UAA Final Report for the 2019-2020 NWCCU Mission Fulfillment Project

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Introduction/ Description of the Opportunity (with historical context)

A university's mission is what describes its purpose in the broadest sense (Allen, 1998). John C. Scott (2006) stated further that the "life force of any enterprise is its mission." In January of 2019, The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) invited the first cohort to its newly inaugurated Mission Fulfillment Fellowship. The NWCCU Fellowship was an 18-month program that involved a series of readings on current theory and practice in assessment, webinars and sessions with national leading experts in university assessment, two multiple-day intensive meetings, and multiple opportunities for the cohort of fellows to get together at NWCCU conferences in 2019 and 2020. Fellows were asked to propose and complete an institution-level project that would inform mission fulfillment. The University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) asked us to have our names put forward and we were honored to be accepted into this inaugural cohort.

UAA's Mission

> The mission of the University of Alaska Anchorage is to discover and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, engagement and creative expression. Located in Anchorage and on community campuses in Southcentral Alaska, UAA is committed to serving the higher education needs of the state, its communities and its diverse peoples. UAA is an open-access university with academic programs leading to occupational endorsements; undergraduate and graduate certificates; and associate, baccalaureate and graduate degrees in a rich, diverse and inclusive environment.

Our project focused on the section of the UAA mission that expresses our commitment to serve the higher education needs of the state, its communities, and its diverse peoples. While UAA has an extensive network of community partners, this is the first time we have conducted a survey to gain insight into their broad expectations of our programs and graduates.

Literature Review

Over the past two decades, universities around the globe have published findings from research done on skills which employers expect students to acquire while working on their post-secondary education.

Two projects collecting information from employers on desired skills have been published in literature out of Australia. In both, researchers from multiple universities collaborated to complete employer satisfaction surveys that were given in multiple iterations from 2003 through 2012 (Shah & Nair, 2011; Shah, Grebennikov, & Nair, 2012). Both survey projects collected data on employer satisfaction with the quality of university graduate skills and the key capabilities of graduates as they entered the work force. Cumulatively, the two studies included data from five different rounds of employer surveys. They consistently found the following areas as most important:

- Being able to communicate effectively
- Being flexible and adaptable
- A commitment to ethical practice
- Being willing to face and learn from errors and listen openly to feedback
- Being able to organize work and manage time effectively
- Wanting to produce as good a job as possible
- The ability to empathize with and work productively with people from a wide range of backgrounds
- A willingness to listen to different points of view before coming to a decision
- Being able to develop and contribute positively to team-based projects
- Being able to set and justify priorities

They also found that employers were seeing lower than desired performance from graduates in the areas of communication, organization, listening and appropriately responding to feedback, time management, flexibility, and quality decision-making. The authors recommend continuing to use the same instrument for comparison purposes.

In 2009, The University of Botswana completed an employer satisfaction survey of their graduates (Alao, et. al., 2009). The results of the survey provided the university with information on important skills for graduates to have and their satisfaction with the graduates they had hired. Communication, computer skills, interpersonal skills, problem solving, flexibility, adaptability, planning and organizational skills, leadership/managerial abilities, and data/research skills were all identified as important attributes for graduates to possess. Survey results also revealed that the employers felt The University of Botswana graduates were proficient in all of the skills except leadership/management abilities. The researchers were able to use the results of their survey to make recommendations on what student learning outcomes the university should focus on. They also recommended increased employer feedback on their curriculum choices.

A group of researchers from universities in Bucharest, Romania published the results of their investigation into desired competencies for graduates (Chiru et.al., 2012). They interviewed 47 different employers from both Romania and the United Kingdom in order to assess how university graduates were meeting the employers' expectations in 24 different competency areas.

The results identified similarities and differences between the responses from the two countries. Their interviewed employers identified customer service orientation, teamwork and cooperation, ability and willingness to learn, and planning, coordinating, and organizing as the most valued competencies in their potential employees.

Another university that has completed a research project that involved employers of their graduates in their planning was the Huaiyin Institute of Technology in Huaiyin, China (Zhang & Zou, 2013). Researchers at that university published the results of interviews and a survey they conducted asking service industry employers to identify key employability skills for their graduates. Their project found that their local service industry employers valued students' personal characteristics (e.g. ethical behavior, responsibility, adaptability, self-confidence, and enthusiasm), basic knowledge skills (e.g. English language ability, political and economic knowledge, and humanities), interpersonal relationship/teamwork skills, information technology abilities, and innovation. This information allowed them to align their efforts to support and develop employable graduates with the needs of their potential employers.

