CCRC COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH CENTER
Teachers College, Columbia University

# Helping Every Student Develop Versatile Skills for a Changing World



Hana Lahr | October 29, 2026

> A credential of value prepares students with the knowledge, skills, and experience to get a good job, succeed in it, and adapt as their work changes.

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# Why are these skills more essential than ever before in a world with AI agents and tools?



## Large language models are incredibly powerful



## Three years into the “AI era” certain limits are notable

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# What people can do that AI agents can't do



Systems thinking & problem solving

Business management & administration

Critical review & analysis

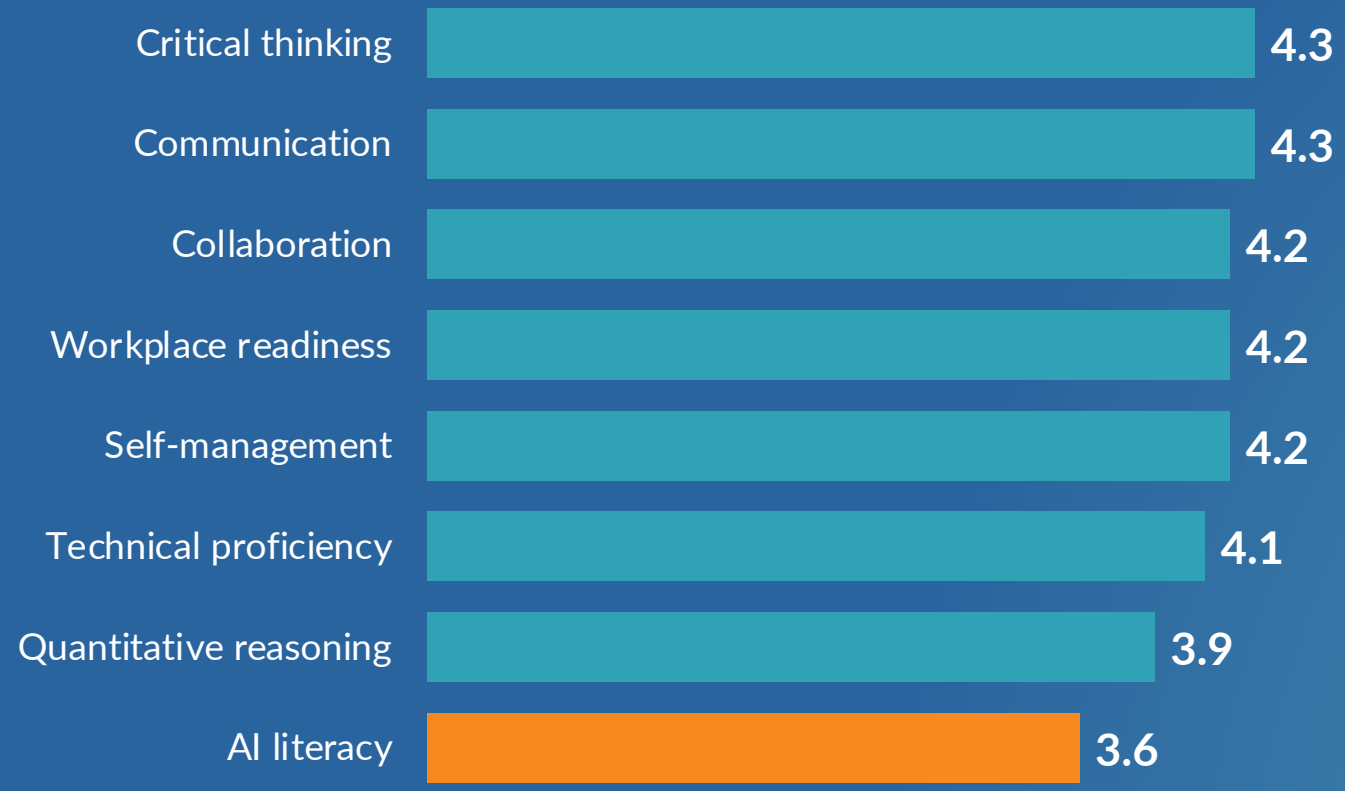
People skills

Hands-on skills

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# Employers rank key skills like critical thinking and communication as most important

*Employers' average rating of each skill's importance (1–5 scale)*




**#8**

AI literacy ranked last of eight skills for entry-level hires

Source: Strada Institute for the Future of Work, Entry-Level Hiring in the AI Era (2026); ~1,500 employers. Average importance, 1–5 scale.

