

**Lesson title:** Skills Inventory

**Lesson's author:** Mark Allen Peterson (with Lisa Suter)

**Summary:** In this homework assignment, students consider what skills they might have to gain from a liberal arts education and how international studies courses might help them acquire these skills.

**Objectives:**

1. Skills: Students develop core liberal arts skills: reading unfamiliar information and making sense of it; thinking critically about what they're reading; synthesizing material; coming to a conclusion about it; and articulating that conclusion verbally and in writing.
2. Living in the World: Students develop knowledge, skills, and attributes needed to live effectively in a world possessing limited natural resources and characterized by ethnic diversity, cultural pluralism and increasing interdependence.

**Learning Outcomes:**

- Students review skills that can be learned as part of a liberal arts education.
- Students reflect on the skills that they already possess, versus the ones they still might wish to acquire (or which might be attractive to a future employer).

**Materials Required:**

- Handout: Skills Worksheet (below).

**Lesson Activities:**

1. At the end of the preceding class, pass out copies of the "Skills Inventory" exercise. Ask students to take it home, read it over, and follow the directions as stated. Ask them to bring the completed product back to class for the next class meeting.
2. At the next class meeting ask students to share their observations about the exercise.
  - Which skills are they strong in?
  - In which skills are they weak?
  - What skills have they gained or strengthened through college activities?
  - Are they confident that they know what a liberal education consists of?
  - How might students benefit from liberal arts education, generally speaking?
  - How might they individually make the most of the opportunities their education affords to build strengths where they are weak?
3. Ask the students to consider what skills they might learn or reinforce in their International Studies course. Discuss with them what you hope the outcomes of the course will be.

**Comments:** Often, students enter introductory international studies classes because it fulfills a requirement. They frequently see no significance to what they are learning in the classroom and the lives they will lead when they leave, beyond a vague sense that

there are some things people “ought to know.” “I have a very successful friend who claims she spent four years in college in exchange for a piece of paper to help her get a job,” said Mark Allen Peterson, the original author of this assignment. “She claims everything she needed to know in her career she already knew or learned on the job.” The purpose of this assignment is to get students thinking about their learning in different ways, as developing skills they will take with them into the global marketplace. Peterson tells his students, “In ten years, I don’t expect you to remember the details of the topics we’ll read and discuss in class. What I do expect is that you will be able to read new information on unfamiliar topics, evaluate it, synthesize it with other things you already know, come to a reasoned conclusion, and express that conclusion orally and in writing. Because those are the skills you should be developing, and those are the things I want to see demonstrated in your classwork.”

Peterson tells students to write concrete examples of their skills so that when they go into a job interview, they can wow the interviewer with anecdotes and stories that will stick in the interviewer’s mind far better than simply claiming one has a skill. But it has important pedagogical roles as well. First, it reinforces the need for evidence when making any kind of claim. Second, it forces students to really reflect on the skills they possess. It is easy to imagine we possess a skill like “seeing challenges or problems as opportunities” until we try to seriously come up with an example of when we used that skill. Third, writing prepares students for class discussion.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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### Skills Worksheet

A liberal arts education is intended to help you develop practical professional skills and to refine and reinforce many of those skills you already possess.. This exercise is designed to help you explore some of the benefits of a liberal arts education, in terms of transferable skills, just as this course is designed to help you test your mastery of some of these skills.

Please look at the attached list of transferable skills. Transferable skills are high order skills that are needed for a wide variety of careers because they can be transferred from one task, job or workplace to another. The attached list is derived from one developed by a British headhunting firm that supplies multinational firms and agencies with consultants. How many of these skills are part of the accomplishments you've listed? What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?

**When you graduate, how many of these skills will you be able to promise to an employer or graduate program?**

#### **Exercise:**

1. Review the attached skills and check off the ones you are confident you possess.
2. Go back over the list. To the right of each skill you have, jot a brief note to yourself about how and when you learned it. You must give a concrete example of a time you used that skill.
3. Complete the exercise by answering the questions on the last page.
4. Bring this exercise to class and be prepared to discuss it.

