



CAMPUS RESPONSE TO THE FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS CRISIS



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SUMMARY

While foundational skills such as critical thinking, logic and reasoning, information literacy, and communication are widely considered to be among the most important outputs of a college education, employer surveys suggest college graduates are not entering the workforce job-ready. As part of an ongoing effort to correct this widening disconnect, NimblyWise has completed a series of interviews with Provosts, Chief Academic Officers (CAOs), and Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs at institutions of all sizes to explore campus responses to the foundational skills crisis.

The findings in this study offer a glimpse into the progress many institutions have made incorporating foundational skills instruction and measurement into their General Education (Gen Ed) curricula. However, it is clear significant gaps remain around the following challenges:

- building consistent foundational skill measurement across all learning experiences
- extending foundational skills development into majors, programs, co-curricular and extracurricular learning
- deepening faculty engagement with foundational skills and job readiness
- helping students intentionally develop their foundational skills and a narrative around those achievements to improve their job readiness and career success

The foundational skills crisis is a reflection of our changing world, as well as our growing understanding of what success looks like in the modern knowledge economy. These obstacles may be systemic and deeply ingrained, but they are not insurmountable. New technologies and pedagogical strategies have emerged to mitigate student deficits and improve learning; adoption of which will be essential for the success of students, academic institutions, and prospective employers alike.

THE FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS CRISIS

The effects of the foundational skills crisis are very real for recent graduates looking to join the workforce. In a survey commissioned by the AAC&U, **91% of employers stated a candidate's ability to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems was more important than their undergraduate major.** However, in the same survey, only 29% found recent graduates well-prepared to locate and evaluate information, 26% indicated critical thinking skills were at the right level, and just 24% thought problem-solving skills were sufficient.¹

This skills gap originates from the lack of consistent instruction around critical thinking and related skills—even as faculty and administrators state with near unanimity such skills are paramount to a college education. Faculty endorse critical thinking as the most important goal of undergraduate education, with over 99% describing it as “very important” or “essential”², however some research suggests **as little as 34% of professors explicitly teach critical thinking in the classroom.**³

The stark effects of this problem can be seen in a recent article by *The Wall Street Journal*, which looked at scores from 200 institutions administering the country's most prominent standardized critical thinking exam (the Collegiate Learning Assessment Plus, or CLA+). The review found “at more than half of schools, at least a third of seniors were unable to make a cohesive argument, assess the quality of evidence or interpret data in a table.”⁴ Similarly, the 2011 book *Academically Adrift: Learning on College Campuses* found **36% of college students did not show any big improvement in learning after four years of college.**⁵

SKILLS GAP CONSEQUENCES

The stakes are high for campuses and college students looking to succeed within this foundational skills crisis. According to an analysis of 20 years worth of freshman—enrollment data by *The Wall Street Journal*, U.S. not-for-profit colleges and universities are segregating into winners and losers—with winners growing and expanding and losers seeing the first signs of a death spiral.⁶ Demographics and geography have some influence on which side of the fault line a school lands, but quality factors including return on investment, student engagement, and academic resources are clear separators. In a related survey of college freshman, a team of researchers at University of California, Los

Angeles found **job placement was the second most important driver after academic reputation, of a students decision to enroll.**⁷

In addition to the enrollment decision, student persistence and time to graduation are increasingly linked to career and foundational skills development. In his landmark study, Neal Raisman found it was not primarily academic or financial considerations causing students to leave, but instead, the student experience. His research found **students feeling a college “does not care,” “is offering poor treatment,” or “is not worth it” accounts for 73% of dropouts.**⁸ Discussions with CAOs and other campus leaders suggest in the current environment, students view early and frequent engagement with career skills as a primary indicator of whether the “campus cares” and if college “is worth it.”

The growing focus on developing strong career and foundational skills comes directly from the economic landscape within which today's students have come of age. They have seen their parents, grandparents, friends, relatives, and older siblings struggle in an increasingly bifurcated labor market. Without developing strong foundational skills, recent college graduates are hard pressed to find gainful employment leveraging their college investment. Research from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Third Way indicates since 1990, **29% of all routine jobs (“rule-based” jobs involving a limited set of tasks) were lost from the US economy** due to economic downturns, and unlike other sectors, routine jobs did not recover during growth periods.

Today's college students have grown up with personal assistants and chatbots like Google's Alexa and Apple's Siri as well as smart search engines from Amazon, Trip Advisor, and other providers of consumer goods. They have experienced first-hand how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is automating many tasks previously provided by human employees. **The trend towards automating routine jobs makes graduates without critical thinking and related skills much less employable.**⁹



GAPS IN CAMPUS RESPONSE

NimblyWise spoke to academic leaders at over 50 campuses nationwide to explore strategies, motivations, and obstacles to developing students' foundational skills. Research was completed through a mix of phone interviews, in-person meetings, and focus groups (*see Appendix A for the 30-minute phone interview instrument used*). Focus groups in particular, held around industry events including the SACSCOC Annual Meeting, the AAC&U Annual Meeting, and the HLC Annual Conference, were used to test, refine, and better understand findings.