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# Employers look first for evidence of problem solving and teamwork skills

*Top attributes employers look for on candidates' resumes*




Source: NACE, Job Outlook 2025 (237 employers, surveyed Aug–Sep 2024). Share of employers seeking each attribute on a candidate's resume.

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# Hiring managers hire for skills and experience

**94%**

are more likely to hire an entry-level candidate who shows critical thinking and problem solving skills

**90%**

are more likely to hire one who shows effective communication skills

**89%**

believe experience is more valuable than formal education

Source: U.S. Chamber of Commerce & College Board, 2025 New Hire Readiness Report (Ipsos survey of 500 hiring managers).

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# Employers are screening less on GPA, more on experience

## Employers screening by GPA

**73%** in 2019

**42%** in 2026

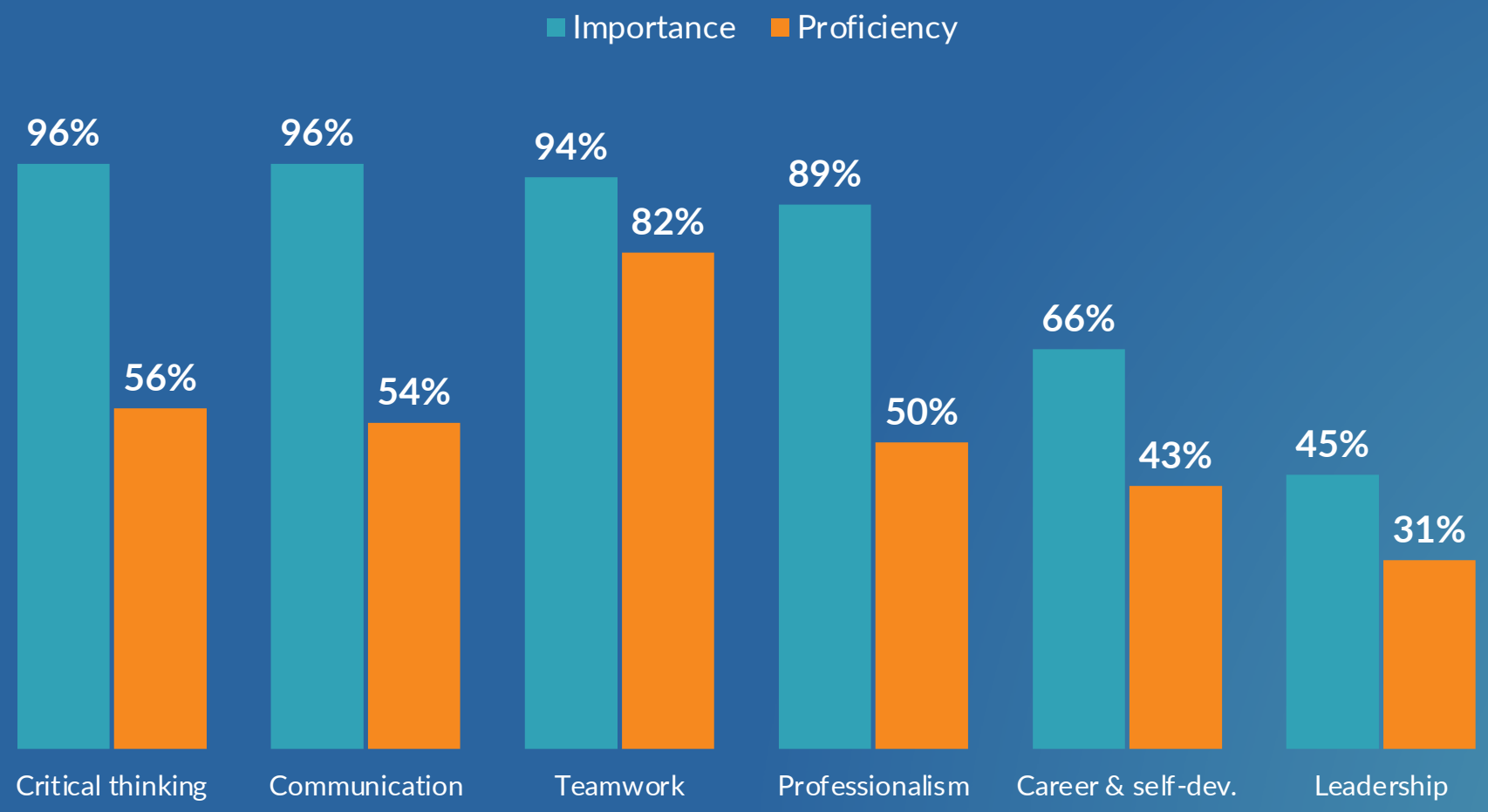
### What they screen for instead




Source: NACE, Job Outlook 2026. Screening criteria among employers that do not screen by GPA.

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# A gap between what employers need and what new grads show




**40+**

point gap in communication and critical thinking

Source: NACE, Job Outlook 2025 (employers surveyed Aug–Sep 2024). Share of employers rating each competency.

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# Students can build these skills through active and applied learning

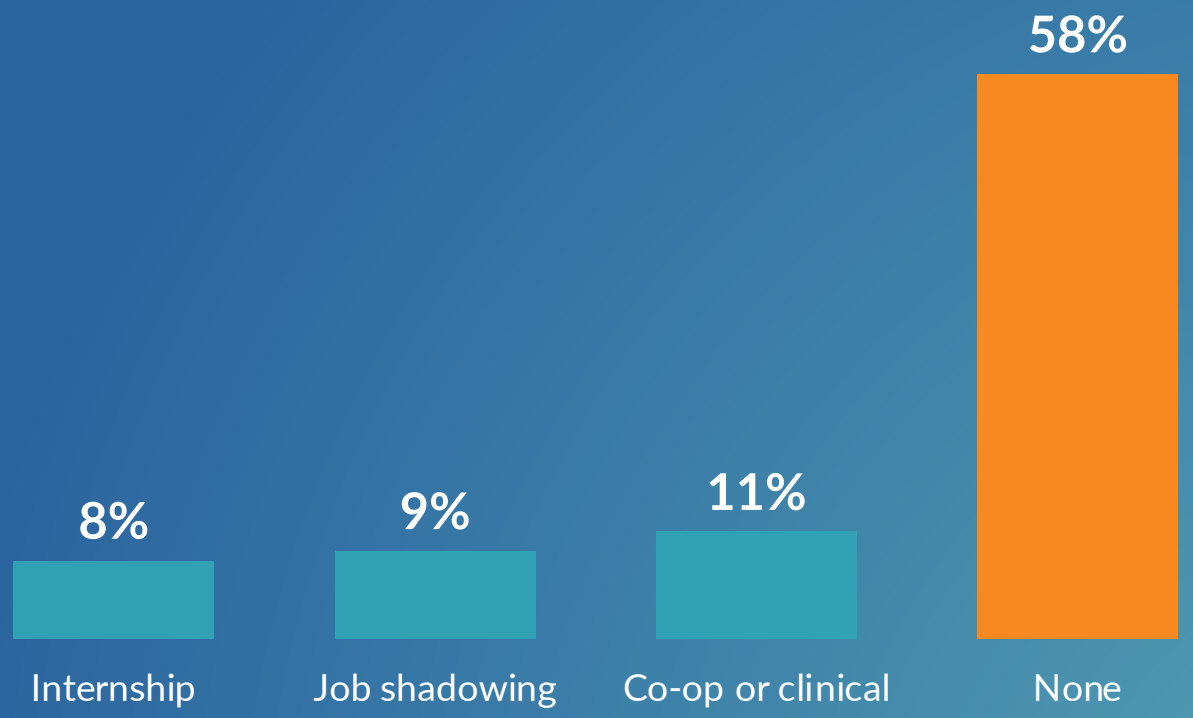


# Few community college students get work-based learning

**17%**

of two-year students in 2025 reported a paid work-based learning experience

**Community college students who participated in…**




Sources: Strada State Opportunity Index, 2025; Inside Higher Ed Student Voice survey (community college respondents).

