# The Workplace Relevance of the Liberal Arts Political Science BA and How It Might Be Enhanced: Reflections on an Exploratory Survey of the NGO Sector

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**ABSTRACT**   Reflecting on a survey of employees of NGOs based in Ontario, Canada, the article considers two questions: How well are our BA programs preparing students for the workplace? Can we enhance workplace relevance without sacrificing our commitment to liberal education? Key findings are presented, including the BA continues to be a desired and employable degree and skills associated with it are valued; employers are not convinced that graduates with BAs necessarily possess these skills; and respondents associate their formal education with individual skills and extracurricular activities with interpersonal skills. Three strategies to enhance the workplace relevance of BA programs without sacrificing liberal education are suggested, and faculty are encouraged to think more holistically about their BA programs and what students need from them.

As professors of political science and the social sciences more generally, we know that many of our students, their parents, and governments are concerned about how our BA programs are preparing graduates for the workplace (Saavedra and Saavedra 2011, 1516). As professors who care about our students, especially those for whom the BA will be a terminal degree, many of us share these concerns. But, as professors who are committed to liberal education, many of us also share Côté and Allahar's apprehension, as reflected in the title of their recent book, *Lowering Higher Education: The Rise of Corporate Universities and the Fall of Liberal Education*, that in responding to these concerns, liberal arts and social science programs risk "drifting" away from a focus on liberal education and toward training and vocationalism (2011, 14). These concerns motivate two questions: How well are our BA programs preparing students for the workplace? Can we enhance our BA programs' workplace relevance without sacrificing our commitment to liberal education?

This article advances the conversation about these concerns by sharing results from an exploratory survey of staff of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) I conducted as chair of a human rights program at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Canada, in 2010. The results of the survey, which included questions about respondents' own and other job applicants' career preparedness, are useful for thinking about the workplace relevance of BAs in a broader North American context for three reasons (1) Canadian universities are similar in organization to four-year public degree-granting institutions in the United States (in Canada the term "college" tends to be restricted to community colleges); (2) the vast majority of survey respondents majored in liberal arts or social sciences, including 23% in political science;[1] and (3) 23% of American liberal arts undergraduates who plan to enter the workforce directly on completing their BA intend to work in the nonprofit sector (Koc 2010).[2]

The article is organized in five sections. The first section describes the survey and its limitations. The second section discusses survey results that speak to the workplace relevance of the BA degree, and the third section addresses results that capture respondents' perceptions of the contribution of formal education and student clubs and volunteering to the development of workplace-relevant skills. With these results in mind, the fourth section proposes strategies for enhancing the workplace relevance of the BA degree without sacrificing commitment to liberal education. Finally, conclusions and suggestions for further research are presented.

## SURVEY METHOD AND LIMITATIONS

This article shares selected results from an online survey of staff at Ontario-based NGOs that advance human rights that was conducted from August 2010 to January 2011 using Survey Monkey. The survey used a two-step nonprobabilistic snowball-type

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sampling method. In the first step Internet searches identified more than 1,000 organizations that were then whittled down to 126 by reviewing organizations' websites for fit with the study's parameters. In the second step staff members were invited to participate, either directly or, where contact information was not available online, by asking executive directors to forward invitations to their staff. Overall, 220 individuals, including 34 executive directors, responded, and 201 surveys were completed.

Although the sampling method is nonrandom, the sample obtained is quite large for a sector from which it is often difficult to generate responses, and it appears to be quite representative. Individual respondents display a range of ages, educational backgrounds, and job titles; the gender distribution (71% female) is very similar to the 67% Almond and Kendall observed in the United Kingdom (2000, 216) and the 70% to 80% Onyx and Maclean suggest for Australia (1996, 335); and the NGOs for which they work vary in terms of size[3] and focus.[4] Still, caution should be exercised in generalizing beyond this particular subsection of the Ontario nonprofit sector.

## HOW WELL ARE BA PROGRAMS PREPARING GRADUATES FOR THE WORKPLACE?

This section reviews survey results that speak to the general workplace relevance of the terminal BA degree. In general, the results suggest that while graduates with a BA degrees remain desired and employable in the NGO sector, many people who work in the sector doubt the reliability of the BA as an indication that graduates actually possess desired skills.