Participating campuses included community colleges, regional public universities, and mid-size private colleges and universities (*see Appendix B for a list of all participants*) across three major accrediting regions:

- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC)
- Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)
- Higher Learning Commission (HLC)

Lack of Campus-wide Strategy

Perhaps the most significant finding of NimblyWise's research is higher ed institutions themselves are key drivers of the crisis due to the largely disjointed approaches to foundational skills instruction and assessment. **Fewer than 1 in 5 campuses have a comprehensive, campus-wide strategy for building students' foundational skills** from the time they arrive on campus, to the time they graduate, to their entry into the workforce. Only 1 in 20 campuses appear to have a comprehensive strategy linking directly to career and work experience. Overall, it was found campuses tend to follow four stages to deploying high-impact practices around foundational skills (*see charts 1, 2 & 3*).

CHART 1

Foundational Skill Development Practices by Stage

STAGE	APPROACH	PRACTICES
Basics for Accreditation	No student-facing foundational skills strategy, assessment is focused around meeting baseline accreditation requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define campus learning outcomes (LOs) and link to Gen Ed courses • Use 3rd party tests or student artifacts to get cohort-level understanding of skill achievement • Make instructional improvements based on annual reviews • Offer optional faculty professional development on foundational skills
Gen Ed Foundation	Make foundational skills a consistent element of students' Gen Ed or Core Learning programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Onboard" students into the value of foundational skills • Use consistent Gen Ed assessment to close the loop into course- and student-level reporting • Encourage explicit foundational skills refreshers in select majors as part of core learning pathways • Instill faculty expectations to complete professional development around foundational skills instruction and assessment • Install a dedicated campus leader working with faculty fellows to support a consistent foundational skills strategy
Major/ Program Refresh	Build on the Gen Ed foundation to begin embedding foundational skills throughout the wider curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require skills refreshers within majors, programs, and/or capstones • Expect all majors/programs to have direct co-curricular integration • Structure skills measurement consistently across curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular learning
Employer Signaling	Help students directly link foundational skills to job readiness and attainment across their entire educational experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an explicit strategy to build student intentionality from the first year to graduation • Help students develop their skills narrative and "career story" • Utilize a career skills journey tool to build intentionality/ reflection • Require co-curricular integrations in all programs that build foundational skills outside the classroom • Support consistent measurement within co-curricular programs as well as internships, apprenticeships, and practicums