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# 74%

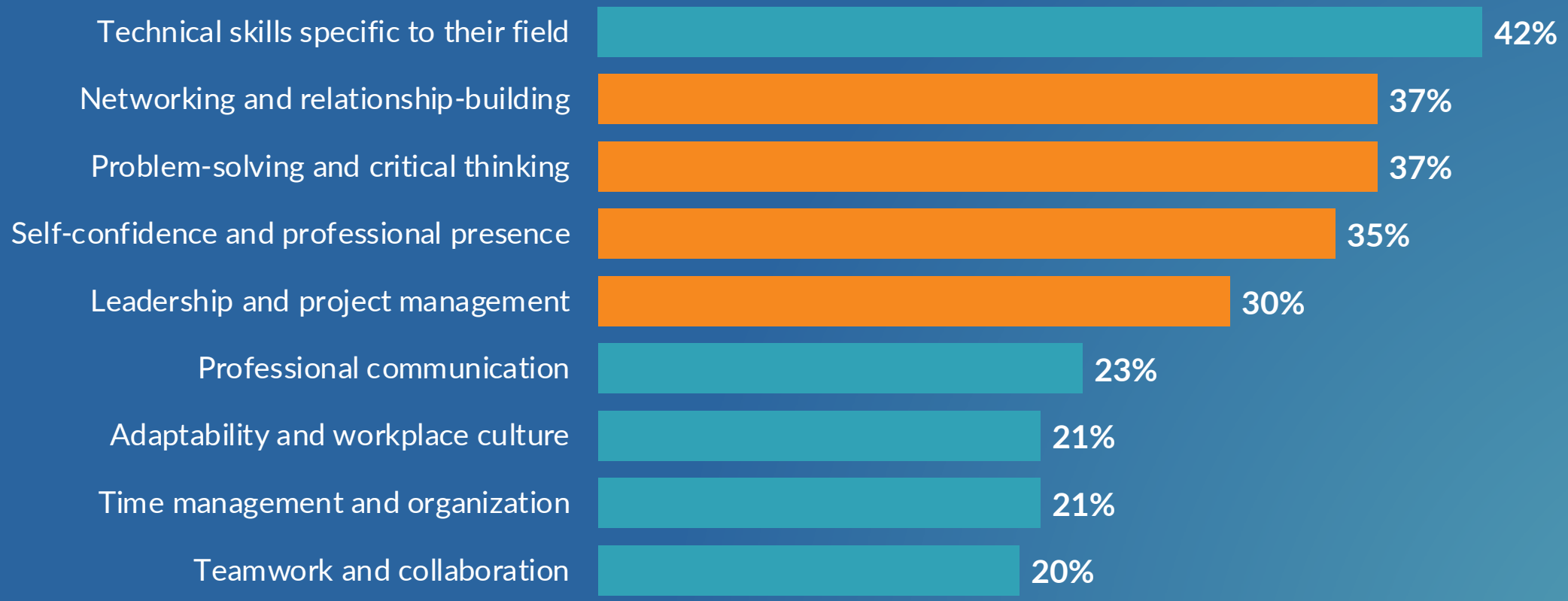
of community college students want more work-based learning (42% very, 32% somewhat interested)



Source: Inside Higher Ed Student Voice survey (community college respondents).

# Students want to develop networking, problem-solving, self-confidence, and leadership skills

*Skills community college students want to build through work-integrated learning (up to 3 each)*




Source: Inside Higher Ed Student Voice survey; two-year college students (n=241).

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# Bring active learning into every course



**Identify competencies**



**Support faculty innovation**



**Help students demonstrate skills**

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# Help students show employers what they can do

**70%**

of employers use skills-based hiring (65% in 2025)



Share examples of using skills to solve problems



Point to experiential learning and work in college



Translate coursework into “skills language”

Source: NACE, Job Outlook 2026.

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# Thanks!