### The BA Graduate Remains Desired and Employable

Responses to two questions suggest that graduates who hold the BA as their highest credential are valued by employers in this sector. The first question, which was directed at respondents who said they had experience hiring entry-level employees (N = 155), asked them to indicate the desirability of various academic credentials. The BA ranked first (46%) among credentials ranked "highly desired" followed by the MA (31%). Even when the responses "highly desired" and "competitive" are combined, the BA (87%) remains almost tied with the MA (88%), far ahead of College Diplomas (44%) and Postgraduate College Diplomas (65%).[5] The desirability of the BA was also suggested by answers to a second question that asked respondents to give advice to a hypothetical student seeking an entry-level position in an organization like the one they work for. When asked about the importance of earning an MA (a credential typically added to the BA) only 16% indicated this was vital for getting a good job, while 50% said it was helpful but not essential, and 32% said it was neither helpful nor unhelpful.

Positive attitudes toward the BA are confirmed by respondents' accounts of their own educational backgrounds. One-third of all respondents indicated that they held the BA as their highest academic credential. This is not a relic from past hiring because an even higher percentage of respondents in their twenties indicated the BA as their highest academic credential (53%).

### Skills Associated with the BA Are Valued in the NGO Workplace…

The survey results also affirm the workplace relevance of generic transferrable skills that are often associated with liberal educa-

tion and the BA. For instance, one question asked respondents to rate the importance of the ability to exercise each of 27 skills or competencies to succeed in their present position.[6] If the 12 skills or competencies that at least 50% of the 186 respondents rated as "Essential" (table 1, row 1) are compared to those found in a typical statement of the skills associated with the BA degree (see Ontario Council of Academic Vice Presidents 2007), we find that half, including the top five competencies, are typically associated with the BA graduates: initiative/ability to work independently; ability to work with a team; interpersonal skills; written communication; ability to work with the unknown; oral communications and public speaking. Most of the other six are specialized or sector-specific skills that may be the subject of particular courses or programs: project management, strategic planning, nonprofit values; leadership; networking; and ability to hold effective meetings.

Responses to two other questions suggest the relevance to the NGO workplace of another quality typically associated with BA graduates: adaptability. First, in answer to open-ended questions about typical job applicant strengths and weaknesses, several respondents emphasized the practicality of generic skills compared to specialized knowledge: "In many workplaces, you can learn the hard skills needed to do well in the job. That's why it's important to work on your soft skills …"; "Knowledge can be learned much more easily than skills." The value of adaptability can also be inferred from responses to a question that asked the percentage of an average week that respondents devoted to each of eleven functions.[7] The aggregate result—respondents perform an average of 7.5 of these functions in a typical week—suggests that many staff in this sector need to be flexible and adaptable multitaskers rather than narrow specialists.

### … But Employers Are Not Convinced That BA Graduates Possess These Skills

Responses to three open-ended questions answered by 135 of the respondents who said they had participated as decision-makers in hiring entry-level employees reinforce the finding that skills typically associated with the BA are valued in the NGO workplace. Furthermore, they suggest that many in the sector doubt the reliability of the BA degree as an indication that graduates actually possess these skills. The three questions asked respondents to identify key strengths and weaknesses they have seen in the education and other experiences of job candidates as well as to note any other skill sets or knowledge bases that candidates typically lack. Responses to all three questions were combined, coded, and categorized; similar responses made by individuals to different questions were removed to avoid double-counting; and representative comments were selected to illustrate the concerns.

*Communication:* More than one-third (36%) of respondents to the open-ended questions noted the importance of communication in general, and writing and oral presentation in particular. The following typical comments illustrate both that these skills are valued but that employers lack confidence that holding a degree indicates that graduates possess them: "We always ask for samples of their work when hiring in order to assess writing skills and also professional presentation ability. They are often lacking the ability to well-design and professionally present their work"; "Having a degree does not mean good communication skills."