CHART 2
Campuses Surveyed by Stage

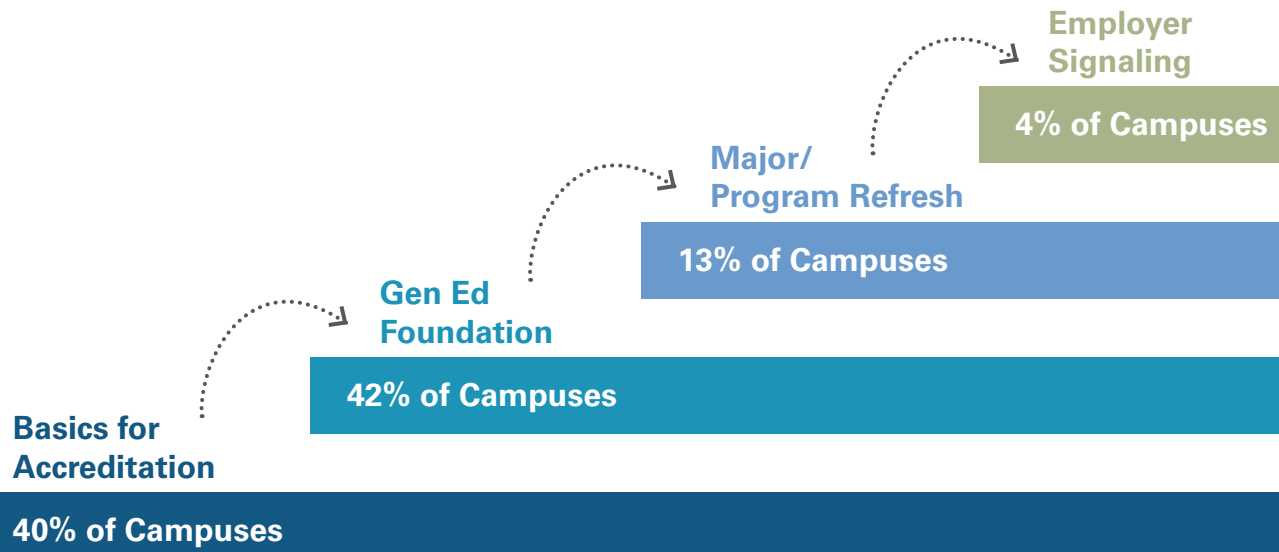
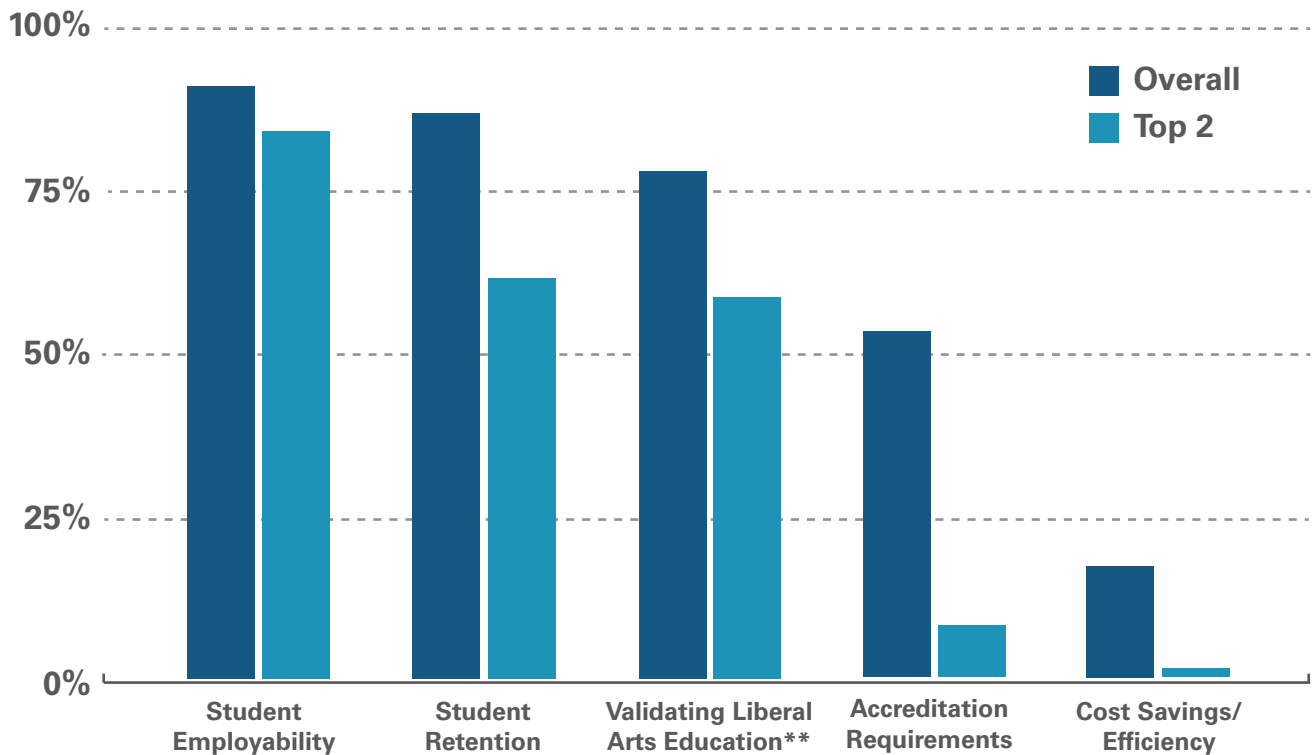


CHART 3
Frequency of Foundational Skill Practices by Stage

BASICS FOR ACCREDITATION		GEN ED FOUNDATION	
Defined Campus Learning Outcomes	97%	Skills Refresh in Some Majors/Programs	51%
Campus LOs Linked to Gen Ed	91%	Dedicated Foundational Skills Strategy Leader	44%
Common Gen Ed Assessment	84%	Student Onboarding in 1st Year Course	40%
Annual Gen Ed Instructional Adjustment	80%	Consistent Gen Ed Course Assessment	40%
		Gen Ed Faculty Development	38%
MAJOR/PROGRAM REFRESH		EMPLOYER SIGNALING	
Co-curricular Integration in Most/All Programs	29%	Consistent Skills Measurement in Internships/Practicums	13%
Foundational Skills Refresh in Most/All Programs	24%	Career Skills Journey Across All Years	7%
Consistent Skills Measurement in Co- & Extracurricular Programs	24%	Career Skills Narrative/Planning Tool	4%

Campuses understand the **main reasons for investing in strategies to build, measure, and activate students around foundational skills are student employability, persistence, and retention**. These investment drivers are the most important across all types of colleges and universities in the study, but for mid-sized private institutions in particular, a fourth driver is top of mind - validating liberal arts skills are key to career and life success (*see chart 4*).

