



Executive Summary

Looking to the Future

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Berea College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

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Introduction

In October 2019, *Forum 40404* members responded to a survey designed to elicit their ideas about what current and future Berea College students will need to learn to be successful and contribute to society in the mid-21st century. The purpose of this survey was to obtain feedback that could help the College improve its general education program as well as inform conversations about majors and minors.

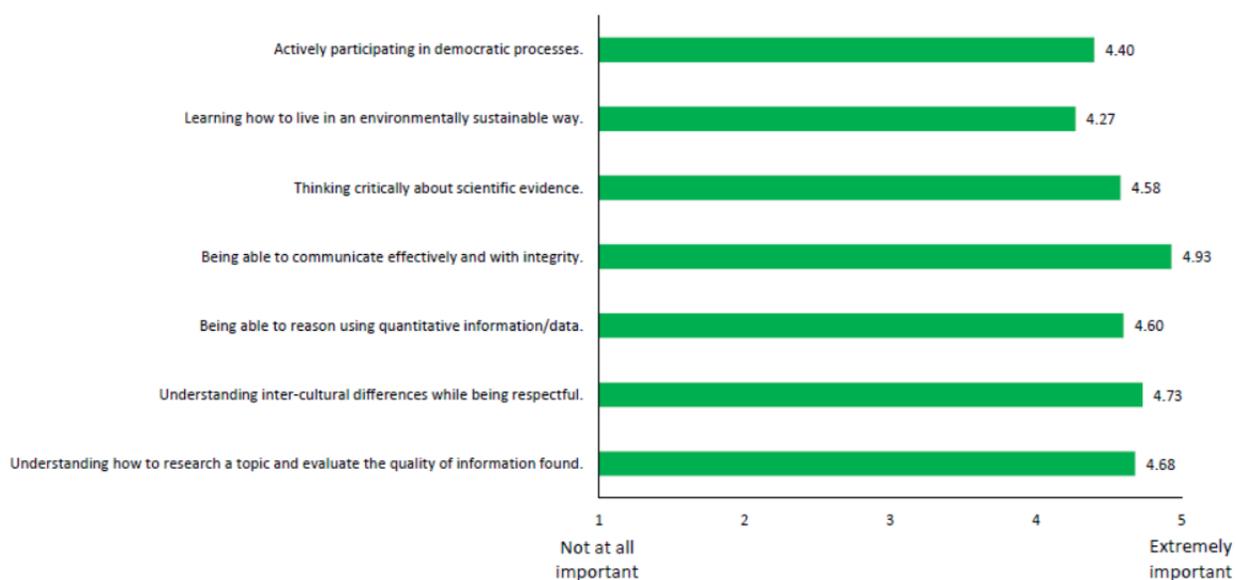
Forum 40404 is the name given to the group of **339** alumni who currently serve as a volunteer survey panel. The volunteers attended the College spanning over six decades (back to the 1940s). As a way to listen to alumni voices, the staff of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment is designing brief surveys for the purpose of gaining alumni input. When *Forum 40404* members were asked why they volunteered for the survey panel, the most common reasons were 1) *to give back and stay connected*; 2) *to help current and future students*; and 3) *to be an alumni voice*.

The following is a summary of the results of the *Looking to the Future* survey which achieved 63.4% response rate (215/339).

Results

Survey respondents were asked to rate the importance of seven common learning goals of general education. Each one was rated highly as the following graph illustrates. Respondents from each of the “generations” (decades) were fairly consistent with others in their high ratings for each goal. Respondents were also given a chance to fill in two other goals of their own and rate their importance. The following graph illustrates the high ratings to the core goals followed by some quotes from the “other” category.

Rate the importance of the following for all students.



All “other” goals reported were rated as 5 (extremely important). Forum members reported many goals (all are included in the full data report). Following are examples that demonstrate the breadth of their responses.

- Female Sociology major: *Being able to evaluate information/news/ideas on social media, especially political news and information about candidates during a national election.*
- Male Physics major: *Being able to distinguish between professional peer reviewed science and sham science.*
- Female Elementary Education major: *Recognizing the value of ideas and experiences of elders.*
- Male Chemistry major: *Handling personal finances and computer processes and technology in general. Business etiquette: greeting people, small talk, table manners.*
- Female History major: *Being able to work effectively with people with diverse interests and goals.*
- Female biology major: *Displaying civility in discussions even when in disagreement with others.*

Respondents were then asked four open-ended questions as follows:

- 1) *What new or different academic disciplines/programs should be offered in the future (majors, interdisciplinary programs, or minors)? List up to five.***

Forum 40404 respondents suggested a wide variety of majors and programs including some applied majors like Water Resources Management, American Sign Language, Geriatric Studies, Sports Management, Conflict Resolution, and Constitutional Law.

However, the most commonly cited major/program was something related to Environmental Studies/Sustainability with a close second of Engineering. The third most common suggestion focused on Computer Science topics like cybersecurity and artificial intelligence followed by majors/programs in Public Health (and Health Informatics).

Possibly the most unique suggestion was a major in the Economics of Space Travel/Business.

- 2) *Are there certifications or special work experiences that should be coupled with any particular academic majors? If yes, please give one or two examples.***

Overall, respondents identified certifications or experiences (e.g., internships, mentorships, etc.) tied to specific majors. For example, Health and Human Performance majors should be certified as personal or athletic trainers; business, economics, and finance majors should complete requirements for a CPA/CFA; Art majors should work in galleries (reviewing, installing, and curating art) or complete internships with local artists; Nursing majors should become certified as nursing assistants (CNA); Sociology majors should partner with social service agencies in the area; and, students minoring in Sustainability Studies should become certified HUD counselors for sustainable housing or work in water and/or waste management or with new energy systems (Green Technologies); and English majors should be required to address a specific need outside

the College using their writing skills. Other suggestions focused on other disciplines (not currently offered at Berea). These included gaining experience at nursing homes, family homes, etc. for a major in Geriatric Studies, NIMS (National Institute for Metalworking Skills) accreditation for Applied Industry majors, first responder training for Applied Clinical Psychology; and, completing a police department internship for Criminal Justice majors.

3) *Is there a subject or course that should be part of each student's education (like a required general education course) that will help contribute overall to society, family, career? Please describe up to three courses.*

Again, respondents produced many suggestions for required general education courses or subjects that should be taught to all students.

The suggestions included many of the core general education skills common across higher education (e.g., communication, public speaking/debate, quantitative reasoning, leadership, etc.) as well as some very specific topics such as American Indian Culture, Career Planning, Computer Programming, Peace and Social Justice Studies, Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace, Parenting, Governmental Policy/Civics, and the History of Housing Policy in the U.S.

The most *common* suggestions for core subjects/courses were for the topic of Personal Financial Literacy/Finance followed by Personal Ethics/Philosophy.

4) *What other experiences are critical to prepare Berea students for life in the future?*

Forum 40404 members gave a wide array of responses to this very broad question. The most commonly mentioned experience was to gain a better understanding of finances (budgeting, saving, investing, etc.). The next most common response had to do with mental/emotional health, learning to be resilient and dealing with changes, losses, and life's challenges followed by learning to communicate, listen, and get along with diverse others. After these, there were a great variety of responses which are difficult to put into specific categories. Therefore, I offer the following quotes to the reader in order to see the breadth and depth of the various ideas. As you will see, some of the comments are unique in that they are critical of current programs/approaches.

A female (1940s): *At age 90 and always keenly interested in Berea, I am delighted at the many opportunities today's Berea's students can have. Others will doubtless have suggestions. My comment: Bravo for Berea College for its outstanding offerings in 2019!*

A male (1950s): *Studies and understanding of the origins of the universe and life as we know it—impact of natural changes. Applied science and impact on future generations—physical and ethical.*

A female from the 1960s: *I feel that many young people and the families they come from, do not know enough about nutrition and how to live a healthy life, Berea College may offer the last chance they have to obtain this knowledge. And if they learn how to do this they can pass it on to their children and break a chain of ignorance in this area. We have*

several generation that just don't know or have a lot of misinformation concerning how the proper food contributes to good health!