*Maturity and Independence:* This category of comment, made by 30% of respondents, included such competencies as initiative/ ability to work independently; flexibility and adaptability;

*Table 1*

## Skills and Competencies That a Majority of Respondents Rated as Essential to Success in Their Position and Factors They Said Contributed Significantly Their Ability to Perform Them

| | INITIATIVE/ ABILITY TO WORK INDEPENDENTLY | ABILITY TO WORK WITH A TEAM | INTERPERSONAL SKILLS | WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS | ABILITY TO WORK WITH THE UNKNOWN | PROJECT MANAGEMENT | ORAL COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC SPEAKING | STRATEGIC PLANNING | NONPROFIT VALUES & ETHICS | LEADERSHIP | NETWORKING (PUBLIC-PRIVATE-NONPROFIT) | ABILITY TO HOLD EFFECTIVE MEETINGS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. % Reporting the skill or competency is **ESSENTIAL** to being successful in their position | 91 | 89 | 88 | 82 | 73 | 67 | 67 | 66 | 65 | 64 | 54 | 52 |
| 2. % Reporting that their **FORMAL EDUCATION** contributed SIGNIFICANTLY to their present ability to perform this skill or competency | 57 | 36 | 26 | 87 | 29 | 40 | 59 | 34 | 28 | 34 | 17 | 16 |
| 3. % Reporting that their experience in **STUDENT CLUBS & VOLUNTEERING** contributed SIGNIFICANTLY to their present ability to perform this skill or competency | 39 | 59 | 56 | 19 | 32 | 22 | 47 | 22 | 35 | 60 | 38 | 44 |
| 4. % Reporting that their experience in **SELF-TAUGHT/ ON THE JOB** contributed SIGNIFICANTLY to their present ability to perform this skill or competency | 79 | 75 | 82 | 64 | 83 | 71 | 78 | 71 | 79 | 76 | 87 | 67 |

Percentages do not add up to 100; respondents were permitted to check as many contributing influences as applied.

planning, organization, and time management; and self-confidence and the ability to deal with ambiguity. The following comments were typical: "Not being able to see what needs to be done without being told, not being able to complete tasks"; "Unable to motivate themselves and learn independently, unable to figure out problems on their own (use Google, instruction manuals)." The relevance of these skills was stated forcefully in response to a separate open-ended question: "NGO staff have little time to spare so show that you will add to the solution not to the burden."

*Critical Thinking and Analysis:* These skills were noted by 13% of respondents. Although most of the comments in this category simply stated "critical thinking," some were more descriptive: "Understanding the context as a whole, i.e., synthesis of various themes into greater understanding of interrelated nature of broad social justice themes"; "failure to read and to do so in a critical spirit; gullibility, particularly with respect to human rights."

Although *passion and commitment* is not a skill or competency per se, 13% respondents made comments that were collected in this category. Faculty in political science and other liberal arts and social sciences can find themselves advising students to follow their interests and passions when selecting programs and courses. Respondents' comments suggest that this advice has direct consequences for employment. This is powerfully illustrated in one respondent's account of a job candidate weakness: "no clear focus of what skills they want to build, or experience they want to have (i.e., they just WANT a job, any job)."

Thus, while the BA is desired, and people holding BAs are employed, in the NGO sector, those with experience hiring those with BAs suggest that job applicants who possess the credential do not always possess the associated skills. One strategy to enhance the workplace relevance of the BA degree, then, is to strengthen our efforts to encourage students to develop these skills and competencies by emphasizing to them that it is these skills, and not the credential, that employers seek. One way to do this is to explicitly draw the connection between course assignments and workplace-relevant skills by presenting students with comments from employers like the ones presented previously when explaining course assignments in class.

## CONTRIBUTION OF FORMAL EDUCATION AND STUDENT CLUBS AND VOLUNTEERING

This section considers what the survey results suggest about the contribution of formal education and student clubs and volunteering to the development of skills respondents consider essential to success in their positions.

