# Graduates overestimate readiness as Barnard leads shift to teaching life skills



As commencement season unfolds, graduates across the country are poised to enter a world ripe with opportunity. Yet, many are stepping out of their respective institutions woefully unprepared—not due to a lack of ambition or aptitude, but because essential life skills are often neglected in their education. This lack of preparation raises alarming questions about how well higher education is equipping students for the realities of life after college.

Today's graduates face a rapidly changing landscape that demands more than academic achievements. They must navigate fluctuating job markets, substantial student debt, pervasive mental health issues, and a public discourse that frequently lacks substance. This complexity underscores an urgent need for institutions to provide students not just with knowledge, but also with critical life skills—stress management, financial literacy, and constructive dialogue are among the most essential. Yet, in many cases, these skills are relegated to an afterthought, if they are addressed at all.

This disconnect is alarmingly highlighted by a recent national survey conducted by Seramount. While nearly 90% of college students claim they feel adequately prepared for the workforce, over half of hiring managers disagree, citing a troubling sense of unpreparedness in recent graduates. Such statistics reveal a glaring gap between student perceptions and the expectations of the job market. These findings echo sentiments expressed in earlier surveys, indicating that while many students are confident in their skills, nearly 50% lack faith in their job search readiness.

The ramifications of this lack of preparedness are not simply theoretical; they have real-world consequences. The reality confronts students directly, especially those from backgrounds where financial competency is not merely advantageous, but essential. Barnard College’s recent initiative, the Francine A. LeFrak Foundation Center for Well-Being, responds directly to these challenges. The centre is designed as a holistic space where students can build physical, mental, and financial strength. This initiative marks a progressive shift in higher education, recognising that learning cannot be siloed into academic subjects alone.

At the centre, students engage in conversations that extend beyond textbook knowledge; they tackle topics such as financial fluency—vital skills that help them secure their futures. Participants in the Financial Fluency Certificate Program have reported transformative experiences. One first-generation, low-income student articulated a crucial insight: “I quickly realised that earning a college degree alone would not be enough to secure a better future.” Such sentiments highlight the urgent need to equip students with skills that standard curriculums frequently overlook.

Moreover, the skills deemed “soft” — such as critical thinking, empathy, and effective communication — are increasingly vital in today’s interconnected world. These skills have never been more crucial as artificial intelligence continues to disrupt traditional job markets and societal structures evolve. The art of respectful disagreement and constructive conversation is at risk of being lost as divisive rhetoric becomes the norm. Institutions must therefore prioritise the cultivation of these competencies, fostering environments where diverse viewpoints can coexist and students can hone their abilities to engage meaningfully with others.

The conversation around these issues calls for a significant paradigm shift in educational philosophy. Higher education should not be viewed as a ticking box to secure employment but as a foundational experience that prepares students to thrive in an uncertain future. It requires institutions to "grow up"—to adapt their curricula in response to the needs of the emerging workforce and the complexities of modern life.

Ultimately, it is incumbent upon higher education to bridge the formidable gap between what students think they know and what they truly need to succeed. Commencement speeches may promise success, but it is robust and relevant educational experiences that will deliver on that promise. It is vital that institutions today recognise their responsibility in preparing the leaders of tomorrow, equipping them with the real, applicable skills that can turn potential into enduring success.