CHART 4
Campus Goals for Foundational Skills Investments*



*See Appendix A, Part II, question 3

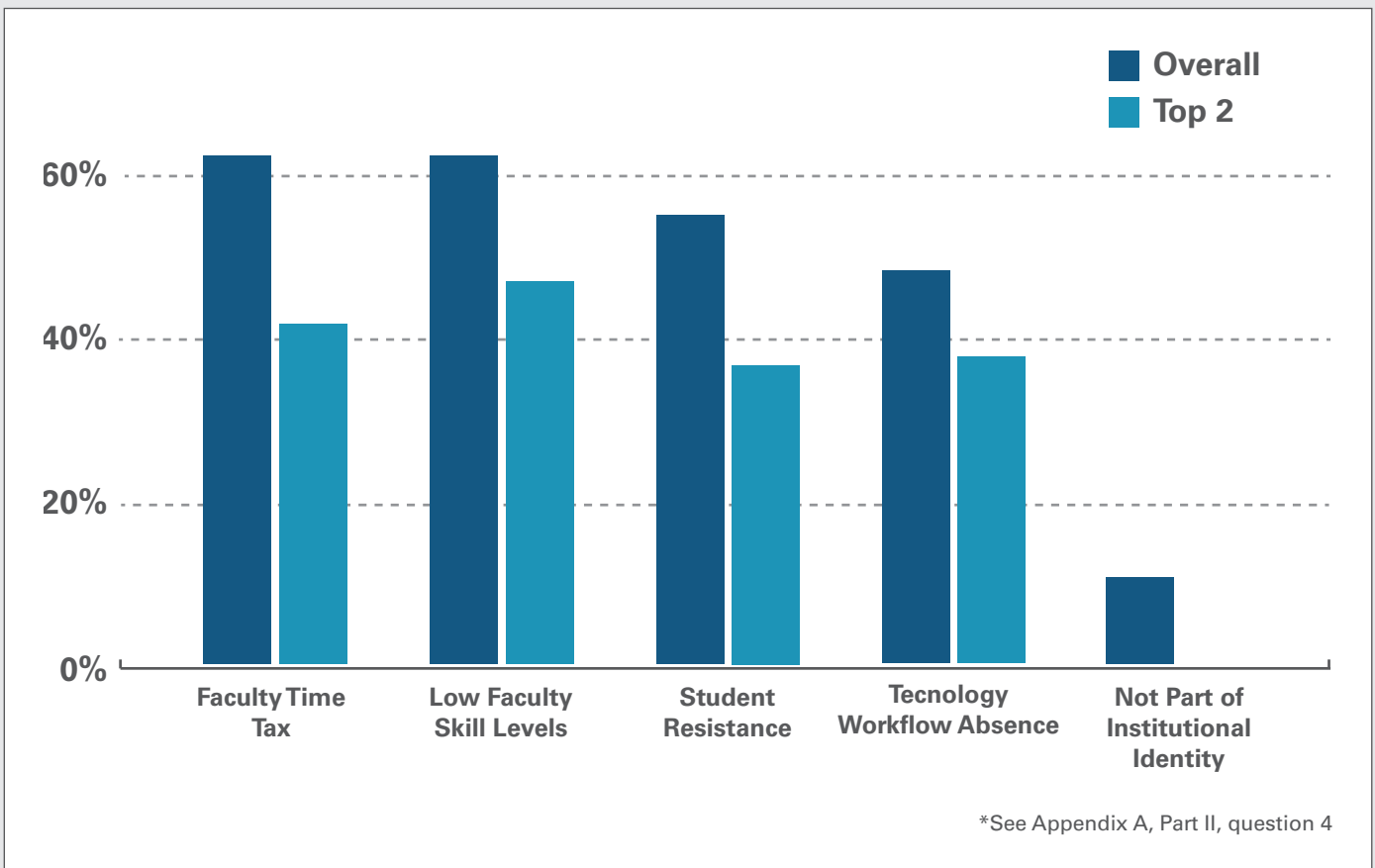
**Percentages only represent liberal arts institutions surveyed

Three Pillars for Success

When building a campus-wide foundational skills approach, colleges and universities generally see three significant barriers:

- low faculty skill levels in teaching foundational skills and time constraints
- student buy-in to the value of foundational skills
- lack of technology for achieving consistent learning measurement and insight

CHART 5
Campus Obstacles to Foundational Skills Strategies*



Overcoming these obstacles relies on three pillars upon which a campus-wide foundational skills strategy may be built. The first is achieved through workflows allowing for **consistent measurement of foundational skills** from Gen Ed into majors/programs, co-curricular, and extracurricular learning experiences. Without this, it is nearly impossible to provide the insights needed by faculty to improve their instruction and by students to intentionally improve their learning. Such workflows can include shared rubrics adapted

across learning environments, shared foundational skills language and vocabulary cutting across disciplines, and technology automating consistent data capture, reporting, and insights.

Secondly, **faculty and staff activation** shifts roles and expectations from a narrow focus on teaching their discipline to a broader emphasis on the learning required for students' college and career success. While nearly 71% of campuses onboard students into the value of foundational skills, just 33% of campuses have required professional development for faculty supporting their understanding and instruction of foundational skills.