## How Respondents Believe They Developed Their Skills

To understand how respondents believed they developed their skills, the survey asked them to indicate, by checking as many answers as applied, which of five experiences (Formal Education; Student Clubs & Volunteering; Formal Job Training (e.g., workshops); Self-Taught/On the Job; None of the Above) they believed contributed significantly to their ability to exercise these skills (table 1, rows 2–4 summarizes selected results). Three things stand out about their responses. First, respondents do not appear to strongly associate their formal education or experiences with students clubs and volunteering with the development of workplace-relevant skills; in fact, for 11 of the 12 most highly valued skills and competencies the highest percentage of respondents selected "Self-Taught/On the Job" as having significantly contributed to their ability to exercise them. Second, if focus is shifted to experiences that a *majority* (versus the *highest percentage*) of respondents rated as making a significant contribution, the results suggest that together, formal education and student clubs and volunteering (which we might call the "broader educational experience") are perceived to have contributed significantly to the development of the ability to exercise six of the 12 skills. Finally, the skills and competencies that majorities of respondents associate with formal education and student clubs and volunteering appear to differ in kind: formal education is associated with what might be called *individual* skills (Written Communication; Oral Communications & Public Speaking; Initiative/Ability To Work Independently) while student clubs and volunteering with *interpersonal* skills (Leadership, Ability To Work With A Team, Interpersonal Skills). This association of volunteering with interpersonal skills is consistent with Canadian data that found that volunteers ranked interpersonal skills highest among the skills they thought they learned from volunteering (66%) (communication skills rated a distant second at 45%) (Hall et al. 2009, 49). The next two sections review results that speak to the contribution of each of these experiences.

## Formal Education

Further insight into respondents' perceptions of the contribution of formal education can be drawn from questions that asked respondents to rate the workplace relevance of various types and forms of academic assignment.

The percentage of respondents who rated various *forms* of academic assignments as "Extremely Useful" as preparation for their work is summarized in table 2. The fact that all of the forms of assignment that require students to interact with one another (team written work, team oral presentations, seminar discussions, and debates) ranked below the forms of assignment that are typically performed individually (individual oral presentation, service learning/internship with a NGO, individual written work, international education/volunteering/internships) supports the suggestion that respondents associate formal education with the development of individual skills and not with interpersonal skills. Given that "Ability to Work with a Team" was rated second as a skill essential to success in their positions (table 1, row 1), it is troubling that respondents give such low ratings to forms of assignment that appear to develop these skills.

Table 3 summarizes the percentage of respondents who rated various *types* of academic assignment as "Extremely Useful" as preparation for their work. Although the pattern is less clear cut than was the case with table 2, table 3 suggests that, on the whole, those working in NGOs perceive less workplace relevance in tra-

*Table 2*

### Value of Form of Assignments as General Preparation for Respondent's Work

| FORM OF ASSIGNMENT | PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO DESCRIBED THE FORM OF ASSIGNMENT AS EXTREMELY USEFUL |
|---|---|
| Individual Oral Presentation | 58 |
| Service Learning/Internship in a NGO | 56 |
| Individual Written Work | 53 |
| International Education/Volunteering/Internships | 47 |
| Team Written Work | 41 |
| Team Oral Presentation | 38 |
| Seminar Discussions | 33 |
| Debates | 27 |

Percentages do not add up to 100; respondents were permitted to check as many contributing influences as applied.

*Table 3*

### Value of Types of Assignments as General Preparation for Respondent's Work

| TYPE OF ASSIGNMENT | PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO DESCRIBED THE TYPE OF ASSIGNMENT AS EXTREMELY USEFUL |
|---|---|
| Writing a Policy/Analysis Paper | 49 |
| Writing a Grant Application | 46 |
| Writing a Précis (i.e., a concise summary of a longer document) | 43 |
| Writing a Press Release | 38 |
| Writing a Research Proposal | 38 |
| Writing a Newspaper Article | 25 |
| Writing a Traditional Research Essay | 17 |
| Learning How to Read a Court Decision | 18 |
| Writing a Literature Review | 14 |
| Writing a Critique of a Book or Article | 12 |
| Creating a Video News Report | 8 |
| Writing a Book Review | 6 |
| Creating a Short Documentary Film | 4 |

Percentages do not add up to 100; respondents were permitted to check as many contributing influences as applied.

ditional liberal arts assignments like traditional research essays, critiques, literature reviews, and book reviews than in assignments that emphasize application (grant application, policy paper, research proposal) and concise forms of writing (précis, press release, newspaper article). This finding must also be troubling for those who desire to enhance the workplace relevance of the BA degree without abandoning liberal education.