A similar study was completed by a university research team in Malaysia which surveyed both employers and faculty (Singh, Thambusamy, & Ramly, 2013). Their project was in response to an outcry from employers that their recently interviewed and hired graduates from the universities were not adequately prepared for the workplace. The two competencies that were ranked as the top two most important by both employers and faculty were "communication skills" and "integrity and professional ethics." Their key finding was that even though employers and faculty agreed on what was important, curricular changes were likely needed for the universities to be more successful in meeting the goal of producing students proficient in these areas.

In addition to giving vital feedback to these universities about the observations and recommendations from the potential student employers, these projects were beneficial for identifying strengths and weaknesses in their own processes and procedures, resource allocation, relevance of course design and offerings, building and maintaining relationships with these important university community stakeholders.

While the existing literature does include articles with global examples of interviews and surveys that aligned with our project idea, with the exception of two projects that focused on one degree area there was little to no reference in the literature to surveys or interviews about broad skills that are seen or desired in students and graduates conducted by American universities. However, in 2018, the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) completed a large-scale survey of 1,001 business executives and hiring managers as a part of their "Fulfilling the American Dream: Liberal Education and the Future of Work" project (Hart Research Associates, 2018). The survey collected data on the value the participants placed on college degrees and on the most highly valued skills for entry-level hires. The key findings of their survey were that college degrees are important to employers, and that employers found credentials more important than the average person in the United States. The survey also produced list of learning outcomes in different construct areas that were found to be very important for college graduates to possess. The top five competencies were oral communication, teamwork skills with diverse groups, ethical judgement and decision-making, and applied knowledge in real-world settings.

The AAC&U survey aligned very well with our models of topics from the literature, our already established student learning outcomes at UAA, and especially our proposed project. We reached

out to the AAC&U seeking permission to use their survey questions for our work. We obtained a copy of their survey and permission to use or adapt it for our project. That survey provided the foundation for our interview questions.

UAA Fellowship Interview Project

For our mission fulfillment project, we conducted interviews with top employers of UAA graduates and current students (i.e. through internships). All UAA campuses were consulted in selecting top employers. Our main purpose was to collect information about what competencies these key community stakeholders felt was most important for our students to have developed as they work on their education at our university. Our desired outcomes for the project were to add depth and breadth to our community relationships with external stakeholders and to acquire meaningful data to help inform efforts in strategic planning, resource allocation, student support and career services, residence life, curriculum, and pedagogy.

Process

At UAA, our project journey began by meeting with our Chancellor, Dr. Cathy Sandeen, and her Cabinet to present and get approval for our project. We received great support, feedback, and offers of support from the administration. The Office of Academic Affairs and specifically Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, Susan Kalina, served as a mentor and guide through our entire project. Additionally, we regularly presented our project progress to other key stakeholder groups in assessment, accreditation, and student success throughout our time working on this project.

To prepare the interview questions, we started with the AAC&U survey and made some adjustments to personalize the questions for our university. We made some additions to the list of competencies that was in the original survey, based on a list of proposed competencies we had already polled faculty on in an open forum the previous spring (See Appendix). Lastly, we added a few questions specific to the outward face and marketing of UAA to the community. After we had the interview questions approved, we wrote a script for the interviews to ensure consistency for each interview.

The UAA system includes a main campus in Anchorage and five satellite campuses in communities as close as 45 miles and as far as 400 miles away. It was important to us to include employers from these communities. Vice Chancellor of University Advancement, Megan Olson, provided support by giving us participant suggestions and contact information for the organizations that are the top employers of our students and graduates. We also consulted the market data on our top employers available from Emsi Labor Market Analytics. We collected a list of potential interviewees and reached out to all of them with a request and an invitation to participate in our project. The College of Engineering provided administrative support for all of our scheduling needs, which became quite involved with cancellations and rescheduling after the outbreak of COVID.

Employers Interviewed

Our final group of interviewees came from 10 organizations spread throughout the UAA system. Among these 10 organizations, we interviewed 16 individuals. All of our interviewees had job responsibilities that including recruiting, interviewing, or hiring new employees. The organizations, their location and the number of interview participants for each are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Community employers interviewed for this project.

The Community Employers Interviewed		
Organization	**Location**	**Number of Interviewees**
Bureau of Land Management	Prince William Sound	1
Anchorage School District	Anchorage	4
MTA	Mat-Su Valley	1
Municipality of Anchorage	Anchorage	1
Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium	Anchorage	1
R&M Consultants, Inc.	Anchorage	1
GCI	Anchorage	2
Southcentral Foundation	Anchorage	3
University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)	Anchorage	1
KPMG	Anchorage	1

Before each interview, we sent each interviewee a handout with the UAA Mission and the list of competencies along with a link to a Qualtrics survey that collected demographic information and pre-interview opinions on our list of competencies (see Appendix A). The interviews were completed between February and July of 2020, conducted via Zoom, recorded (with permission), and then the transcripts (automatically generated by Zoom) were edited for accuracy. The interviews each included 13 questions and the interviews took 35 minutes on average.