A male from the 1960s: *Experience in communicating credibly, truthfully, expertly and effectively within a wide range of communication environments, including interpersonal, mass media, and social media. Experience in effectively evaluating information from a broad range of communication sources, including interpersonal, mass media, and social media. Leadership experience within a variety of personal and professional contexts.*

A female from the 1970s: *There is nothing in the academic curriculum to prepare students for losses or failures beyond their controls. There should be some sort of seminar type requirement with formats for effective ways to deal with life's losses. They cannot function if they cannot deal with loss in a mentally and emotionally healthy way.*

A male from the 1970s: *Understanding that the world we live in is driven by different forces, including social media and the loss of brick and mortar retail, with a particular understanding of personal finance, investing, and business demands.*

A female from the 1980s: *I know they weren't always popular and a major pain to staff, instructor wise, but the humanities are valuable. Focusing on a major that will yield the highest paying job is being short-sighted. Technology is not all that. Understanding our human past is how we ground the present. Learning how to express one's self through more than just sound bytes takes effort. Contemplation, civility and understanding need to be cultivated and demonstrated.*

A male from the 1980s: *Berea should drop majors that have no value beyond academic settings, such as African American Studies, Asian Studies, Gender Studies, and Peace and Social Justice. All you are doing is turning out half-educated nitwits who think the world owes them something.*

A female from the 1990s: *The ability to adapt to changes in their lives and careers. To be able to look at a situation and see the whole picture, not just their perspective. To have a good understanding of the past and how it affects our perception of the present day. That learning and acquiring knowledge is a lifelong pursuit that isn't limited to their college experience.*

A male from the 1990s: *Provide a guided tour of all the buildings and facilities on campus and the history of each.*

A female from the 2000s: *Real life skills such as, budgeting, business, economy, cooking, baking & nutrition, handyman basics.*

A male from the 2000s: *Digital literacy. Obviously nearly every field is being transformed by advances in the digital realm and while Berea certainly contributed to my digital literacy, I think that we only scratched the surface on what we could and should have been doing.*

A female from the 2010s: *Internships, study abroad experiences, research projects, labor positions with transferable skills that align with future goals.*

A male from the 2010s: *I do not know how to accomplish this but if students could be exposed to other disciplines and courses other than their current level of interest, a new world of challenges may open to them in a constructive and beneficial way. What about establishing a "Visit your Neighbor's Class" day. Make it a fun, learning experience. Has a biology major ever visited the Agriculture and Natural Resources farm? Or a nursing student visit a physics lab? You get the idea.*

Summary

Members of Forum 40404 were asked to contribute their ideas and wisdom concerning what Berea College students need to learn in order to prepare for life in the mid 21st century. In all cases, they rated the importance of various learning goal statements highly; the highest rating was for *Being able to communicate effectively and with integrity* (4.93 average out of 5). When asked about what new majors or disciplines should be offered by the College, Sustainability/Environmental Studies (currently a minor), Engineering, and Computer related disciplines were most commonly cited. When asked about certifications and/or work related experiences, the respondents offered a wide variety of ideas (most in conjunction with specific majors). Forum members also contributed their thoughts on what courses every student should have as part of a general education curriculum. The most *common* suggestions for core subjects/courses that were not already a part of the general education curriculum were for Personal Financial Literacy/Finance and Personal Ethics/Philosophy.

Finally, members were asked to respond to the question: *What other experiences are critical to prepare Berea students for life in the future?*

The most commonly mentioned experience focused on gaining a better understanding of finances (budgeting, saving, investing, etc.). The next most common response had to do with mental/emotional health, learning to be resilient and dealing with changes, losses, and life's challenges followed by learning to communicate, listen, and get along with diverse others.