Are UPIKE Students Employer Ready?

A common outcome for institutions of higher education is to produce graduates who have the skills and abilities that will make them ready to enter the workforce. A report released by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) highlights the similarities and discrepancies between employers’ and students’ views on just how ready today’s college students are to enter the world of work (Fabris, Jan 2015; Hart, 2015). What about the baccalaureate graduates from the University of Pikeville from the Class of 2014? How ready were they?

94% of employers agree that all college students should have educational experiences that teach them how to solve problems with people whose views are different from their own.

UPIKE graduating seniors have higher Cognitive Knowledge than their peers nationally (3.85 vs. 3.60 on a 5-point scale). In other words, they have an above average degree of understanding and awareness of various cultures and their impact on the global society and level of proficiency in more than one language.

Specifically, the Class of 2014
- understand how various cultures of this world interact socially;
- know how to analyze the basic characteristics of a culture; and
- can discuss cultural differences from an informed perspective.

86% of employers agree that every college student should take courses that build the civic knowledge, skills, and judgment essential for contributing to our democratic society.

UPIKE graduating seniors have higher Social Responsibility than their peers nationally (3.95 vs. 3.72 on a 5-point scale). In other words, they have above average willingness to interact with persons with different social norms and cultural backgrounds and are comfortable and responsible when relating to others.

Specifically, the Class of 2014
- think of their lives in terms of giving back to society;
- consciously behave in terms of making a difference; and
- place volunteerism as an important priority in their lives.

80% of employers say that during the hiring process it is very important to them that recent college graduates demonstrate the ability to apply learning in real-world settings.

High-Impact Practices demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback.

95% of the UPIKE graduating seniors from the Class of 2014 responded that they had participated in at least one such activity:
- a learning community
- service-learning
- research with faculty
- an internship or field experience
- study abroad
- a culminating senior experience

Citation of this report:
The Root of the Discrepancies
The report’s research found that many employers feel that college graduates are falling short in their preparedness in several areas, including the ones employers deem most important for workplace success. However, the research also uncovered that college students are notably more optimistic about their level of preparedness across learning outcomes. This phenomenon holds true for the UPIKE Class of 2014 as well. They consistently self-reported that the University helped them gain the skill, but when evaluated as to actually having the skill, the students fell short.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill employers rated as very important</th>
<th>UPIKE graduates perceived they have the skill</th>
<th>UPIKE graduates demonstrated having the skill</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ability to effectively communicate orally</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to effectively communicate in writing</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>96%</td>
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</tbody>
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Students’ speech at this level contributes significantly to the knowledge or beliefs of the audience; sustains positive interest, feeling and/or commitment among the audience; contains elements of vividness and special interest in the use of language and supporting materials; adapts supporting materials to the experiences of the audience in order to create strong bonds of identification between the speaker and audience and the audience and topic; is delivered in a fluent, polished, natural manner that strengthens the impact of the speaker’s message and creates a bond with the audience; and begins and ends with impact using a creative and complete introduction and conclusion.

Students at this level can discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate use of parallelism; discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate use of idiomatic language; recognize redundancy; discriminate between correct and incorrect constructions; and recognize the most effective revision of a sentence.

Students at this level can evaluate competing causal explanations; evaluate hypotheses for consistency with known facts; determine the relevance of information for evaluating an argument or conclusion; determine whether an artistic interpretation is supported by evidence contained in a work; recognize the salient features or themes in a work of art; evaluate the appropriateness of procedures for investigating a question of causation; evaluate data for consistency with known facts, hypotheses or methods; and recognize flaws and inconsistencies in an argument.

Conclusion
The University expects at least 80% of its graduates to be employed full time or enrolled in graduate school within one year of graduation. UPIKE continued to make no progress with this target as only 77% of graduates from the Class of 2013 found full-time employment or enrolled in graduate programs within one year after graduation.

The President has charged a team of his executive staff to define the job of Coordinator of Student Career services. This position will devote full time to determining the career goals of students scheduled to graduate and help them discover where and how to apply for jobs in that career field. As a part of that effort, the University has established two student Career Closets to make appropriate clothes available to students preparing for interviews or other occasions where the students need business clothes they do not have.


Citation of this report: