

60-Second SoTL

Episode 72 – The Agility Imperative for Career Readiness

Featured Article

Finley, Ashley. 2025. *The Agility Imperative: How Employers View Preparation for an Uncertain Future*. American Association of Colleges and Universities. <https://www.aacu.org/research/the-agility-imperative>

Transcript

(Music)

0:10

Jessie L. Moore:

What do employers really think about higher education's role in preparing students for work—and for civic life—in an uncertain future? And where do they see gaps between what matters most and what graduates can actually do? That's the focus of this week's 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning. I'm Jessie Moore.

(Music)

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In *The Agility Imperative: How Employers View Preparation for an Uncertain Future*, Ashley Finley, Vice President for Research at the American Association of Colleges and Universities, reports findings from an online survey of 1,030 employers, conducted with Morning Consult in August 2025. Her report is published by the American Association of Colleges and Universities and is available to download for free from AAC&U's website.

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The Agility Imperative builds on nearly twenty years of employer research by AAC&U. Participants in the 2025 survey were managers or executives involved in hiring decisions at organizations with 25 or more employees, spanning industries, regions, ages, and political affiliations.

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The results are striking—especially when compared with public opinion. Employers report significantly higher confidence in higher education than the general public and are far more likely to view a college degree as worth the time and financial investment. This confidence is especially strong among employers under the age of forty, who consistently express more optimistic views about graduates' preparation and the value of higher education overall.

1:47

Employers also hold a broader view of higher education's purpose than is often assumed. While providing a skilled and educated workforce ranks as the top priority, nearly as many employers say colleges should help students become informed citizens, engage with diverse ideas, foster cross-cultural understanding, and serve their communities. In other words, employers do not see workforce preparation and civic learning as competing goals—but as connected ones.

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When it comes to skills, employers continue to prioritize what AAC&U has long described as durable or transferable capacities. These include the ability to apply knowledge in real-world contexts, work effectively in teams, communicate clearly, reason ethically, and solve complex problems. New to the foreground, though, is AI literacy—with a majority of employers saying it is very important that graduates develop skills to use artificial intelligence tools while in college.

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At the same time, the report surfaces persistent gaps. While employers rate many of these skills as *very important*, far fewer say graduates are *very well prepared* in them. On average, fewer than forty percent of employers believe students are highly prepared across key skill areas—including critical thinking, communication, global awareness, and AI-related skills. The gap between importance and preparation is especially pronounced for ethical judgment, oral communication, and applying learning to real-world settings.

3:15

Employers also emphasize mindsets and dispositions—such as adaptability, responsibility, openness to feedback, and persistence—as being just as important as technical or cognitive skills. Yet these qualities are rarely articulated or assessed as clearly as other learning outcomes.

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One area where employers see particular promise is in hands-on, high-impact educational experiences. Experiences like undergraduate research, capstone projects, global or community-based work, and project-based learning consistently make graduates more attractive candidates—especially to younger employers. Employers also conveyed growing enthusiasm for ePortfolios and micro-credentials to communicate learning beyond the transcript, particularly when micro-credentials are issued by colleges in partnership with industry.

4:03

Finley's conclusion is both hopeful and directive. Employers believe in higher education—but they want clearer connections between learning, work, and civic purpose. The agility employers seek isn't just technical fluency. It's the ability to integrate knowledge, adapt to change, engage difference, and apply learning over a lifetime in a rapidly changing world.

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To learn more about this study, visit our show notes for a link to the open access publication. While you're there, visit the Center's survey page to put this employer report in conversation with the Center's own 2025 survey of recent college graduates.

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(Music)

4:46

Jessie L. Moore:

Join us for our next episode of 60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning. Learn more about the Center at

www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org.

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