## **1. PEOPLE SKILLS**

### **1-1 Interpersonal skills**

- able to interact successfully with a wide range of people
- knows how to express feelings warmly and sensitively
- gives and receives feedback in a constructive manner
- "hears" what is said and implied
- knows how to interpret and use body language
- knows how to use tact and diplomacy
- recognizes and values the uniqueness of individuals
- works well with a wide variety of people: males and females; people from other social,

educational, religious, cultural and racial backgrounds; individuals who have disabilities or special needs

### **1-2 Oral communication skills**

- presents information and ideas clearly and concisely, with content and style appropriate for the audience (whether one-to-one or in a group)
- presents opinions and ideas in an open, objective way
- able to "think on feet"

### **1-3 Public speaking skills**

- able to make formal presentations
- presents ideas, positions and problems in an interesting way
- maintains poise in public situations

### **1-4 Counseling skills**

- responds to what others have said in a non-judgmental way ("active listening")
- builds trust and openness with others
- able to help others understand themselves better and to build self-esteem
- able to help others solve their problems
- gives sound advice in an effective way
- able to demonstrate empathy

### **1-5 Coaching / mentoring skills**

- gives appropriate advice in a persuasive way
- gives feedback in a constructive way
- helps others to increase their knowledge or skills
- works and communicates with others to satisfy their needs and expectations

### **1-6 Teaching / training skills**

- able to help others gain knowledge and skills

- able to motivate people to learn new things and to perform well
- able to adjust content and teaching style to the audience
- able to create an effective learning environment

### **1-7 Supervising skills**

- motivates individuals to perform well
- able to coordinate the assignment of tasks appropriately
- identifies and uses human resources in an effective way
- delegates responsibilities and establishes an appropriate system of accountability
- able to monitor progress and assess the quality of job performance of others

### **1-8 Leadership skills**

- motivates and empowers others to act
- inspires trust and respect in others
- able to build effective teams
- involves others without coercing or cajoling
- promotes open discussion and involvement of all participants, while not dominating
- able to facilitate and manage group interactions
- able to delegate effectively
- able to gain cooperation from difficult people

### **1-9 Persuading skills**

- communicates effectively to justify a position or influence a decision
- effective spokesperson; able to explain goals and activities in a way appropriate to the audience
- able to sell products
- able to promote ideas
- effective in lobbying for change

### **1-10 Negotiating skills**

- able to negotiate skillfully
- knows how and when to make compromises

### **1-11 Mediation skills**

- able to resolve conflicts that stems from different perspectives or interests
- helps those with opposite viewpoints reach mutual agreements, either through consensus or compromise
- encourages 'give and take' from both sides; can persuade others to agree to disagree if a compromise position cannot be found
- able to deal with conflict in an open, honest and positive way

### **1-12 Interviewing skills**

- asks and responds to questions effectively  
able to make others feel relaxed  
and to create a feeling of trust

### **1-13 Client service skills**

- able to build a relationship of mutual trust with clients
- able to understand or perceive clients' needs
- gives or finds appropriate services
- helps individuals develop more positive attitudes
- helps clients cope with stressful situations
- acts as an advocate for clients
- develops ways (tailored to individual needs) to help people reach personal goals
- able to handle complaints and concerns in a sensitive way

### **1-14 Care-giving skills**

- able to identify and respond appropriately to the need for care, counseling, treatment or therapy
- patient and able to empathize with others
- able to give sensitive care to people who are sick or elderly or who have severe disabilities

## **2. MIND SKILLS**

### **2-1 Analytical / logical thinking skills**

- able to draw specific conclusions from a set of general observations (= deductive reasoning)
- able to draw general conclusions from set of specific facts (= inductive reasoning)
- examines data to understand inter-relationships and correlations
- able to compare and contrast details and options
- able to synthesize information and ideas
- able to identify appropriate frameworks for analysis and evaluation

### **2-2 Critical thinking skills**

- able to review different points of view or ideas and make objective judgments
- able to examine underlying assumptions
- able to formulate a question, analyze a problem or define a situation with clarity, accuracy and fair-mindedness
- investigates all possible solutions to a problem, weighing the pros and cons
- able to review or develop policy and programs

