

Alumni Survey Results:

Executive Summary

Brief methods:

All St. Ambrose University undergraduate alumni within approximately one year of graduation were surveyed fall 2003 to learn their perceptions of 20 general-education skills that may have been developed during their undergraduate careers at SAU. The survey form was developed based on our General Education Goals and Objectives (see Appendix C at the following web site <http://web.sau.edu/assessment/2004%20Assessment%20Plan%20Draft%20April%2027,%202004.htm#Appendix%20C> for a copy of the survey form). Alumni were asked to rate the importance of each skill or ability along with their satisfaction with the preparation they received at SAU. The skills were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = low importance or satisfaction; 5 = high importance or satisfaction).

The skills they rated were as follows from the highest to the lowest importance rating:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Communicate well orally | 11. Respect individual differences |
| 2. Listen effectively | 12. Work effectively in a group |
| 3. Think critically | 13. Make health life decisions |
| 4. Solve problems effectively | 14. Think quantitatively |
| 5. Write effectively | 15. Participate in the life of my community |
| 6. Take responsibility for my actions | 16. Recognize freedom of inquiry allows for dissent |
| 7. Make moral and ethical decisions | 17. Appreciate artistic and other events |
| 8. Use computer adequately | 18. Place issues in historical perspective |
| 9. Resolve conflicts effectively | 19. Express self through an artistic medium |
| 10. Locate appropriate sources of information | 20. Communicate in a foreign language |

Brief results: Because of a small response (N = 66), the results of the survey should be interpreted with caution. Follow-up survey

1. 53% of those surveyed rated all twenty skills a 3 or higher in terms of their level of satisfaction with the preparation they received at SAU.
2. 42% rated all twenty skills a 3 or higher in importance at this point in their lives.
3. The skills receiving the lowest satisfaction ratings tended to be the skills that were perceived to be relatively unimportant. These skills receiving the lowest ratings in satisfaction and importance are: (1) Communicate in a foreign language, (2) Express self through an artistic medium, (3) Place issues in historical perspective, and (4) Appreciate artistic and other events.
4. Four skills received relatively low satisfaction ratings compared to their importance ratings:
 - (1) Resolve conflicts effectively
 - (2) Listen effectively
 - (3) Use computer adequately
 - (4) Think critically

All skills will continue to be monitored through follow-up surveys. In addition, every effort will be made to increase the response rate to a more meaningful level, including web response capability.

The following pages of this report allow you to drill deeper into the results as you see fit. Both descriptive and interpretive results are presented.

	Importance		Satisfaction	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
<i>Sample Size = 66 alumni</i>				
Communicate well orally	4.82	5	4.11	4
Listen effectively	4.77	5	3.92	4
Think critically	4.69	5	4.02	4
Solve problems effectively	4.67	5	4.08	4
Write effectively	4.66	5	4.11	4
Take responsibility for my actions	4.66	5	4.17	4
Make moral and ethical decisions	4.60	5	4.32	5
Use computer adequately	4.57	5	3.92	4
Resolve conflicts effectively	4.55	5	3.72	4
Locate appropriate sources of information	4.48	5	3.95	4
Respect individual differences	4.45	5	4.15	4
Work effectively in a group	4.33	5	4.37	5
Make healthy life decisions	4.29	5	3.89	4
Think quantitatively	4.26	4	3.89	4
Participate in the life of my community	4.06	4	3.95	4
Recognize freedom of inquiry allows for dissent	4.03	4	3.80	4
Appreciate artistic and other events	3.78	4	3.97	4
Place issues in historical perspective	3.43	3	3.42	3
Express self through an artistic medium	3.08	3	3.59	4
Communicate in a foreign language	2.46	3	2.82	3

66 SAU graduates examined a list of 20 skills and rated each of them on a scale from 1-5 in terms of:

- (1) How important each skill is to them today
(1 = very unimportant; 5 = very important)
- (2) Their satisfaction with the preparation they received at SAU in each skill
(1 = very dissatisfied; 5 = satisfied)