Following review of the transcripts, a master data set was created, combining the demographic data collected in the pre-interview survey and the full answers of the participants. We then prepared data summaries, tables and graphs for the response data.

The complete set of our data appear in this report. We presented these results to the Chancellor and her Cabinet at their October 2020 meeting, and plan to present a shortened version at the NWCCU 2020 Annual Conference.

Organization Demographics

We asked the organizations to provide us with the same demographic information that was also collected on the AAC&U survey. Table 2 summarizes the results from the Qualtrics survey that was sent out before the interviews.

Table 2: Demographic information provided by interviewees in Qualtrics pre-interview survey.

Organization	Total Employees	Description	Areas of Involvement
Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium	> 1000	Nonprofit Organization	Healthcare/medicine
Anchorage School District		School district, college, or university	Education
Bureau of Land Management (picked by PWSC)	< 25	Government Agency or Municipality	Government (federal, state, or local)
GCI			Technology/ telecommunications
KPMG	> 1000	Private or publicly traded company	Professional services
MTA (picked by Mat-Su)	100-499	Nonprofit organization	Advertising; Media/ entertainment; Professional services; Service; Technology/ telecommunications; Construction/ building contractors; Engineering
Municipality of Anchorage	> 1000	Government Agency or Municipality	Government (federal, state, or local)
R&M Consultants, Inc.	100-499	Private or publically traded company	Professional services; Construction/ building contractors; Engineering
Southcentral Foundation	> 1000	Nonprofit organization	Healthcare/medicine
University of Alaska Anchorage	>1000	School district, college, or university	Other

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Results

Pre-Interview Results

The pre-interview asked participants to rate each of the competencies on a five-point Likert scale ranging from not important to very important. The results are shown in Table 3. The only competency that did not have the majority of respondents rated as either somewhat or very important was "proficiency in a language other than English."

Table 3: Initial impressions of interviewees on proposed core competencies, as captured using the pre-interview Qualtrics survey.

Competency	Very important	Somewhat important	Neutral	Somewhat unimportant	Not important
The ability to work effectively with others in teams	8	1	0	0	0
The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources	7	1	0	0	0
Ethical judgment and decision-making	7	1	0	0	0
The ability to work independently in setting priorities, managing time, and meeting deadlines	7	1	0	0	0
The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings	7	2	0	0	0
The ability to analyze and solve problems with people from different backgrounds and cultures	6	1	1	0	0
The ability to effectively communicate orally	6	2	1	0	0
Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills	6	3	0	0	0
The ability to analyze and solve complex problems	5	3	0	0	0
The ability to effectively communicate in writing	5	4	0	0	0
Staying current on changing technologies and their applications to the workplace	4	1	1	2	0
The ability to innovate and be creative	4	4	0	0	0
The ability to work with numbers and statistics	3	5	1	0	0
Proficiency in a language other than English	0	3	1	1	4

These data provide a baseline for comparison with the questions we asked about these same competencies during the live interviews and show that our external stakeholders agree that we started with a strong list full of competencies that they do value.

Live Interview Results

Question: How important is it today for individuals to complete a college education and receive some sort of college degree or credential?

When asked how important it is today for individuals to complete a college education and receive some sort of college degree or credential, all 10 organizations stated that is was very important. They were clear that it was critical for many or most jobs in the organization and preferred for all of them. These responses speak directly to the value and importance of the university's main purpose, educating and credentialing our students.

Question: How easy or difficult is it to fill open positions at your company or organization today?

All of our interviewees indicated that their organizations have some degree of difficulty filling open positions. They noted a lack of qualified applicants, especially for positions that require specific skills or specializations, noncompetitive salaries, and our location in Alaska as being reasons for this. Interviewee responses are summarized in Fig. 1. We can and should keep this in mind and try to increase the number of our successful graduates in these areas. This information can also be used to inform marketing, program and course offerings, and student career mentoring.

Figure 1: Reasons given by interviewees as to why it is difficult to fill some or all positions within their organization.

Question: Which do you think is most important for recent UAA graduates who want to pursue advancement and long-term career success at your company? Having knowledge and skills that apply to a specific field or position, cut across a range of fields or positions, or both.

