of Texas at Austin
- University of Washington

*Note: To protect respondents' identity, data from this question has not been included in the open access version of the survey.*

Q2. In which year did you graduate?

- 2012
- 2011
- 2010
- 2009
- 2008
- 2007
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Continued Learning after College

- Q3. Once graduates finish college, many discover they still need to learn additional skills or gain knowledge so they can "stay smart."

In the LAST YEAR, have you needed to learn any of these additional SKILLS or gain KNOWLEDGE to stay competitive in the workplace, involved in the local community where you live, or fulfilled in your personal life? (Check ALL that apply.)

- Working with desktop computers or laptops (e.g., applications, coding, graphics)
- Working with smartphones, tablets, or mobile devices (e.g., apps, tools)
- Managing money and finances (e.g., setting up budgets, paying taxes)
- Working with children (e.g., parenting, teaching)
- Career and professional development (e.g., job openings, courses, training)
- "How to" specifics (e.g., making repairs, decorating, cooking, DIY)
- Hobbies (e.g., crafts, making beer, cooking, learning a language)
- Housing (e.g., finding housing, learning neighborhoods, maps)
- Making purchases (e.g., buying furniture, computers, groceries)
- Travel (e.g., trip planning, buying airline tickets)
- Volunteering (e.g., hospitals, children's reading programs)
- Spiritual and religious groups (e.g., churches, Buddhist practice groups)
- Interpersonal communication (e.g., resolving conflict, collaborating)
- Getting involved, civic action (e.g., political causes, volunteering)
- Making social contacts (e.g., finding others, online dating, meetups)
- Availability of professionals (e.g., finding a doctor, lawyer, contractor)

Matrix grid with these categories at the top:

- Workplace
- Community
- Personal life

- Q4. Some recent college graduates use certain specific resources when they need to learn additional skills or gain knowledge for the workplace, their community, or personal lives.

In the LAST YEAR, have you consulted any of these RESOURCES to learn additional skills or gain knowledge to stay competitive in the workplace, involved in the local community where you live, or fulfilled in your personal life? (Check ALL that apply.)

- Search engines (e.g., Google, Bing)
- Open access databases (e.g., ERIC)
- Library databases (e.g., ProQuest)
- Books (e.g., paperbacks, e-books, etc.)
- News (e.g., print, online)
- Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter)
- Blogs (e.g., Huffington Post blogs)
- Online forums (e.g., computer help)
- Educational sites (e.g., YouTube videos)
- Online courses (e.g., MOOCs)
- Campus alumni associations
- Bookstores (i.e., physical place, online)
- Public libraries (i.e., physical place, online)
- Academic libraries
- Workplace information centers
- Museums (i.e., physical place, online)
- Professional conferences

Matrix grid with these categories at the top:

- Workplace
- Community
- Personal life

- Q5. Some recent college graduates turn to people as resources when they need to learn additional skills or acquire knowledge for the workplace, their community, or personal lives.

In the LAST YEAR, have you turned to any of the following PEOPLE to learn additional skills or gain knowledge to stay competitive in the workplace, involved in the local community where you live, or fulfilled in your personal life? (Check ALL that apply.)

- Coworkers
- Supervisor/boss
- Friends
- Family
- Librarians
- Current instructors/professors
- Former instructors/professors
- Licensed professionals (e.g., attorneys)
- Career advisors
- Community experts (e.g., clergy, coaches)
- Experts in a given field (e.g., budget analysts)

Matrix grid with these categories at the top:

- Workplace
- Community

- Personal life

Q6. If given the choice, how do you prefer to learn additional SKILLS or gain KNOWLEDGE for use in the workplace, the local community where you live, or your personal life? (Check ALL that apply.)

- Settings where learning is planned for me (i.e., extension classes, MOOCs)
- Settings where I receive a diploma, certificate, or badge upon completion
- Settings where there are no examinations, assignments, or grading involved
- Job training offered through workplace opportunities
- One-on-one help offered face-to-face
- One-on-one help delivered online
- Community education outlets (e.g., workshops at libraries, museums, organizations)
- Learning from whatever sources might seem appropriate
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q7. Now, let's focus on some of the specific sources you may have used them for continued learning.

In the last year, have you used any of the following WEBSITES to learn additional skills and gain knowledge? (Check ALL that you've used.)

- Coursera
- Udacity
- ALISON
- Stack Overflow
- lynda
- Udemy
- edX
- Academic Earth
- Codecademy
- Duolingo
- CrashCourse
- Pinterest
- Khan Academy
- Google Helpouts
- YouTube videos (beyond the sites listed here)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- No experience with this situation

Q8. Some recent college graduates turn to blogs when they need to learn additional skills or gain knowledge for the workplace, their community, or personal lives.

How many BLOGS have you followed in the last year, whether you've subscribed or not?

- None
- 1–2 blogs
- 3–4 blogs
- 5–6 blogs
- 7–10 blogs
- More than 10 blogs
- Don't know

Q9. How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about reasons for reading (or not reading) BLOGS? (Check ALL that apply.)