The third key pillar involves building **student intentionality** - getting student buy-in around using all learning experiences to develop foundational skills, and supporting an employer-facing narrative to explain how they utilize these skills. Only 4 in 10 campuses have dedicated courses or learning experiences in the freshman year teaching students the value of foundational skills to college, career, and life success. Just 7% of campuses have a career skills journey building on this freshman onboarding into the second year, major, and career-related experiences.

MOVING TOWARDS A CAMPUS-WIDE STRATEGY

As campuses progress across the four stages of development towards a comprehensive foundational skills strategy, the three pillars of consistent measurement, faculty & staff activation, and student intentionality are carried out through a variety of practices. Here we take a look at examples within a sample of the surveyed institutions.

Basics for Accreditation (40% of campuses)

The four out of ten institutions in the first stage align their focus around **bringing the campus into compliance with regional accreditation requirements** (e.g. SACSCOC, MSCHE) **or state-level learning requirements** (e.g. Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) core objectives, State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) core competencies).

Consistent skills measurement for these campuses is limited to the campus or student cohort-level. The absence of course-embedded assessment and course-level feedback

makes it very difficult to give specific learning insights to individual faculty or students. While helpful in meeting re-accreditation requirements, this approach does little to help students develop foundational skills in a comprehensive and intentional way.



BEMIDJI
STATE UNIVERSITY

*A public state university
in Minnesota with 5,000
undergraduate students*

Artifact sampling and standardized testing for cohort-level insight

The California Critical Thinking test is used with a random sample of freshman and sophomore students to track skills at the cohort level. A campus-developed rubric is used for another handful of foundational skills aligned to Bemidji's liberal education learning goals. A sample of student artifacts from 15-20% of the freshman class is used to measure learning outcome progress. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness completes an annual review to suggest instructional adjustments in Gen Ed.



*Seventh largest college
in Texas with nearly
53,000 credit students*

Course-embedded common assessment for cohort-level insight

A course-embedded common assessment across Gen Ed makes it possible to scale consistent foundational skills measurement. The elimination of high faculty time tax and low student response from previous common assessments supports cohort-level instructional feedback on more core competency areas. Academic curriculum teams (ACTs), made of district-wide faculty from different programs and disciplines, develop the skill measurement strategy and closed-loop reporting for each of the Gen Ed learning outcomes.

Gen Ed Foundation (42% of campuses)

Institutions that have moved to the second stage take the key step forward of ***developing a course-level instructional feedback loop that can accelerate student and faculty learning insights***. Campuses at this stage are most heavily focused on building learning insights across Gen Ed, but some have started to look for ways to more consistently measure skills progression from Gen Ed into majors and apply within co- and extracurricular programs. These campuses are using course-embedded assessments to start creating a picture of foundational skills at the individual student level, but not yet building foundational skills broadly across student learning experiences.



WINSTON-SALEM STATE UNIVERSITY

A historically black public comprehensive university located in North Carolina with nearly 5,000 undergraduate students

Consistent Gen Ed instruction and feedback

Consistent mapping of 7 campus learning outcomes takes place across 150+ Gen Ed courses and 100 different instructors. Common rubrics and automated skills tagging are driven by a software workflow which supports cross-Gen Ed comparison and feedback on foundational skill strengths, gaps, and instructional adjustment needs.

Faculty fellows and rollout

WSSU built a very conscious rollout strategy around consistent Gen Ed measurement, which started with a team of 6 faculty fellows who collaborated with an Associate Provost sponsor. These faculty fellows then developed 7 cross-disciplinary faculty committees, one for each Gen Ed learning outcome, involving 85 faculty members working together on consistent approaches to instruction, assessment, measurement, and reporting.

Student onboarding and co-curricular activation

In parallel, orientation was redesigned to align with foundational skills. From their first days on campus, students now begin a process of career discovery around what they want to do, where they want to go, and how they want to get there. To foster the application of key foundational skills, WSSU requires all clubs, activities, and on-campus jobs to have learning objectives aligned to the Gen Ed 7. Internships and service learning are the next co-curricular learning areas to be integrated.



A community college in North Carolina with over 3,000 undergraduate students

Consistent Gen Ed instruction and feedback

Gen Ed Student Learning Outcomes Teams (GESLOT), with faculty representatives from technical and non-technical disciplines, built a cross-Gen Ed approach to skills measurement. While the campus has not fully automated LO measurement, scoring, and reporting, the GESLOT builds a report every semester to assess foundational skill areas that are working and those needing instructional adjustments.

All-faculty training on explicit instruction

Nash CC partnered with Avid for Higher Ed over a span of 6 years to train all faculty members on foundational skills. The process was used to develop a common Instructional Framework and Language around foundational skills.

Applying foundational skills to work

A key focus has been getting students into project-oriented learning, particularly in technical disciplines aligned to the campus' advisory councils. The most recent QEP focused on a first year success initiative to make sure all first year students have opportunities to develop and apply foundational and workforce skills. Efforts to improve instruction and application of foundational skills have been rewarded with enrollment growth and steep climbs in retention and graduation rates.



