

Essential Skills

Issue: Essential Skills developed through study at GBC. How do GBC students, graduates and employers view the development of these fundamental skills, abilities and behaviours?

Key Findings

- Students, graduates and employers value a range of skills and abilities as college program outcomes.
- GBC students are most satisfied with the teamwork skills they develop during their program. Teamwork was also one of the highest scoring skills by both graduates and employers
- Although overall satisfaction rates for essential skills are relatively high, the ‘top box’ ratings (very satisfied), leave room for improvement

Implications for Teaching

- As part of job-related training, incorporate tasks and assignments which develop essential skills for students, and promote field education experiences.

Implications for Research

- Use available data on essential skills to track development across programs, and use as quality indicators during program growth.

Implications for Policy

- Examine the integration of essential skills into GBC curricula and student experiences. Consider linking field experiences and experiential learning into all programs. Consider placing greater focus on “top box” scores.

Background: Strategy 2020 commits us to being an enabler of the innovation economy Essential Skills can be defined as those needed for the workplace, including literacy, communication, computer use, and other skills not specific to particular occupations, but required for almost all jobs. In recent years, national and international organizations (e.g. Conference Board of Canada; OECD) have been placing increasing emphasis on the value and assessment of competency in these areas as part of educational learning outcomes. As these skills are transferable and set the foundation for further learning and growth, they will provide individuals with greater flexibility and opportunity in a competitive workforce.

Depending on the source, skill labels and specificity may vary, but the types of skills are consistent. For example, Table 1 shows the nine essential skills as defined by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC; <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca>). The importance of the strong development of essential skills in driving economic success is a core feature of the OECD Innovation Strategy.

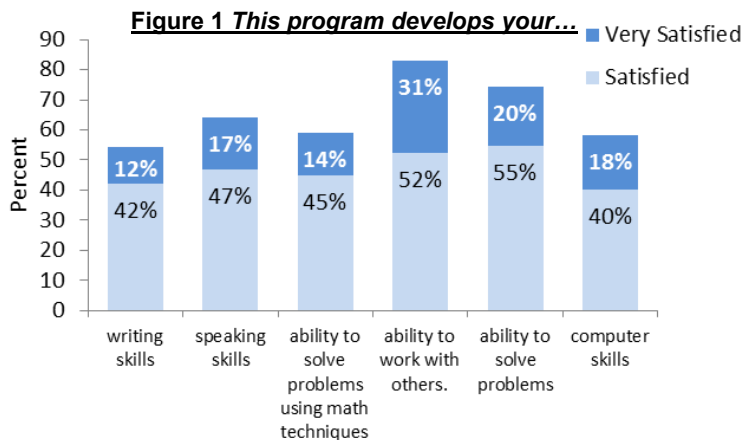
Table 1 Essential Skills

Reading
Writing
Document Use (involving a variety of information displays)
Numeracy (use of numbers and thinking in quantitative terms)
Computer Use
Thinking (problem solving; decision making; critical thinking; job task planning & organizing; significant use of memory; finding information)
Oral Communication
Working with Others
Continuous Learning (ongoing skills and knowledge development)

OECD Innovation Strategy

...Formal education is the basis for forming human capital, and policy makers should ensure that education systems help learners to adapt to the changing nature of innovation from the start. This requires curricula and pedagogies that equip students with the capacity to learn and apply new skills throughout their lives. Emphasis needs to be placed on skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, user orientation and teamwork, in addition to domain-specific and linguistic skills...

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/51/28/45326349.pdf>



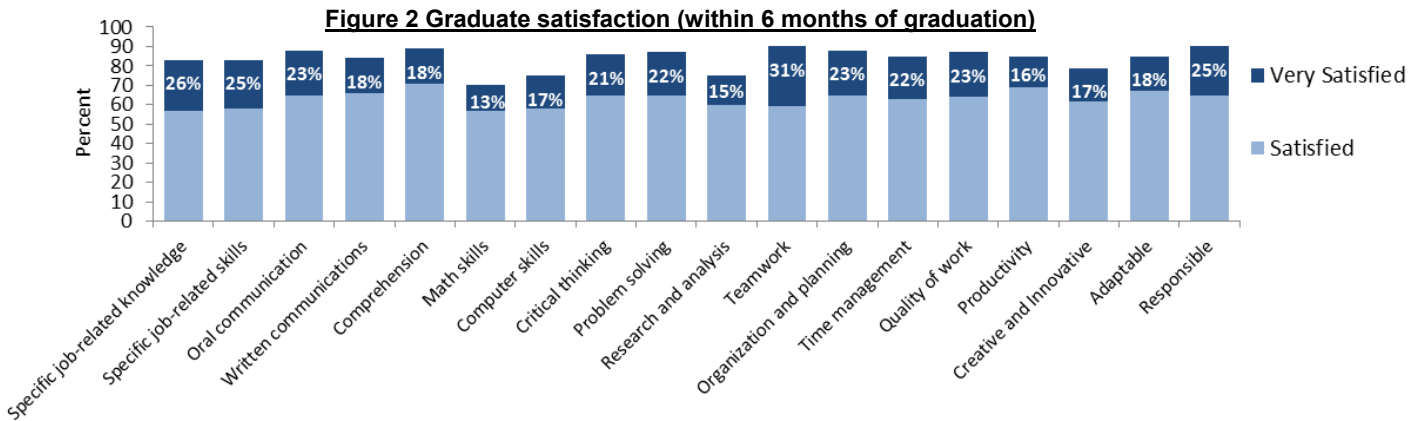
Analysis

GBC Student Satisfaction with Skill Development

- Overall, 85% of GBC students report being satisfied or very satisfied with the skills and knowledge they are acquiring through their program (KPI Student Satisfaction Survey 2011). Figure 1 shows a breakdown of satisfaction ratings specifically for essential skills. GBC students are most satisfied with development of their teamwork skills when viewed as either the total satisfaction score (83%) or the ‘top box’ score (very satisfied = 31%).