While thirty percent of our responses indicated a specific field, sixty percent responded that either a range of fields or both were the most important. While most of the organizations interviewed offer services in a fairly narrow range of fields (such as telecommunications, accounting, or engineering), more than half responded that it was important to have skills outside of those areas as well. These results, summarized in Fig. 2, speak to the importance of a liberal arts education in our graduates.
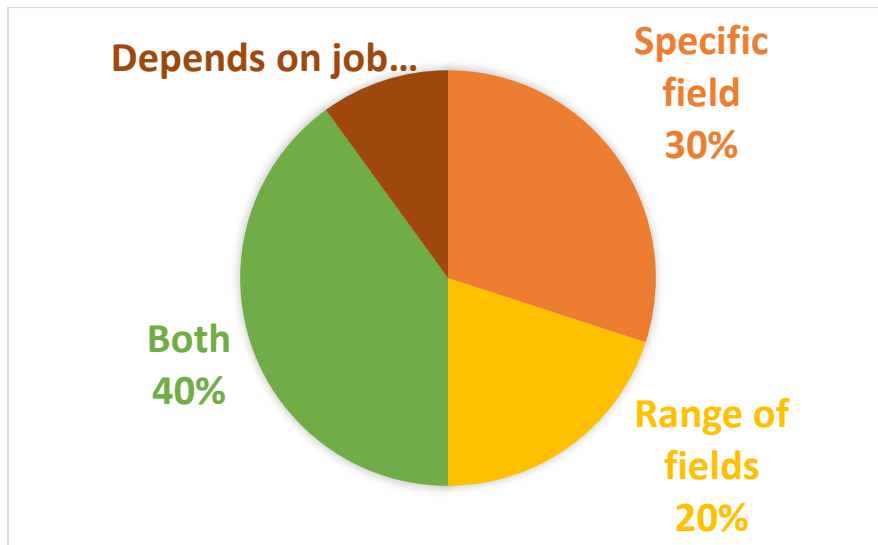

Figure 2: Summary of interviewees' responses to whether they prefer new hires to have field-specific skills, skills that cut across a range of fields, or both.

The results of these first three questions highlight the need for the services of the university. It is important that we know how valuable what we do is for our community.

University of Alaska Anchorage

Question: This question refers to the list of competencies from the email we sent. Looking at the list of skills and knowledge areas, please indicate THREE areas where you would like UAA to place the greatest emphasis on improving college graduates' preparedness. THEN are there any that you are seeing from our students or graduates regularly?

During the interviews, we asked everyone to indicate three areas where they would like UAA to place greatest emphasis on improving college graduates' preparedness. We recommended that they pick from the list of proposed core competencies from the pre-interview handout (see Appendix A), but also allowed them to propose their own. The results are summarized in Table 4. The top three competencies chosen were "the ability to work effectively in teams", "critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills", and "the ability to work independently in setting priorities, managing time, and meeting deadlines".

Table 4: Summarizes the number of interviewees who picked each proposed core competency as one of their unranked top three.

Proposed Competency	Number of Respondents
The ability to work effectively with others in teams	7
Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills	6
The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings	5
The ability to effectively communicate in writing	5
The ability to effectively communicate orally	4
The ability to work independently in setting priorities, managing time, and meeting deadlines	4
The ability to analyze and solve problems with people from different backgrounds and cultures	3
The ability to analyze and solve complex problems	2
Self-motivation and the ability to take initiative and be proactive in offering ideas and solutions	2
The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources	1
Ethical judgment and decision-making	1

Through our conversations on which competencies these organizations think are the most important, we also got information on what skills they are seeing in our graduates, and some suggestions for additional competencies.

Some interviewees indicated which of the proposed core competencies they were already seeing regularly. Note that it was not in our original script to ask what competencies the interviewees were already seeing, but when the third group of interviewees volunteered this information, we realized it was valuable information and modified the script. The competencies named by the interviewees (with number of organizations naming the competency noted in parentheses) were:

- The ability to work effectively with others in teams (3)

- The ability to effectively communicate orally (1)

- The ability to effectively communicate in writing (1)

- Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills (1)

- The ability to work with numbers and statistics (1)

- The ability to analyze and solve problems with people from different backgrounds and cultures (1)

The fact that three of our top employers feel that they are regularly seeing teaming skills in our graduates indicates that we should stay the course in our current efforts to teach this skill, but also that new initiatives should likely be focused on other skills that employers are currently seeing less of.

Question: We have a list of learning experiences individuals can have in college. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being the most likely your company is to consider hiring a recent college graduate if they have had that experience.

Interviewees were asked to indicate the extent to which the presence of certain (mostly optional) learning experiences that it is possible to have in college on a candidate's resume would affect their decision to consider hiring that candidate. The clear favorite learning experience by our interviewees was an internship. While many UAA students do complete internships while in college, there is certainly room to encourage and incentivize this experience even more. Interviewees also highly regarded group and community-based projects, which is not surprising given their emphasis on teaming skills. The results of this question are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Responses of interviewees when asked to rate the presence of certain learning experiences on a resume in terms of likeliness to increase a candidate's desirability as a hire.