A private liberal arts college in Texas with nearly 2,500 students

'Pathways Curriculum' for consistency

A 'Pathways Curriculum' built a consistent approach to foundational skills instruction and assessment, embedding 6 core capacities into the first year experience and all Gen Ed courses. Each term, assessment one of the capacities is used to support a triple feedback loop into (a) course instruction, (b) capacity definition and measurement, and (c) center for teaching and learning programming.

Faculty collaboration on curriculum redesign

Trinity used the redesign of its Gen Ed into the Pathways Curriculum to activate faculty around foundational skills. The campus began implementing in Fall 2015, creating an opportunity for faculty to have explicit conversations about what they were trying to accomplish around foundational skills. The new first year experience program, set up to onboard students into foundational skills as part of the Pathways Curriculum, involved 80 out of 230 teaching faculty.

Student onboarding within the FYE

The first year experience component of the Pathways Curriculum is an ambitious, six-hour course taught by faculty in pairs. It is very labor intensive and requires 80+ participating faculty to reach all freshman in a year. All sections meet once a week for a common lecture with one faculty member focusing on writing and the other focusing on discussion and presentation with critical thinking sprinkled across. The goal is to give students a variety of instruction modes and foundational skills across the same topic.

Major/Program Refresh (13% of campuses)

Working to ***ensure students are continually deepening foundational skills across all majors and programs***, campuses in this stage are looking to integrate curricular, extracurricular, and co-curricular directly into learning for most or all students. This makes it possible for students to move more fluidly and intentionally in-and-out of different learning experiences. The application of foundational skills learned in the classroom helps students become ready for the world of work beyond college, but campuses have yet to directly link this intentionality to job readiness.



A private baptist university in Texas with 1,700 undergraduate students

Shared rubrics across the core curriculum

At Hardin-Simmons, the 46-hour core curriculum begins in Gen Ed, but continues into major programs. While foundational skills instruction starts in Gen Ed Core courses, faculty are expected to include writing, problem solving, and quantitative skills refreshers in 1000, 2000, and 3000 level major courses. Common rubrics for each campus learning outcome are used to gauge skills development across Gen Ed and progression into upper level major courses.

All-faculty training on core curriculum

To support the core curriculum, all faculty (including adjuncts) receive training on Core Competencies. Explicit training on instruction and assessment around writing, problem solving, and quantitative skills makes it easier to build a common vocabulary, and helps students to crosswalk skills refreshers in their higher level major courses.

Student onboarding and activation into majors

All freshmen are given an explicit onboarding into core competencies, solidifying their understanding and importance of college and career success. Students use writing, problem-solving, and quantitative skills into their junior and senior year courses as part of the core curriculum - most programs are moving toward co-curricular integrations. The campus does not yet have a workflow to help students build intentionality and a narrative around careers skills, but is considering a co-curricular transcript.



A community college in South Carolina with over 6,100 students

Shared rubrics link curriculum to work

A common rubric around Work Ethic Skills (WES) was built for Gen Ed and technical programs to increase the portability of skills. Employers use the same WES rubric as the technical programs to connect directly to instruction. WES badges can be added to an e-portfolio system embedded in their D2L learning management system (LMS). The e-portfolio includes a reflection and employer communication piece to help students build intentionality.

All-faculty training and faculty experts

All faculty are trained on instructing and assessing around the WES rubric. At first, Piedmont Technical worked with a third party training company to teach foundational skills instruction to all faculty, but moved to developing a program based on their own internal expertise, using faculty experts in each skill area, and developing training modules in their LMS.

Intentionality into apprenticeships

WES rubrics provide continuity in skill development from Gen Ed into technical courses and apprenticeships. Students take the WES rubric at the beginning of their apprenticeship as a low stakes way to get feedback on their foundational skills progression.



A private university in Michigan with nearly 2,200 undergraduate students

Shared rubrics in core curriculum

Lawrence Tech's 24-credit core curriculum for all students covers math, analytical thinking, writing, literature, and science, while prominently featuring problem-based, project oriented, and collaborative learning. Shared rubrics on writing, problem solving, and teaming are used across the core curriculum to evaluate student skills development.

Training and curriculum design

Every faculty member attends 2-3 training days on problem-based learning, experiential learning, effective writing, and critical thinking to learn how to integrate such instruction into the core curriculum successfully. Each department has an annual learning outcomes review to discuss results of the findings and close the loop, ensuring next actions continually sharpen instruction and assessment approaches.

Student onboarding and skill refreshers

All students are onboarded into foundational skills through the core curriculum in their freshman year. Opportunities for problem-based, project-based, and collaborative learning support ongoing skills application throughout all four years of study. Most majors have defined co-curricular integrations - engineering for example has a multi-year sequence around the entrepreneurial mindset, but the campus does not have a workflow to capture skill development across all learning experiences.