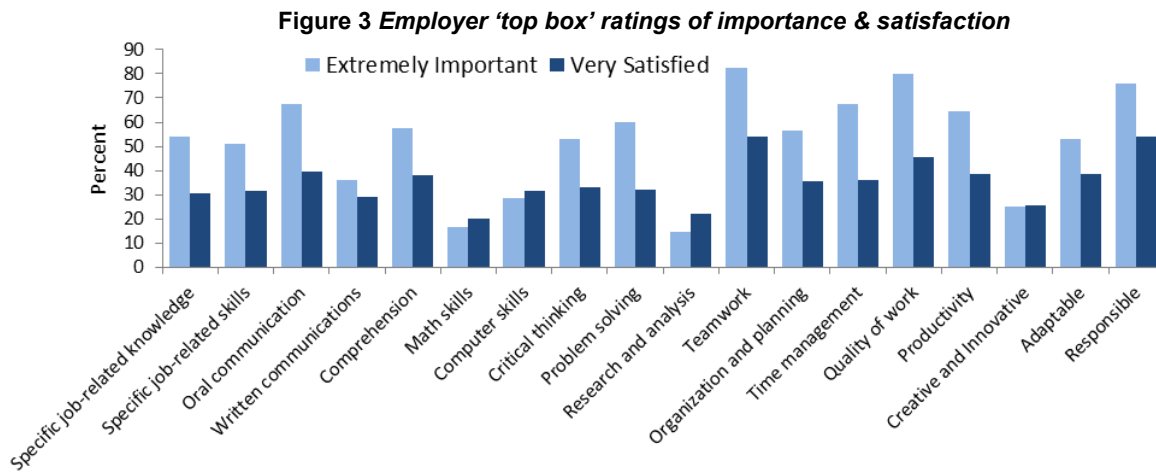
GBC Graduate Satisfaction with Educational Preparation

- The KPI Graduate Outcomes/Satisfaction Survey includes a range of skills and abilities; graduates rate satisfaction with their educational preparation for each. Although the total satisfaction scores are high, the top box (very satisfied) makes up a relatively small portion of the total (Figure 2). As with students, graduates are most satisfied with the teamwork skills they developed at GBC. Math, computer and research & analysis skills leave the most room for improvement.



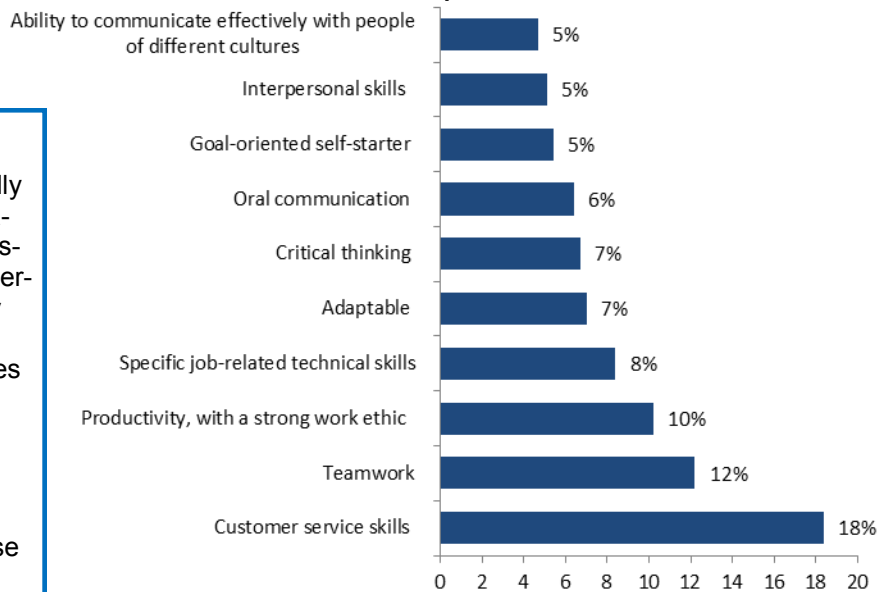
Employers of College Graduates

- GBC employers clearly recognize the value of a range of skills and abilities in our graduates. Figure 3 shows the 'top box' ratings from GBC employers i.e. percent of employers who view these skills as extremely important and are very satisfied with those skills and abilities in the GBC graduates they hired. Across employers, there is a strong positive correlation between importance & satisfaction



- The value that employers place on essential skills was further validated in a recent GTA Employer Survey commissioned by GBC in which local employers of college and university graduates were asked to state the skill or ability they find to be the most important. Their top ten responses are shown in Figure 4. This survey found that our college is seen by GTA employers as the best GTA college, producing graduates with the skills they most value.

Figure 4 Percent of GTA employers choosing these skills/abilities as the most important



Essential Skills & Strategy 2020

The link between creativity & productivity may not be fully recognized yet, but this link is fundamental to an innovation economy. Implicit in the successful attainment of essential skills at GBC is the development of innovation literacy — the ability to think creatively, evaluate, and apply problem-solving skills across multidisciplinary contexts. Innovation literacy is a key advantage for GBC graduates — and for our community, as it is innovation that will drive economic growth.

Strategy 2020's focus on preparing diverse learners for job success & enabling the innovation economy directly support the development of innovation literacy. Our close ties with industry and community partners ensure that GBC programs & services are of the highest quality. By involving our students in industry-focused applied research, field education & experiential learning opportunities, we promote the skills our graduates need to get the job today, and to get the job done tomorrow.