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Rating (*shading indicates highest percentage)	5 – most likely	4	3	2	1 – least likely
Completion of an internship or apprenticeship with a company or organization	53%	27%	13%	7%	0%
Completion of a community-based or service-learning project with a community organization	31%	23%	31%	15%	0%
Completion of a research project done collaboratively with peers	8%	62%	23%	8%	0%
Completion of a field-based project in a diverse community setting with people from different backgrounds or cultures than one's own	31%	62%	8%	0%	0%
Completion of an advanced, comprehensive project in the senior year, such as a thesis, senior project, or other major assignment	8%	31%	31%	8%	23%
Completion of multiple courses requiring significant writing assignments	8%	33%	42%	17%	0%
Completion of a study abroad program in which the student lives and studies abroad for a semester or more	0%	14%	36%	21%	29%

Question: Most employers require a résumé and some review college transcripts when evaluating whether recent college graduates have the skills and knowledge to succeed at their company or organization. How useful would it be to your company/organization also to see an electronic portfolio of student work that summarizes and demonstrates a candidate's accomplishments in key skill and knowledge areas?

Interviewees had mixed responses about the usefulness of e-portfolios. Over half of the responses (59%) indicated that e-portfolios would be helpful or very helpful when evaluating candidates. A third (33%) indicated that they would not be helpful and the remaining responses were that they might be helpful in some departments but not others.

Question: How often do you receive applications from potential employees that contain links to electronic portfolios?

Sixty percent of the interviewees indicated that they never have seen a link to an e-portfolio and thirty percent said they have rarely or occasionally seen them. Many of the government and other public sector employers noted that their hiring portals did not allow for any e-portfolio links, so applicants would have to include links to their portfolios on their resumes if they wanted them to be reviewed.

Question: What programs or degrees is UAA most well-known for?

Interviewees were able to list many programs that they associated with UAA, but Education was the most listed, named by six out of the ten organizations. Half of the interviewed organizations named engineering (or more specifically focused on engineering disciplines that they hire from) and nursing. Two organizations mentioned business. Other degree offerings and areas named by a single organization include agriculture, the sciences, computer science, aviation, logistics, fish and game, outdoor programs (offered by Prince William Sound Community College), and medicine.

Question: What types of advertising have you seen or heard about UAA?

The interviewees listed a variety of sources for advertising, including local and college newsletters, alumni communications, signs around town, and online advertisements. Five reported that they had not seen any advertising and a common comment was that they thought UAA could do more advertising. We would recommend that if this project is extended or repeated in the future that this question be modified to ask respondents in what ways UAA is visible in the community. While many interviewees initially had a hard time answering this question, they were able, when pressed, to name numerous ways in which UAA is visible, including sporting events, theater, dance and music productions, alumni events, and events hosted on campus (such as competitions for children in the local school districts).

Question: Please discuss any ways your company or organization partners with UAA.

All of the interviewees had examples of ways that there organizations are already partnering with UAA. *Internships* was the most popular response (emphasizing the extent to which our community employers value this experience), but there was a wide variety of partnership opportunities of which we are already participating in. These existing and established partnerships, as self-reported by the interviewees, are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Established partnerships between interviewees' organizations and UAA, self-reported.

Anchorage School District	**Placing student teachers** **Internships**
Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium	**ANSEP**
Bureau of Land Management	**Internships** **UAF Museum for collections**
GCI	**Internships**
KPMG	**Accounting Club** **ANSEP** **Nine of the Spine**
MTA	**Internships** **Job Fairs**
Municipality of Anchorage	**Internships**
R&M	**Review senior projects** **Proctoring tests** **Volunteering for E-Week**
Southcentral Foundation	**Nuclear student experience** **Clinical Rotations**
UAA	**Student Employment on and off campus** **Partnering with academic programs**

Question: Are there any other ways you would like to partner with UAA?

While many of our interviewees indicated they already hire interns from UAA, three organizations reported a desire to enhance internships and practica. Two organizations reported a desire to work on research projects with particular colleges or departments (indeed, many of our capstone project classes and other community engaged project classes work with community organizations on projects, so this is not an uncommon relationship locally). Other desired

partnerships included enhancing dual credit opportunities to provide students with a pathway not just to a diploma but to a job afterwards, and also a desire to work with esports.

Additional Results

GCI is a local telecommunications company for Alaska that is headquartered in Anchorage. The interviewees from this organization created a survey using the SurveyMonkey tool and sent it to all of their employees with supervisory duties (n = 128), asking them select their unranked top three from the list of proposed core competencies given on the pre-interview handout (see Appendix A). GCI is an organization which offers a broad range of services, so even though the results come from one organization, they may offer a good snapshot into a the skills that are desirable in a wide range of areas. This information is clearly valuable enough to note in this report, but it is also outside the scope of this project so we have included it as Appendix B.