Employer Signaling (5% of campuses)

Only one in twenty institutions in the study have moved onto the fourth stage. Setting these campuses apart are commitments to making sure ***all phases of the college education and all modes of learning explicitly support career readiness.***

As the greatest combatant against the skills crisis, campuses at this stage prepare students with both essential skills and the awareness and tools they need to signal their achievements to prospective employers. In addition to integrating curricular, extracurricular, and co-curricular learning to ensure all students have rich and diverse opportunities to apply foundational skills, there are also four-year strategies focused on student intentionality and reflection. These campuses are committed to developing a student-facing workflow making it possible to link foundational skills directly to career applications.



A small private university in North Carolina with just over 1,100 students

Consistent measurement across all learning

The “Pfeiffer Life” sequence integrates core skills throughout a student’s education - weaving them through courses, residence life, student life, religious life, and career services. Shared rubrics developed to track core skills in academic courses have been adopted to support consistent skills measurement outside of the classroom as well. A system linked to an electronic portfolio allows students to earn badges in core skills across all learning experiences.

All-faculty and staff training

A cross-foundational team of faculty, student success, and career services leaders supports Pfeiffer Life and the Pfeiffer Journey. The campus used a third party partner to train all faculty and staff around intentional instruction and assessment of core skills, and to build a common language across Pfeiffer Life. The campus is now looking for ways to continue to deepen and refresh faculty and staff skills.

A four-year plan for student intentionality

Students receive a booklet on the Pfeiffer Journey throughout Pfeiffer Life at the start of a two-semester first year experience program. The booklet and FYE course review communication, collaboration, information fluency, critical thinking, and skills sought by employers. Students start their sophomore year with a retreat where they complete a “learning skills” assessment on their strengths, gaps, and next steps. In their junior year, students map out all curricular and co-curricular learning experiences as they become more major and career focused.



A liberal arts college in Iowa with just over 1,000 students

Consistent measurement across all learning

At Clarke, the phrase General Education has been replaced with the “Clarke Compass.” The Clarke Compass maps University educational outcomes such as communication, critical thinking, spirituality, leadership, and intercultural engagement throughout curricular and co-curricular requirements. Shared rubrics are used to provide consistency in assessment of student artifacts and an integrated software workflow supports collecting and comparing learning.

Flexible approach to faculty training

Faculty and staff participate in workshops based on University outcomes, and development is offered for faculty-teaching writing and speaking as two important skills in the Clarke Compass. Faculty have opportunities to complete rubric training and development for the rest of the Clarke 8 learning outcomes as well.

A four-year plan for student intentionality

Students are onboarded into the Clarke Compass during orientation and their Transitions course, which aids in their adjustment from being a high school student to a college student. Each major has points at which they introduce and reinforce these same skills and ends with a capstone that blends major and Clarke Compass outcomes. Within both curricular and co-curricular learning environments, students are asked to demonstrate foundational skills and build their career and life narrative.

NEXT STEPS: BUILDING URGENCY

The vast majority of campuses surveyed have yet to implement effective strategies to address the current foundation skills crisis, outfit their students with the tools needed for 21st century success, or incorporate closed-loop assessment programs to inform faculty instructional development.

While the time and resource investments required for institutions to correct their course are not insignificant, the benefits to all stakeholders are immediate and impactful. For example, a recent study indicated a 1 standard deviation increase in critical thinking ability increased a student's probability of retention by 24.2%.¹⁰ Other foundational skills like communication and information literacy not only make graduates more enticing to prospective employers, they improve students' GPA, credits earned, and graduation rates.¹¹

NimblyWise's strategic approach revolves around helping campuses build the three pillars of success: **consistent learning insight, faculty and staff activation, and student intentionality** throughout all learning experiences. Through this strategy, institutions are supported at every step of the journey toward foundational skills success; from meeting baseline accreditation needs all the way through employer signaling.

- Campus-wide consistent assessment solutions make accreditation reporting accurate and easy-to-use, freeing up staff time spent manually organizing data
- Instructional materials can enrich the Gen Ed curriculum to cultivate valuable skills that will empower students to excel throughout their college career
- Flexible deployment of course modules, either as a standalone course or in supplementing existing curricula, allows institutions to broaden the reach of foundational skills instruction outside of Gen Ed and into a variety of different learning environments
- Program certificates and badging allow students to better understand how foundational skills will serve them in their careers and demonstrate specific skills to employers
- Assessment data help faculty better understand strengths and gaps in their own teaching, so they can continuously improve from year to year

There is no place in the current educational landscape for the status quo, and institutions that do not evolve risk being pulled into the death spiral of plummeting enrollment and floundering retention. Avoiding this fate requires a sense of urgency from administrators, faculty, and staff around foundational skill instruction. NimblyWise can help; positioning your institution and students for success and relevancy in the decades to come. Through a combination of insightful research, innovative technology, and proven pedagogy, we work with each institution to create a bespoke strategy for solving the foundational skills crisis.