## Student Clubs and Volunteering

The first thing that can be observed from the survey questions concerning the significance of students clubs and volunteering is that respondents do perceive this experience to be workplace relevant. This is indicated in several ways. Most directly, when asked to give advice to a hypothetical student seeking an entry-level position in an organization like theirs, the greatest number of respondents rated "volunteer with any NGO"[8] as "Vital" (46%; N = 199). More indirectly, the majority of respondents (63%) indicated that they had belonged to a *student* organization (e.g., campus-based clubs, campus chapters of nonprofits/NGOs, and student government). This percentage seems quite high given that Hall et al. report a 58% rate for *all forms* of volunteering among Canadians aged 15 to 24 (2009, 38).[9] Further, respondents appear to have been active with 78% having belonged to two or more organizations and 66% served in an executive position. More directly again, and consistent with other findings (Sagen, Dallam, and Laverty 2000, 762; Hall, McKeown, and Roberts 2001, 35), when those who had belonged to student organizations were asked if they felt this had helped them obtain their first job after graduating, 50% said they thought it had, including 6% who obtained their first full-time job with an organization they had belonged to as a student.

question soliciting advice for a hypothetical student. For instance, one respondent wrote: "Do as much networking as you can in whatever shape that may take—volunteering, attending conferences/workshops, internships, work, etc. That is often how you hear of job or internship opportunities and how you can make your application stand out from the hundreds of others." The value of networking and being "in the loop" was also suggested when respondents were asked where respondents' organizations tend to advertise jobs: although 87% said their own website and 86% said word-of-mouth/contacts/networks, only 18% said the media most accessible to outsiders: newspapers. The increasing importance of networking is suggested by comparing it to a study published in 2003 that reported that 80% of nonprofits use the newspaper to advertise job openings (Ban, Drahnak-Faller, and Towers 2003, 138).

Regardless of how faculty think they are helping their students, discussion of the survey's results pertaining to the contribution of formal education and student clubs and volunteering to the development of workplace-relevant skills is sobering. Unlike the experience of student clubs and volunteering, which respondents perceived as contributing to workplace-relevant interpersonal skills, formal education, especially group work and traditional liberal arts assignments, was not seen as especially

*Given that "Ability to Work with a Team" was rated second as a skill essential to success in their positions (table 1, row 1), it is troubling that respondents give such low ratings to forms of assignment that appear to develop these skills.*

Although respondents were not asked why they thought this experience was valuable, some possibilities can be teased out of answers given to other questions. The importance of practical experience came through strongly in responses from people with hiring experience to the questions about job applicant strengths and weaknesses. This category, which included references to work and volunteer experience, life experience in general, and experience living and working in international settings, was volunteered by 65% of the 135 respondents, clearly making it the top category.

Because references to practical experience were made in answer to open-ended questions, respondents were not asked why they thought this was important. Nevertheless, many of their answers to these and other questions provide some insight into why this is important; faculty might consider sharing these answers with their students. One concern had to do with lack of familiarity with the workplace and of how to apply their academic knowledge: "unused to office environment,... deadlines, unrealistic expectations"; "Not knowing how to apply their education to the real world, having theory and limited practice"; "We tend to get very qualified applicants. Some just don't have much experience outside of a more structured academic setting, and only experience will remedy that." A second concern identified by 13 respondents (10%) was described variously as "overconfidence" or being "preachy," "arrogant," or "judgmental." This behavior is often worked out through experience. Finally, another benefit of practical experience is that it helps students develop a skill that Koc reports undergraduates typically lack (2010): networking. Networking was noted by six respondents to an open-ended

workplace relevant and, to the extent that it was, it was associated with individual skills like written communication.

### DISCUSSION: ENHANCING WORKPLACE RELEVANCE

Respondents' perceptions like the ones discussed earlier are useful for thinking about our programs, our courses, and how we teach. On the one hand, it is likely that education is one of those arts like building houses and preparing feasts of which, as Aristotle famously wrote, the "artist is not the only, or even the best, judge" (1958, 126). While the respondents may not be skilled in teaching political science, they have much experience applying their education in the workplace. On the other hand, even if graduates are not good judges of their education, their perceptions provide a better idea of what, despite our intentions, students think they have learned. These perceptions also provide insight into the thinking of those who will be hiring our present students. In light of these perceptions, this section discusses three distinct, yet complementary, strategies for enhancing the workplace relevance of our BA graduates without sacrificing our commitment to liberal education.