- Blogs are easy to find using a search engine
- Blogs can give a good summary about a topic
- Blogs can be a good source of low-cost information
- Blogs can be a source of current information
- There's an authenticity to content; blog writers are rarely paid
- Blogs have candid viewpoints; more than mainstream media does
- Blogs have ongoing discussion with posts
- As an author of my own blog, I read other people's blog content.

Matrix grid with these categories at the top:

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No experience with this situation
- Don't know

Q10. Some recent college graduates turn to books when they need to learn skills or acquire knowledge for the workplace, their community, or personal lives.

How many BOOKS, if any, have you read within the last year (including e-books, books on tape, hardcovers, and paperbacks)? (If you have started but not finished a book that counts, too.)

- None
- 1–2 books
- 3–4 books
- 5–6 books
- 7–10 books
- More than 10 books
- Don't know

Q11. When you are EVALUATING content from websites, in general, for continued learning, how often have you considered the following things in the last year?

- How up-to-date the information is
- What they author's credentials are
- URL is from a legitimate source, (e.g., gov or edu)
- Site links to other resources
- Charts add important information (if they exist)
- Someone has recommended using the site
- Site is familiar from previous use
- Site is familiar from college
- Site design conveys legitimacy
- Gut feeling says site is legitimate

Matrix grid with these categories at the top:

- Almost always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
- Don't know
- No experience with this situation

Q12. Recent graduates sometimes find that they can use critical thinking skills learned in college for continued learning. What skills and competencies did YOU learn in college and now apply?

How strongly do you agree or disagree that you developed the following CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS in college and have continued to apply and use them after graduation?

- Formulating a search strategy
- Using multiple sources
- Sorting through large amounts of content
- Evaluating credibility of content
- Extracting the information needed
- Revising a search based on findings
- Reading text "closely" to find meaning
- Finding relevant data within large datasets
- Drawing conclusions from large datasets
- Communicating an argument persuasively
- Presenting information effectively
- Asking questions until I understand
- Having the ability to learn anything on my own

Matrix grid with these categories at the top:

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No experience with this situation
- Don't know

Q13. Now, let's focus on the challenges of being a continuous learner and needing to learn additional skills and gain knowledge. What has been challenging for YOU? How much do you agree or disagree with each of the statements about what's CHALLENGING about continued learning after college?

- Finding time for continued learning
- Finding affordable sources
- Staying motivated to keep learning
- Finding understandable information
- Lacking access to college library databases
- Lacking access to college professors or lectures
- Staying on top of everything need to know

Matrix grid with these categories at the top:

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No experience with this situation
- Don't know

### Demographic Data Collection

Q14. What was your undergraduate MAJOR? (Check all that apply.)

- Architecture or Engineering
- Arts and Humanities
- Business Administration (includes Accounting)
- Computer Science
- Education
- Information Management and Systems
- Mathematics
- Occupational Training (includes Nursing, 2 yr. or 4 yr. certificate programs)
- Physical and Life Sciences
- Social and Behavioral Sciences
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q15. What was your GPA when you graduated from college with your undergraduate degree?

- Below 1.4
- 1.4–1.6
- 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+
- Decline to state



Q16. Are you CURRENTLY EMPLOYED?

- Yes, I have full-time employment.
- Yes, I am self-employed.
- Yes, I have part-time employment.
- No, I'm not currently employed.
- Decline to state

Q17. If you are employed, are you working in the field that you STUDIED in college?

- Yes
- No
- No, I'm not currently employed
- Decline to state

Q18. What is your AGE today?

- List age: \_\_\_\_\_
- Decline to state

Q19. What is your GENDER?

- Male
- Female
- Decline to state

Q20. How close do you CURRENTLY LIVE from the college where you received your undergraduate degree?

- 0–30 miles away
- 31–50 miles away
- 51–100 miles away
- 101–500 miles away
- Over 500 miles away
- Other

Q21. Have you ENROLLED in a graduate program of any kind since college (e.g., graduate school, law school)?

- Yes, I am currently enrolled in a graduate program
- Yes, I have applied and I'm waiting to hear about acceptance
- Yes, I have received a graduate degree already
- No, I'm not enrolled, but I am seriously considering going back to school in the near future
- No, I have no plans to attend graduate school right now

Q22. Interested in participating in a follow-up interview?

If you would be willing to participate in a follow-up phone interview (10-15 mins.) to tell us about continued learning after college, please provide a telephone number and just your first (not your last) name.

*Note: To protect respondents' identity, data from this question has not been included in the open access version of the survey.*

### How to Enter the Drawing for the \$100.00 Gift Certificate

We would like to thank you for your involvement in our study by entering you in a drawing for a \$100.00 Amazon.com gift certificate. If you win, you can use the certificate to buy anything you'd like from Amazon.

The drawing will be held within two weeks of the completion of administering the survey this fall. There will be ONE winner on each campus where the survey is administered.

If you would like to enter the drawing, please provide us with your email address so we can contact you if you win. You do not need to have answered all of the questions to enter the drawing.

*Note: To protect respondents' identity, data from this question has not been included in the open access version of the survey. ❖*