

Colleges and Employers Point Fingers Over Skills Gap

IN SURVEY after survey, employers agree that the skill they most want in future workers is **adaptability**. Those who hire complain that they often find today's college graduates lacking in **interpersonal skills, problem solving, effective writing and oral communication, and the ability to think critically and analytically**. Employers say future workplaces need those

skills, as well as workers who can **sort through information to find the most critical pieces and come up with novel solutions to problems**.

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So which college majors best arm students with those skills? That question has touched off heated discussions be-

tween those who advocate for practical majors and others who think that liberal-arts majors are best for rapidly changing fields.

Employers are almost evenly split. In one survey, 45 percent of hiring managers said they preferred that students get an education that specifically prepares them for the workplace; 55 percent favored a broad-based education.

"Ideally, you want to do both," says Richard Arum, one of the authors of *Academically Adrift*, the 2011 book that found that **almost half of students failed to improve their critical-thinking skills in the first two years of college**.

Mr. Arum says the field of study matters less than how much you work in the major. Math and science majors may not write or read much

for their classes, but they show gains in critical thinking because they spend the most hours studying. "It doesn't matter what these students focus on," he says, "as long as they focus on it in a rigorous way."

So if you take smart college graduates and put them through apprenticeships, it doesn't really matter what they majored in. IBM and Procter & Gamble are well known for such apprenticeships.