A liberal arts college aims to educate its students broadly and well, exposing students to a wide variety of disciplines. Where some colleges are geared toward preparing you for a specific career, a liberal arts college focuses on teaching knowledge and skills that will serve you well throughout life, no matter what you do. This includes critical and analytical thinking, creative problem-solving, effective writing and speaking, and knowledge of many different subjects.” - Carleton College Admissions Office

DEFINITION. For the purposes of this project, we have defined "liberal arts skills" as transferable, functional abilities that are required in many different problem-solving and task-oriented situations. They are performance abilities that can be acquired through informal life experiences (volunteering or activities) or formal education and training (like an internship). Although the specific subject matter of academic disciplines is often a means for developing or refining liberal arts skills, the application of these skills is not dependent on the mastery of an academic discipline. Liberal arts skills are interdisciplinary abilities involving many areas of human development (e.g., cognitive, affective, social, psychological, and moral development).

We have not tried to eliminate the natural overlapping that is characteristic of many of the individual skills. Instead we have felt it more useful to group them in nine clusters of related skills that are generally recognized as essential in a variety of careers and other activities.*

Communication Skills: ability to...
- listen with objectivity and paraphrase the content of a message
- use various forms and styles of written communication
- speak effectively to individuals and groups
- use media formats to present ideas imaginatively
- express one's needs, wants, opinions, and preferences without violating the rights of others
- identify and communicate value judgements effectively
- describe objects or events with a minimum of factual errors
- convey a positive self-image to others

Design and Planning Skills: ability to...
- identify alternative courses of action
- set realistic goals
- follow through with a plan or decision
- manage time effectively
- predict future trends and patterns
- accommodate multiple demands for commitment of time, energy and resources
- assess needs
- make and keep a schedule
- set priorities

Valuing Skills: ability to...
- assess a course of action in terms of its long-range effects on the general human welfare
- make decisions that will maximize both individual and collective good
- appreciate the contributions of art, literature, science, and technology to contemporary society
- identify one's own values; assess one's values in relation to important life decisions

Human Relations and Interpersonal Skills: ability to...
- keep a group "on track" and moving toward the achievement of a common goal
- maintain group cooperation and support
- delegate tasks and responsibilities
- interact effectively with peers, superiors, and subordinates
- express one's feelings appropriately; understand the feelings of others
- use argumentation techniques to persuade others
- make commitments to persons
- be willing to take risks
- teach a skill, concept, or principle to others
- analyze behavior of self and others in-group situations
- demonstrate effective social behavior in a variety of settings and under different circumstances
- work under time and environmental pressures

Information Management Skills: ability to...
- sort data and objects
- compile and rank information
- apply information creatively to specific problems or tasks
- understand and use organizing principles
- evaluate information against appropriate standards

*This list was developed by Paul Breen (Learning Center, P.O. Box 27616, San Francisco, CA 94127) in consultation with students, employers, & faculty members from 21 disciplines in the humanities and the social and behavioral sciences.
Personal / Career Development Skills: ability to...
- analyze and learn from life experiences - both one's own and others'
- relate the skills developed in one environment (e.g., school) to the requirements of another environment (e.g. work)
- match knowledge about one's own characteristics and abilities to information about job or career opportunities
- identify, describe, and assess the relative importance of one's needs, values, interests, strengths, and weaknesses
- develop personal growth goals that are motivating
- identify and describe skills acquired through formal education and general life experience
- identify one's strengths and weaknesses
- accept and learn from negative criticism
- persist with a project when faced with failure unless it is clear that the project cannot be carried out or is not worth the time or effort needed to complete it
- generate trust and confidence in others
- take risks
- accept the consequences of one's actions
- "market" oneself to prospective employers

Research and Investigation Skills: ability to...
- use a variety of sources of information
- apply a variety of methods to test the validity of data
- identify problems and needs
- design an experiment, plan, or model that systematically defines a problem
- identify information sources appropriate to special needs or problems
- formulate questions relevant to clarifying a particular problem, topic, or issue

Critical Thinking Skills: ability to...
- identify quickly and accurately the critical issues when making a decision or solving a problem
- identify a general principle that explains related experience or factual data
- define the parameters of a problem
- identify reasonable criteria for assessing the value or appropriateness of an action or behavior
- adapt one's concepts and behavior to changing conventions and norms
- apply appropriate criteria to strategies and action plans
- take giver premises and reason to their conclusion
- create innovative solutions to complex problems
- analyze the interrelationships of events and ideas from several perspectives

Management and Administration Skills: ability to...
- analyze tasks
- identify people who can contribute to the solution of a problem or task
- identify resource materials useful in the solution of a problem
- delegate responsibility for completion of a task
- motivate and lead people
- organize people and tasks to achieve specific goals

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**ABILITIES AND SKILLS**

**Evaluating Skills and Abilities**

1. Think about the things that you do best. Refer to the broadest possible range of your experience. Do not be concerned about whether your answers have any particular relationship to careers. Of all the things that you do or have done before, what do you perform with the greatest skill? Some of these may be talents, which come naturally to you and thus may be difficult for you to notice in yourself. List two or three and describe them briefly.
   1. __________
   2. __________
   3. __________

2. Now look through the following Abilities and Skills categories, and evaluate yourself on each of these according to the following scale:
   1 = No ability at all
   2 = Enough ability to get by with help from others
   3 = Some ability
   4 = Definite; strong ability in this area

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**Abilities and Skills**

**Numerical**
- Computational Speed
- Working with Numerical Data
- Solving Quantitative Problems
- Computer Use

**Creative**
- Artistic
- Imaginative with Things
- Imaginative with Ideas

**Working With Others**
- Supervising
- Teaching
- Coaching
- Counseling

**Managerial**
- Organization and Planning
- Orderliness
- Handling Details
- Making Decisions

**Verbal/Persuasive**
- Writing
- Talking
- Speaking
- Persuading
- Selling
- Dramatics
- Negotiating

**Investigative**
- Scientific Curiosity
- Research
- Technical Work

**Manual/Physical**
- Mechanical Reasoning
- Manual Dexterity
- Spatial Perception

“Critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, effective communication: these are the tools that transform a collection of facts and figures into a way of understanding the world.”
- Carleton College Admissions Office

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