In one strategy, which might be called "going with the flow," faculty develop a vision of undergraduate education that builds on the perception that formal education and student clubs and volunteering play complementary roles by helping students develop, respectively, individual and interpersonal skills. This idea is captured in George Kuh's (1995) description of extracurricular activities as "The Other Curriculum." Pursuing this strategy requires faculty to do things like proactively identifying

appropriate extracurricular opportunities, showing students these opportunities are valued by actively endorsing them, teaching students how to get the most out of them, and, where such opportunities do not exist, working with students to bring them to campus.[10] This strategy offers many advantages. First, by leveraging extracurricular activities to develop students' more practical skills, the workplace relevance of their broader educational experience can be enhanced while resisting, or at least minimizing, introducing vocational elements into the formal academic curriculum. Another advantage is that it reflects the study's finding that NGO employers appear to use these experiences as a signal that job applicants possess certain desirable skills that they believe cannot be learned through formal education alone.

A second strategy, which might be called "resisting the flow," involves placing greater emphasis in academic programs on the development of skills that respondents did not associate with formal education. As Collins, Knotts, and Schiff (2012) have illustrated, this can be accomplished in many ways. They present 11 ideas, including adding to the curriculum required internship and career preparation courses and embedding elements of career preparation in other courses. A concern with this approach, as it would

comes with particular courses, assignments, *and* extracurricular activities (for a discussion of portfolios, see Chatham-Carpenter, Seawel, and Raschig 2010). Whether pursued through a student portfolio or not, this strategy offers many advantages: it requires faculty to become more articulate—to themselves, to each other, to their students—about the value of course content and assignments (Kuh 1995; Breuning, Parker, and Ishiyama 2001); it encourages students to develop skills that are valued by the NGO sector that is recognized by people who work in that sector; it provides a means of communicating, endorsing, and encouraging students to pursue this broader vision of undergraduate education; and, as a result, it may alter graduates' perceptions of the skills they possess and of how they developed them.

## CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This article discusses the results of an exploratory survey of NGO staff to contribute to our thinking about how faculty can respond to legitimate pressures for workplace relevance without abandoning liberal education. Consideration of the results suggests that while the BA graduate remains desired and employable in this sector, those who work in the sector do not perceive that their

> *Unlike the experience of student clubs and volunteering, which respondents perceived as contributing to workplace-relevant interpersonal skills, formal education, especially group work and traditional liberal arts assignments, was not seen as especially workplace relevant and, to the extent that it was, it was associated with individual skills like written communication.*

presumably involve some displacement of traditional liberal arts assignments, is that it could represent a significant shift toward vocationalism. To avoid this, faculty may need to become more deliberate about managing the mix of the types of assignments students complete in pursuing their BA programs. One way to achieve this is for faculty to engage in curriculum mapping, whereby they collectively identify the learning objectives, in terms of content and skills/assignments, to be attached to each course, or at least each required course, in their program. Uchiyama and Radin (2009) discuss the process of curriculum mapping as well as an example of its use to ensure that their education program achieved certain standards. Political science faculty could engage in similar processes to ensure their programs strike a desired balance between liberal education and the development of more narrowly workplace-relevant skills.

A final strategy combines and transcends the first two and speaks directly to the observation that many graduates do not seem to recognize the skills they are (or could be) developing already, whether through formal education or extracurricular activities. This involves incorporating both the active promotion of extracurricular opportunities in the "going with the flow" strategy and the deliberate embedding of workplace-relevant skills into the curriculum of the "resisting the flow" strategy into a broader vision of how the program educates its students. Although this could be done in many ways, one useful technique for illustrating this approach is the "Student Portfolio" or "ePortfolio."[11] The idea is that students create portfolios by following faculty-generated maps or matrices that associate valuable skills and learning out-

formal education, and especially traditional liberal arts assignments, contributed significantly to the development of workplace-relevant skills. Building on these findings, as well as findings about the contribution of extracurricular experiences like student clubs and volunteering, several strategies are suggested that could make it possible to enhance the workplace relevance of the political science and other BA graduates, without sacrificing commitment to liberal education. At the core of these strategies is recognition that faculty may need to become more articulate and deliberate in thinking about the structure of their programs and assignments.