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APPENDIX A

PHONE INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

I. Background Script

NimblyWise partners with colleges and universities to build continuous instructional improvement strategies around foundational skills like critical thinking, communication, and other skills most important to students’ success in college and their careers. We need your help to understand both strategies and obstacles for Provosts and CAOs around continuous instructional improvement. We plan to talk with 40+ institutional leaders as part of this investigation and will provide all participants with a summary memo of our findings.

II. Questions

1) **Foundational Skills Initiative:** Over the last 12–24 months and looking forward, what are your major foundational skills initiatives?

Initiatives	Overall	Top 2
A. Defined core competencies explained to all students		
B. Defined core competencies linked to all Gen Ed courses goals		
C. Foundational skills refreshers in majors/programs		
D. Centers of Excellence (e.g. writing, embedded IL, oral communication)		
E. Defined co-curricular integrations		
F. Consistent foundational skills measurement in Gen Ed		
G. Foundational skills measurement in internships/work-related experiences		
H. Faculty leader for continuous instructional improvement		
I Annual measurement and closing loop into instruction		
J Faculty professional development on foundational skills		
K. Other		

2) **Level of Priority:** On a scale of 1-10, how important are foundational skills initiative relative to other priorities on campus (10 is the top priority, 1 is a very low priority)? How would this change if explicitly linked to effective job placement?

3) **Investment Thesis:** What is motivating you to increase investments in foundational skills initiatives? What are top 2 reasons for why you would invest more money? How would you know if you were getting a return?

Reasons	Overall	Top 2
A. Meeting accreditation requirements		
B. Potential cost savings/efficiency for Gen Ed instructional cost and prof dev		
C. Improving student retention and risk identification		
D. Improving student employability		
E. Validating liberal arts education mission		

4) **Obstacles:** When you think about foundational skills, are there any obstacles that might keep you from taking action in these priority areas? (Start: open-ended, then offer prompts, rank Top 2)?

Reasons	Overall	Top 2
A. Faculty time tax, hard to get faculty time and mindshare		
B. Faculty skills, training assessment or teaching foundational skills		
C. Not part of institutional brand or identity		
D. Absence of technology workflow to support consistency/automation		
E. Funding constraints		
F. Student resistance		

5) **Organizational Execution:** Who is mainly responsible for cross-unit/major consistency? How about faculty engagement? Does anyone, other than Provost, own closing the loop instruction?

(I = Integration, F = Faculty, C = Closing the Loop)

Owner	Check All
A. Provost	
B. Academic leadership - deans, chairs and program leadership	
C. Gen Ed leadership	
D. Assessment and institutional effectiveness	
E. Faculty senate and/or faculty committees	
F. Faculty center for teaching and learning	

6) **Funding/3rd Party Resource:** Approximately how much money have you spent on consultants and other 3rd party resources? From what sources? Which 3rd party resource is most important?

7) **Colleagues:** Finally, are there colleagues in your network who might be interested in participating in our study?

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPATING CAMPUSES

Mid-Size Privates	State	Mid-Size Privates <i>(cont'd)</i>	State
Albion College	Michigan	Trinity University	Texas
Allegheny College	Pennsylvania	University of Montevallo	Alabama
Baldwin Wallace University	Ohio	Wayland Baptist University	Texas
Barton College	North Carolina	William Peace University	North Carolina
Belmont Abbey College	North Carolina	Winston Salem State University	North Carolina
Briar Cliff College	Iowa		
Clarke University	Iowa		
Coe College	Iowa		
Coker College	South Carolina		
Drew University	New Jersey		
Georgetown College	Kentucky	Community Colleges & Regional Publics	State
Hardin-Simmons University	Texas		
Illinois College	Illinois	Alvin Community College	Texas
Lawrence Technological University	Michigan	Austin Community College District	Texas
McMurry University	Texas	Bemidji State University	Minnesota
Mount Ida College	Massachusetts	Collin College	Texas
Mount Saint Mary College	Maryland	Davidson County Community College	North Carolina
North Carolina Wesleyan College	North Carolina	Forsyth Technical Community College	North Carolina
Our Lady of the Lake University	Texas		
Pfeiffer University	North Carolina		
Piedmont Technical College	Georgia	Greenville Technical College	South Carolina
Point University	Georgia	Ivy Tech Community College	Indiana
Schreiner University	Texas	Lenoir Community College	North Carolina
Southwestern College	Kansas	Nash Community College	North Carolina
St. Ambrose University	Iowa	Northern Arizona University	Arizona
St. Edward's University	Texas	Oakland University	Michigan
St. Mary's University	Texas	Piedmont Community College	North Carolina
Sullivan University	Kentucky	Southwestern College	California
Susquehanna University	Pennsylvania	Spartanburg Community College	South Carolina
Texas Lutheran University	Texas	Tarrant County College District	Texas