Additional competencies suggested were 1) being able to adapt on the fly and adjust to circumstances, 2) being well-organized, 3) navigation of workplace conflict, 4) technical aptitude, 5) office etiquette, and 6) being able to take criticism constructively.

Competency Comparison

To compare the results between the data we received on the importance of the proposed competencies in the pre-interview question (Table 3) and the top three choices given during the live interview (Table 4), we ranked the competencies most to least popular and then found the median rank. This yielded a list of the top six proposed competencies. The top six competencies based on the pre-interview and top three choices during the interview appear with their median rank in Table 7.

Table 7: Top six competencies based on both pre-interview and interview responses, with median rank.

Proposed Core Competency	Median Rank
The ability to work effectively with others in teams	1
Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills	2.5
The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings	2.5
The ability to work independently in setting priorities, managing time, and meeting deadlines	3
The ability to effectively communicate orally	3.5
The ability to effectively communicate in writing	3.5

Discussion

Of the top six proposed competencies in Table 7, the ability to work effectively in teams was ranked the most important competency and also was the competency that was reported as being observed in our graduates who are already employed or in internships. This was also true for critical thinking and analytical reasoning, and both oral and written communication. The key takeaways are that teamwork, critical thinking, and communication are important, and that these employers are seeing evidence of proficiency in these areas. Therefore, we should work to support and maintain what we are already doing in these areas.

The other competencies in our top six that we can focus on are applications of knowledge to real world settings, and strong independent working skills such as setting priorities, managing time, and meeting deadlines.

Our findings were not only consistent with the findings both globally and nationally over the past twenty years, they have provided us with insights into what the direct employers of our graduates value, what they are seeing, and what they would like to see. Our results largely mirror the results of the AAC&U survey (Hart Research Associates, 2018), but with some significant differences. As with the AAC&U results, we found that our top employers do place great value in college credentials and in skills that cut across many majors. Our results on the question of additional learning experiences (Table 5) were similar to those found nationwide, with internships being by far the most desired experience by hiring managers, and project-based learning experiences being valued as well. A majority of executives and hiring managers nationwide do believe that colleges and universities need to do more to prepare graduates, particularly when it comes to professional skills, and our results certainly show areas where UAA can improve. However, nationwide only 50% of hiring managers find recent college graduates well-prepared to work effectively in teams, so clearly UAA is also having some significant success. Another area where our results diverged significantly from the AAC&U results was ePortfolios. Nationwide, 81% of hiring managers report finding ePortfolios useful. It is worth noting, however, that the AAC&U results skew heavily toward the private sector (85% of organizations interviewed were private companies), whereas UAA's top employers include more public sector employers who are more likely to manage the hiring process through portals that cannot accept ePortfolios.

At UAA there are multiple groups looking into expanding the use of e-portfolios, but with the results showing mixed opinions on the value of this type of artifact, we may want to explore this further the extent to which these efforts are warranted. Based on our results, one question that merits further examination is whether there are differences in the experiences of public and private sector interviewees.

The results of this survey have helped inform important efforts in accreditation and strategic planning. We are in the process of evaluating our chosen core competencies for our current accreditation cycle and the results of these interviews show that these employers' priorities align with these efforts. The UAA Core Competencies for the current accreditation cycle are Effective

Communication, Creative and Critical Thinking, Intercultural Fluency, and Personal, Professional and Community Responsibility.

Other areas and divisions within UAA that should be able to make use of our results are as follows:

- Office of Academic Affairs – As the office that oversees assessment and accreditation activities campus-wide and that is leading the discussion on adopting and assessing core competencies for the next seven-year NWCCU cycle, this office will be able to use our results to inform planning in this area.

- Chancellor/Cabinet - We observed that our interviewees were uniformly very happy to speak with us and give us their feedback based on their experiences hiring our graduates. This project ties in with and can inform other community outreach efforts by university leadership.

- Advancement – Philanthropic giving is an area in which there is much room for UAA to improve. This project provides a model for enhancing the part of university advancement that focuses on relationship building. Its value lies not only in the fact that it solicited feedback from external stakeholders, but also in the fact that it got hiring managers from our top employers talking directly to faculty. Involving faculty in these relationship-building processes has great potential to enhance UAA's relationships in the community.

- Career Services – Employers consistently reported seeing extreme value in the professional skills and internships that UAA Career Services focuses on, so it is to be hoped that these results will reaffirm this office's value to the university and possibly lead to new or enhanced initiatives in these areas.

- Program Development Goals – Ultimately, the selection and assessment of core competencies will be intimately tied to curriculum and pedagogy, which are owned by the faculty. This is another reason why having faculty members carry out this project had value.