Clearly further research is needed. On the one hand, political science graduates work in a wider range of locales and sectors of the economy than is covered by this survey. Perceptions in those sectors need to be studied and compared and used to inform our thinking about our programs. On the other hand, while graduates' perceptions can be very useful if handled appropriately, the accuracy of these perceptions need to be tested objectively. As an example of what might be discovered, Saavedra and Saavedra (2011), in a pioneering example of how this might be pursued, use Colombian data to suggest (contrary to the perceptions of the present survey's respondents) that formal education does contribute measurably to the development of interpersonal skills. Such research, they suggest, can determine which characteristics of formal education are most effective at developing particular skills (1525). This said, it is important to end with the following caution: in conducting such research we must never forget that liberal education that helps students to become critical thinkers and engaged democratic citizens has value independent of any

contribution it may make to the development of workplace-relevant skills.

## NOTES

1. Most respondents (208) indicated their two most recent degrees or diplomas (thus, percentages do not add up to 100). These were grouped into the following categories: political science (including political economy, public administration, international affairs/relations) (23%); international development/global studies/international project management (19%); sociology/criminology (10%); law (LLB and BA) (10%); Other BA (10%); English (9%); education (8%); journalism/communication (7%); natural sciences/engineering/health sciences (6%); undergraduate business (6%); between 2% and 5% of respondents noted each of the following: history, psychology, religion & theology, social work, women's/gender studies, anthropology, languages, MBA, environmental studies, peace (& conflict) studies, human resources, and human rights.

2. Figure calculated from Koc's "Figure 3: Plans after graduation" (2010).

3. Staff located in Ontario: 1–2 (6%); 3–10 (27%); 11–25 (28%); 26–50 (6%); 51–100 (17%); and 101+ (14%).

4. The main concern/focus of the organizations that 212 respondents indicated were: International Development & Relief (23%); Human Rights/Civil Liberties (18%); Poverty/Social Justice (13%); Education (9%); Health (7%); Research and Policy (6%); Children, Youth & Families (5%); Labor/Workers/Union (5%). Less than 5% of respondents indicated each of the following: Disabilities, Women, Criminal Justice, Community & Social Services, Religion Related, Gay & Lesbian Issues, Seniors.

5. Postgrad college diplomas are typically condensed (usually 1-year) versions of college programs offered to students who have already earned a university degree or college diploma.

6. The 27 skills and competencies were those included in table 1 and ability to manage human resources, accounting/budgeting/financial management, client/case management, competency in French, competitive spirit, conflict resolution, entrepreneurship, fundraising (other than grants), grant writing, negotiation skills, nonprofit law/legal issues, program evaluation, public relations, understanding the government context, and volunteer management.

7. These were budgeting & financial management, grant writing & follow-up reporting, fundraising (other than grants), project management, managing employees, managing volunteers/student or local chapters, networking/liaising with other NGOs, public relations/public speaking/public advocacy, government relations/lobbying/advocacy, monitoring human rights violations/information gathering/research/documentation, providing services to clients.

8. The other options, with percentage rating them as "Vital" in parentheses, were: Get CoOp or Internship experience with the NGO you want to work for (35%), Get International Experience (e.g., work, internship, volunteering) (35%), Get Volunteer Experience with the NGO you want to work for (34%), Learn a language other than English or French (26%), Get a MA (16%), Study at a foreign university for a term or two (8%), and Get a PhD (2%).

9. Unfortunately, the survey only asked about university or college student organizations and not volunteering in general, so there is no way of telling how respondents participated in *all forms* of volunteering.

10. Collins, Knotts, and Schiff provide the example of departments creating pre-law or public administration clubs (2012, 89).

11. This was suggested by Tracy Summerville, a discussant at a presentation of an earlier version of this article.

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