As we celebrate the achievements of this year's graduates, let us not forget the pressing obligation to prepare them fully for life's myriad challenges—a promise not just made, but kept.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.nydailynews.com/2025/06/08/what-we-forgot-to-teach-to-the-class-of-2025/), [[3]](https://seramount.com/about-us/seramount-news-and-press/new-survey-shows-college-students-overestimate-their-career-readiness/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.nydailynews.com/2025/06/08/what-we-forgot-to-teach-to-the-class-of-2025/), [[4]](https://www.edgovsc.us.org/a/NEWS/2024/0626/166.html), [[5]](https://www.aacu.org/research/the-career-ready-graduate-what-employers-say-about-the-difference-college-makes/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://barnard.edu/news/barnard-college-opens-francine-lefrak-foundation-center-well-being), [[6]](https://www.mheducation.com/news-insights/press-releases/2018-future-workforce-survey-results.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.nydailynews.com/2025/06/08/what-we-forgot-to-teach-to-the-class-of-2025/), [[6]](https://www.mheducation.com/news-insights/press-releases/2018-future-workforce-survey-results.html), [[7]](https://www.greatschoolspartnership.org/proficiency-based-learning/research-evidence/surveys-college-educators-employers/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://seramount.com/about-us/seramount-news-and-press/new-survey-shows-college-students-overestimate-their-career-readiness/), [[5]](https://www.aacu.org/research/the-career-ready-graduate-what-employers-say-about-the-difference-college-makes/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.nydailynews.com/2025/06/08/what-we-forgot-to-teach-to-the-class-of-2025/), [[2]](https://barnard.edu/news/barnard-college-opens-francine-lefrak-foundation-center-well-being)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.nydailynews.com/2025/06/08/what-we-forgot-to-teach-to-the-class-of-2025/), [[6]](https://www.mheducation.com/news-insights/press-releases/2018-future-workforce-survey-results.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.nydailynews.com/2025/06/08/what-we-forgot-to-teach-to-the-class-of-2025/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://barnard.edu/news/barnard-college-opens-francine-lefrak-foundation-center-well-being> - Barnard College has inaugurated the Francine A. LeFrak Foundation Center for Well-Being, a pioneering facility that integrates physical, mental, and financial wellness programs. This centre aims to equip students with essential life skills, including financial fluency, to navigate the complexities of post-college life. The initiative underscores the institution's commitment to holistic student development, addressing the gap between academic preparation and real-world challenges.
3. <https://seramount.com/about-us/seramount-news-and-press/new-survey-shows-college-students-overestimate-their-career-readiness/> - A recent Seramount survey reveals a significant disconnect between students' self-assessment of career readiness and employers' perceptions. While 72% of college juniors and seniors feel confident about their career prospects, over half of hiring managers believe recent graduates are unprepared for the workforce. This highlights the need for enhanced experiential learning opportunities to better align student expectations with employer requirements.
4. <https://www.edgovsc.us.org/a/NEWS/2024/0626/166.html> - A U.S. Department of Education survey indicates that over 70% of college students believe they possess the necessary job skills post-graduation. However, fewer than 50% express high confidence in their job search readiness. The study also identifies a lack of internship experience and career planning guidance as primary challenges, suggesting a need for universities to strengthen these areas to better prepare students for the job market.
5. <https://www.aacu.org/research/the-career-ready-graduate-what-employers-say-about-the-difference-college-makes/> - The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) conducted a survey revealing that while 80% of employers agree that higher education prepares graduates for the workforce, there are notable gaps in specific skill areas. For instance, only 34% of employers believe recent graduates are well-prepared in oral communication, despite its high importance. This underscores the need for educational institutions to focus on developing these critical skills.
6. <https://www.mheducation.com/news-insights/press-releases/2018-future-workforce-survey-results.html> - McGraw-Hill Education's 2018 Future Workforce Survey found that only 41% of U.S. college students feel 'very' or 'extremely' prepared for their future careers. This marks an increase from 29% in 2017, yet highlights ongoing concerns about career readiness. The survey emphasizes the importance of aligning educational outcomes with workforce expectations to enhance student preparedness.
7. <https://www.greatschoolspartnership.org/proficiency-based-learning/research-evidence/surveys-college-educators-employers/> - Numerous surveys indicate that both college educators and employers agree on the lack of foundational skills among young adults, such as communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Despite higher educational attainment, these young adults demonstrate relatively weak skills compared to their international peers, suggesting a need for educational reforms to address these deficiencies.