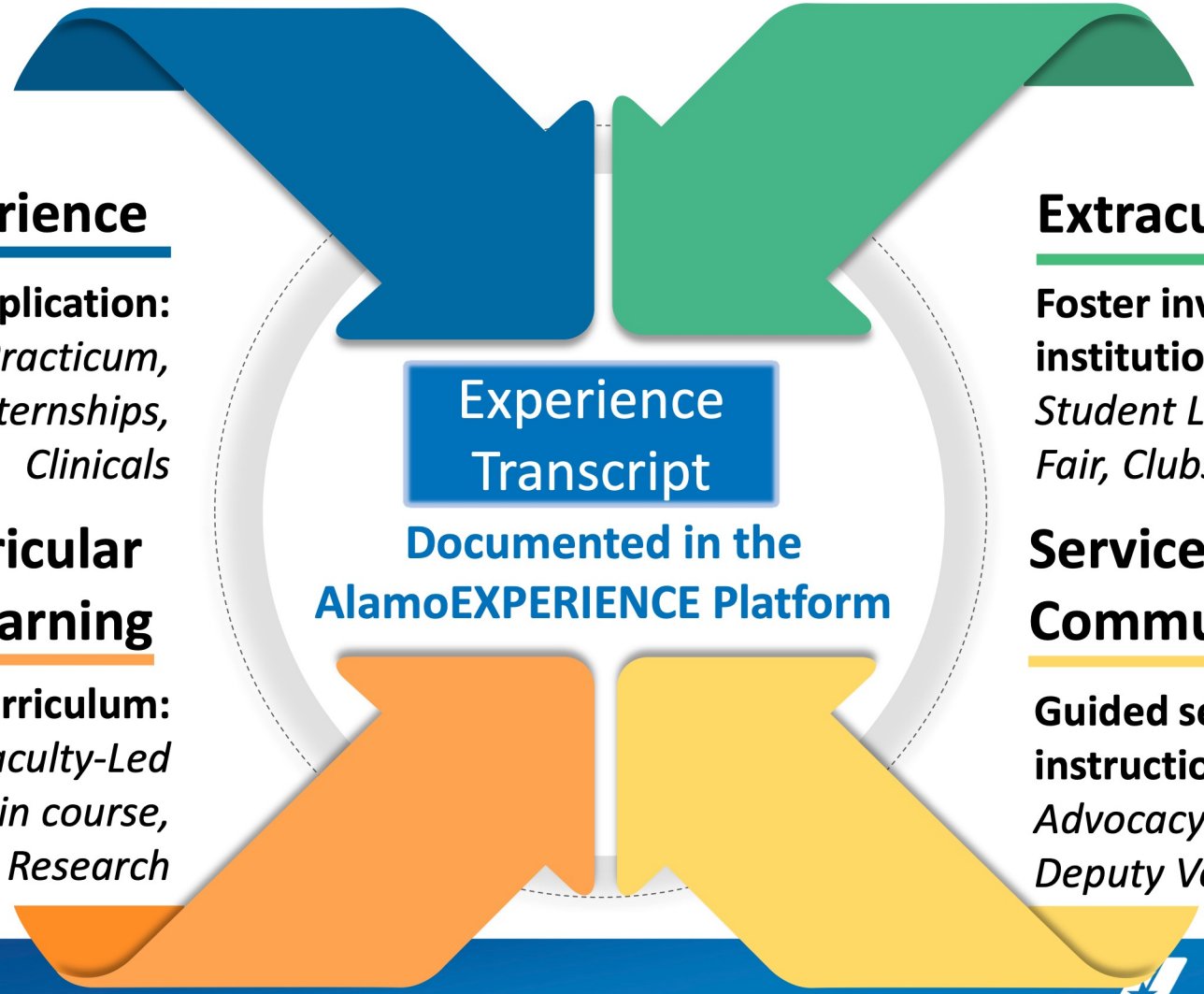
Hana Lahr | lahr@tc.columbia.edu

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ccrc.tc.columbia.edu | @CommunityCCRC | ccrc@columbia.edu | 212.678.3091

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# AlamoEXPERIENCE Model | Four Types of Experiential Learning Opportunities




## Field Experience

**Related to career application:** *Apprenticeships, Practicum, Community Work-study, Internships, Clinicals*

## Co-curricular Learning

**Related to course curriculum:** *Classroom-based learning, Faculty-Led Study Abroad embedded in course, Research*

## Extracurricular Activities

**Foster involvement, strengthen institution's culture on or off-campus:** *Student Leadership Institute, Career Fair, Clubs, Study Abroad*

## Service Learning / Community Service

**Guided service related to community instruction:** *Volunteering in the Advocacy Centers, Habit for Humanity, Deputy Voter*