Future Work

We have already presented the full set of our results to the Chancellor and her Cabinet at their October 2020 meeting. UAA already has a strong culture of internal dissemination for the results of assessment and accreditation-related activities, and so we have offered to give our presentation to the various administrative and Faculty Senate committees that are interested in assessment, professional mentoring, and community relationships. We are already scheduled to present our results to the Accreditation Advisory Committee and expect to give it to several other on-campus groups by the end of the 2020-21 academic year.

There are numerous external venues which we expect will be interested in our methods and results. We plan to present a shortened version at the NWCCU 2020 Annual Conference in November. Using personal interviews to seek external stakeholder input and deepen organizational relationships is expected to be of interest to the broader community of higher

education administration and faculty, and so we plan to publish our results in *Assessment Update* or a similar journal. Our project is also expected to be of interest to the specialized accreditation community and so we plan to submit a version of our results to the ABET 2021 Symposium or similar venue.

Conclusion

Despite the pandemic hitting right as we were starting our interviews, we were able to collect very valuable information that will help UAA apply focused effective assessment practices across a variety of institutional settings, including both academic and student affairs. This project has provided experience analyzing, interpreting, and integrating data into institutional planning and accreditation processes. The project provided us with opportunities to analyze institutional activities and collaborate with stakeholders, and we plan to use it to build on our strengths and identify areas where we can improve. Our interview data has the potential to help advance student learning, student achievement, and therefore it is tied to our mission fulfillment in an integral way. Along with the Chancellor and her Cabinet, this project provides important insight into our community that can be used by our programs, colleges, campuses, Faculty Senate Academic Assessment Committee, General Education, Student Success, Student Affairs and the Center for Advancing Faculty Excellence. This project has started important conversations about employer expectations and how we can deepen our mission of meeting community needs.

Appendix A

A. Pre-Interview Handout

UAA Mission Statement

The mission of the University of Alaska Anchorage is to discover and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, engagement and creative expression. Located in Anchorage and on community campuses in Southcentral Alaska, UAA is committed to serving the higher education needs of the state, its communities and its diverse peoples. UAA is an open-access university with academic programs leading to occupational endorsements; undergraduate and graduate certificates; and associate, baccalaureate and graduate degrees in a rich, diverse and inclusive environment.

List of Potential Competencies

Here is a list of potential competencies which UAA is considering adopting and tracking for all graduates. In the interview, we are going to ask you to select your top three.

I.   The ability to work effectively with others in teams
II.   The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings
III.   The ability to effectively communicate orally
IV.   The ability to effectively communicate in writing
V.   Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills
VI.   The ability to work with numbers and statistics
VII.   Proficiency in a language other than English
VIII. The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources
IX.   The ability to innovate and be creative
X.   Ethical judgment and decision-making
XI.   The ability to analyze and solve complex problems
XII.   Staying current on changing technologies and their applications to the workplace
XIII. The ability to analyze and solve problems with people from different backgrounds and cultures
XIV.   The ability to work independently in setting priorities, managing time, and meeting deadlines
XV.   Self-motivation and the ability to take initiative and be proactive in offering ideas and solutions

B. Interview Questions
   I.   Qualtrics Interview Questions

Pre-Interview Questions, provided via Qualtrics Survey

UNIVERSITY of ALASKA ANCHORAGE™

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview with UAA. We are interviewing a group of our external partners to determine what you value in terms of a university education and what skills and experiences you value most when looking for potential employees. These preliminary questions will help us understand your organization better and will allow us to spend more time during the interview on your answers to more qualitative questions.

1. For identification purposes, please enter your name and your organization:
2. For identification purposes, please enter your name and your organization:
3. How many employees currently work for your company/organization in all US locations? (pull-down menu)
   a. Fewer than 25
   b. 25 to 99
   c. 100 to 499
   d. 500 to 999
   e. 1,000 or more
   f. Not sure
4. Broadly speaking, in which of the following areas is your company/organization involved? Please check all that apply.
   a. Advertising
   b. Automobile/automotive
   c. Banking and financial services
   d. Construction/building contractors
   e. Engineering
   f. Government (federal, state, or local)
   g. Healthcare/medicine
   h. Hospitality or food service
   i. Insurance
   j. Legal
   k. Manufacturing
   l. Media/entertainment
   m. Printing/publishing
   n. Professional services
   o. Real estate
   p. Recreation
   q. Restaurant
   r. Retail
   s. Service
   t. Technology/telecommunications
   u. Transportation
   v. Other (please specified)
5. Which of the following best describes your company/organization? (pull-down menu)
   a. Private company or publically traded company
   b. Nonprofit organization
   c. Government agency or municipality
   d. School district, college, or university