### **2-3 Creative thinking skills**

- able to use imagination and intuition freely
- able to generate new ideas, invent new things, create new images or designs; find new solutions to problems
- able to conceive new interpretations to ideas or information
- able to design new approaches to solve problems
- able to make connections between seemingly unrelated things
- able to reshape goals to reveal new possibilities
- able to use wit and humor effectively

## **2-4 Problem-solving skills**

- able to clarify the nature of a problem, evaluate alternatives, propose viable solutions and determine the outcome of the various options

## **2-5 Decision-making skills**

- able to identify all possible options, weigh the pros and cons, assess feasibility and choose the most viable option

## **2-6 Planning skills**

- able to plan projects, events and programs
- able to determine the need for action
- able to lay out a step-by-step process for achieving a goal
- able to establish objectives and needs, evaluates options, chooses best option
- able to analyze all the requirements (i.e., human, financial and material resources) to accomplish specific goals
- able to establish realistic timetables and schedules

## **2-7 Organizational skills**

- able to organize information, people or things in a systematic way
- able to break down an activity into component tasks and coordinates resources (both human and financial);
- assigns appropriate people to undertake tasks
- able to establish priorities and meet deadlines
- able to understand the inter-relationship between the parts of a whole
- able to develop or streamline procedures
- monitors progress and effectiveness

# **3. APPLIED / PRACTICAL SKILLS**

## **3-1 Advanced writing skills**

- able to communicate in writing for maximum impact
- able to select, interpret, organize and synthesize key ideas
- able to adjust style, form and content to a particular audience
- able to draft non-routine correspondence and complex reports
- able to write in a creative way for the general public (e.g., publicity material)
- able to edit a written text to ensure that the message is as clear, concise and accurate as possible

### **3-2 Research skills**

- able to design research projects
- able to define the scope of a topic
- able to develop appropriate methodology and implement a plan
- knows how to find and collect relevant background information
- able to identify people who have information relevant to the task
- knows how to collect and compile data
- able to analyze data, summarize findings and write a report
- attention to detail; observation skills

### **3-3 Administrative / clerical skills**

- able to operate computers and other basic office equipment
- able to do word processing, data entry and basic formatting of texts
- able to compile basic information
- able to design and maintain filing and control systems
- general office work

### **3-4 Financial skills**

- able to keep accurate financial records
- able to manage a budget (that is, preparing sound budgets and monitoring expenses)

- able to establish and maintain accounting and auditing procedures
- able to compile financial and other numerical data
- able to prepare financial statements and reports
- able to interpret financial reports and audited statements
- able to monitor inventory flow

### **3-5 Language skills**

- competence in a language other than the one dominant in the organization
- functionally bilingual (for example, fluency in French or English as a second language)
- able to translate and/or interpret in a given language
- able to communicate in sign language

### **3-6 Advanced computer skills**

- able to use a variety of software programs
- able to learn new software quickly
- able to manipulate data in a computer system
- knowledge about desk-top publishing
- able to design a web page for the Internet

### **3-7 Technological skills**

- understands technical systems and operates effectively within them
- understands technical specifications; reads technical manuals with ease
- able to maintain computer or other systems; able to analyze potential dysfunctions and troubleshoot for potential problems
- able to suggest modifications to an existing system or design a new system to improve performance

### **3-8 Performing skills**

- able to make presentations using video, television or other media in an interesting way
- able to entertain, amuse and inspire an audience
- able to act, sing or play an instrument in public

### **3-9 Artistic skills**

- able to draw diagrams and illustrations
- uses color and design creatively
- able to design displays and publicity material (print, video, Internet)

### **3-10 Perceptual skills**

- able to visualize new formats and shapes
- able to estimate physical space

### **3-11 Mechanical skills**

- able to install, operate and monitor the performance of equipment and mechanical devices
- able to repair mechanical devices

## **4. ADAPTABILITY SKILLS**

- capacity to adapt to new situations and settings and to tolerate change well
- ability to work in a changing environment; tolerance for ambiguity
- flexibility to adapt to the needs of the moment
- a positive attitude towards change (this means seeing change as a challenge and yes, even an opportunity rather than as a problem)

### **Questions**

What are my professional goals when I leave the university?

What skills do I need to meet these goals?

What do I need to work on while attending this school (both in class and in extra-curricular activities)?