

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**SWBAT:** use critical reading (interacting with relevant text ) to analyze the article, and then explain relevance of Project-Based Learning (AVID Challenges) as an intro to the AVID10 curriculum.

**EQ:**

1. Which specific skills must professionals exhibit in order to be competitive candidates in the job market?
2. How are colleges and universities attempting to assist students in becoming more competitive in the professional job market?
3. How might Project-Based Learning (AVID Challenges) foster the growth of these skills in our AVID students?

**Schools, Businesses Focus on Critical Thinking** By **MARISA TAYLOR**

**Wall Street Journal**

<http://online.wsj.com>

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While the ability to think critically is, well, critical in the workplace, employers have long complained that many of the young college graduates they hire seem to lack this skill. Now, universities are trying to fix the problem before their grads ever meet a recruiter.

When asked which skills new college graduates needed to improve most, more than half of the respondents to the question on The Wall Street Journal's survey of 479 college recruiters named some combination of critical thinking, problem solving skills and the ability to think independently.

These results echo what the Business Roundtable, a network of company chief executives, found in a 2009 survey of 600 employers. Despite the recession and high jobless rate, 61% of respondents said it was difficult to find qualified employees. Susan Traiman, the Roundtable's director of public policy, says the skills companies felt were most lacking were work ethic, communication skills and analytic skills. "We heard this over and over again," she said.

Sara Holoubek, chief executive of Luminary Labs, a boutique consulting firm in New York, says the recent graduate analysts she hires, though "extremely smart," can't seem to turn their isolated observations about a client's business into a strategy—despite the fact that they are often better observers than their superiors.

This inability to assert an opinion holds young employees back in client presentations, she adds.

George Washington University's Columbian College of Arts and Sciences is one of

the schools addressing the problem. Its new core curriculum will focus on developing reasoning and critical thinking. Beginning in 2011, for example, freshmen will no longer simply complete a science class and get credit for a required course. They'll have to prove proficiency in scientific reasoning to pass. To measure that, professors are designing evaluation standards and assignments to test students on their reasoning skills.

Other schools are reformatting classes to shorten lectures and include peer teaching. Harvard University physics professor Eric Mazur first pushed the concept in the 1990s when he began using a short lecture that ends with a problem that students discuss with peers, instead of spending an hour lecturing. The student-to-student aspect helps cement understanding of the concepts, say experts.

The model has been adopted in other science and math courses at Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of California at San Francisco, among others. Similarly, in the last few years, the National Center for Academic Transformation has led the redesign of large lecture courses at dozens of colleges to ramp up the time students spend working on problems in small groups or in guided learning labs.

Villanova University's School of Business is taking another approach, recently combining its introductory accounting and finance courses and its introductory management and marketing courses to form co-taught, cross-disciplinary classes more aligned with what students will encounter on the job.

The idea, says marketing professor James Glasgow, who co-teaches the marketing and management course for sophomores, is to "take the concept... and then [show] the application of that knowledge so the student comes up with a better understanding."

Meanwhile, many employers say they are trying to help new hires develop these skills. Ms. Holoubek, for example, recently signed up an employee for external training. Other companies make it a point for managers to spend extra time developing independent and critical thinking skills in their new hires.

The Business Roundtable has launched the Springboard Project to find ways to bridge the gaps. Chaired by Accenture PLC Chairman and Chief Executive William D. Green, the group's latest effort is a free online video series called JobSTART101, which aims to teach what Mr. Green dubs the "dot-connecting skills." Subjects include how to articulate a point of view.

"We need to raise the water table by improving the analytical skills, the critical thinking skills, the communication skills that are necessary for really almost every job in today's economy," said Mr. Green. The videos will be released in the fall to college career centers and social networking sites.

Whether today's young graduates are less able to think critically than their forbears, or if it's that the current pace of the workplace requires more independent thinking than it did in the past, is up for debate. Some experts speculate that online search

engines and peer-generated information from social-networking sites have dulled young people's research skills.

Todd Davis, executive director of recruitment at Burbank, Calif.-based Warner Brothers Entertainment Inc. says he sees increasing numbers of his recent college graduate hires relying on such sources when creating strategies.

That means many don't understand the reasons why a strategy might—or might not—work. Many take search engine results as fact, he says.

"We have individuals who are making assumptions without doing any significant research," says Mr. Davis, who oversees hiring of more than a thousand employees a year. "They think they understand what they're saying...but they don't have an understanding of why."

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