APPENDIX A: Interview Materials

6. We have a list of skills and knowledge areas from a national survey on college education. For each one, please indicate how important it is that recent college graduates you are hiring demonstrate proficiency in that skill or knowledge area. (Likert scale: "Not important at all," "Somewhat unimportant," "Neutral," "Somewhat important," "Very important")
    a. The ability to work effectively with others in teams
    b. The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings
    c. The ability to effectively communicate orally
    d. The ability to effectively communicate in writing
    e. Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills
    f. The ability to work with numbers and statistics
    g. Proficiency in a language other than English
    h. The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources
    i. The ability to innovate and be creative
    j. Ethical judgement and decision-making
    k. The ability to analyze and solve complex problems
    l. Staying current on changing technologies and their applications to the workplace
    m. The ability to analyze and solve problems with people from different backgrounds and cultures
    n. The ability to work independently in setting priorities, managing time, and meeting deadlines
    o. Self-motivation and the ability to take initiative and be proactive in offering ideas and solutions

II.   Face-to-face Interviews
1. Do your current job responsibilities include recruiting, interviewing, and/or hiring new employees?

2. How important is it today for individuals to complete a college education and receive some sort of college degree or credential?

3. How easy or difficult is it to fill open positions at your company or organization today?

4. Which do you think is most important for recent UAA graduates who want to pursue advancement and long-term career success at your company? Having knowledge and skills that apply to a specific field or position, cut across a range of fields or positions, or both.

5. This question refers to the list of competencies from the email we sent. Looking at the list of skills and knowledge areas, please indicate THREE areas where you would like UAA to place the greatest emphasis on improving college graduates' preparedness. THEN are there any that you are seeing from our students or graduates regularly?

6. We have a list of learning experiences individuals can have in college. Please indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 with 5 being the most likely your company is to consider hiring a recent college graduate if they have had that experience.

   a. Completion of an internship or apprenticeship with a company or organization.
   b. Completion of an advanced, comprehensive project in the senior year, such as a thesis, senior project, or other major assignment.
   c. Completion of a study abroad program in which the student lives and studies abroad for a semester or more.
   d. Completion of a research project done collaboratively with peers.
   e. Completion of a community-based or service-learning project with a community organization.
   f. Completion of a field-based project in a diverse community setting with people from different backgrounds or cultures than one's own.
   g. Completion of multiple courses requiring significant writing assignments.

7. Most employers require a résumé and some review college transcripts when evaluating whether recent college graduates have the skills and knowledge to succeed at their company or organization. How useful would it be to your company/organization also to see an electronic portfolio of student work that summarizes and demonstrates a candidate's accomplishments in key skill and knowledge areas?

8. How often do you receive applications from potential employees that contain links to electronic portfolios?

9. What programs or degrees is UAA most well-known for?

10. What types of advertising have you seen or heard about UAA?

11. Please discuss any ways your company or organization partners with UAA.

12. Are there any other ways you would like to partner with UAA?

13. That is the end of our questions, do you have any last questions for us?

Appendix B

GCI Manager Survey Responses:

GCI FEEDBACK
Top Three Competencies
Select only three:

Answer Choices	Responses	
The ability to work effectively with others in teams	58.59%	75
Self-motivation and the ability to take initiative and be proactive in offering ideas and solutions	43.75%	56
Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills	35.16%	45
The ability to work independently in setting priorities, managing time, and meeting deadlines	32.03%	41
Ethical judgment and decision-making	20.31%	26
The ability to locate, organize, and evaluate information from multiple sources	19.53%	25
The ability to effectively communicate orally	16.41%	21
The ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings	14.84%	19
The ability to analyze and solve complex problems	14.84%	19
The ability to effectively communicate in writing	14.06%	18
The ability to analyze and solve problems with people from different backgrounds and cultures	12.50%	16
The ability to innovate and be creative	10.16%	13
Staying current on changing technologies and their applications to the workplace	9.38%	12
The ability to work with numbers and statistics	0.78%	1
Proficiency in a language other than English	0.00%	0
Answered		**128**

Above results are from a Survey Monkey survey sent to all GCI Supervisors where we asked them to choose their top 3 choices from the compentencies UAA provided.

OTHER FEEDBACK:

1. Hire more adjunct professors that teach part-time. Exposure to teachers with real-world experience in the field of employment. We have seen direct results in the engineering and computer science areas.
2. Expand internships. Having students work part time in the real workforce has a dramatic impact on their readiness and maturity when full-time employment is offered. This has proven very successful at GCI.
3. Increase emphasis on more hard skills: Engineering, IT, Accounting, Network Security.
4. Add courses that address interpersonal skills such as Emotional Intelligence, constructive conversations and managing disagreements.

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