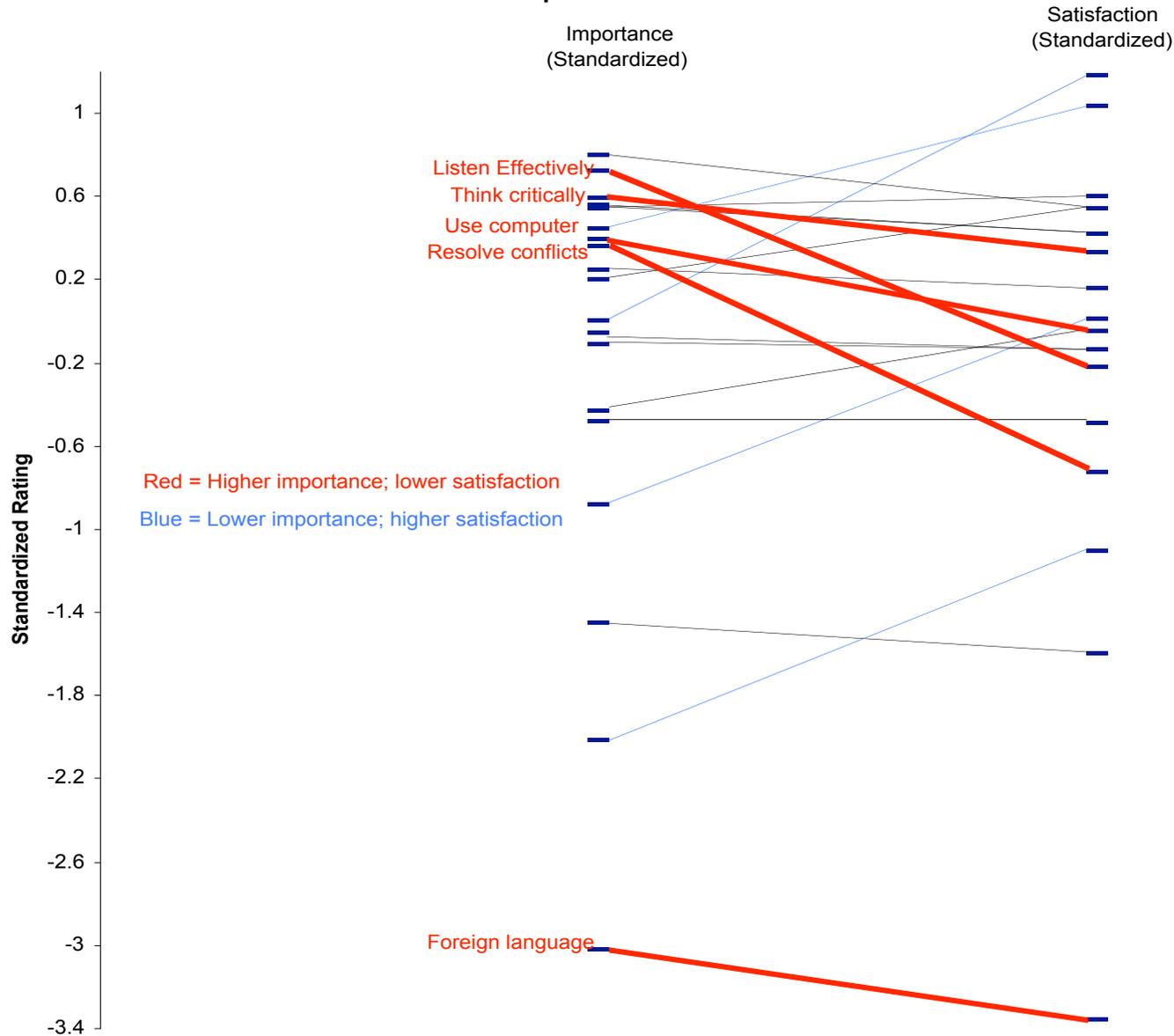
The table lists the skills in order of their average importance rating. The alumni surveyed believed *communicating well orally* is the most important skill and *communicating in a foreign language* is the least important skill.

42% of those surveyed rated all twenty skills a 3 or higher in terms of importance. Looking at the median importance ratings, we see each skill was rated a 3 or higher by at least half of those surveyed.

53% of those surveyed seemed satisfied with their preparation in all twenty skills (they rated all twenty skills a 3 or higher in satisfaction). The skills with the highest average level of satisfaction were *work effectively in a group* and *make moral and ethical decisions*.

Notice that the skills receiving relatively low average satisfaction ratings were perceived to be the least important skills.

Importance & Satisfaction



This chart displays the relative differences in importance and satisfaction ratings for all 20 skills. To standardize the satisfaction and importance ratings, z-scores were calculated for each skill. These z-scores allow us to compare satisfaction and importance on a common scale.

From this chart, we can identify four types of skills:

1. Relatively **important** skills in which students feel they have been **well prepared**
2. Relatively **unimportant** skills in which students feel they have been **well prepared**
3. Relatively **important** skills in which students feel they have been **poorly prepared**
4. Relatively **unimportant** skills in which students feel they have been **poorly prepared**

The skills labeled on the chart represent skills that received relatively low satisfaction ratings compared to their importance ratings.

For example, effective listening, critical thinking, computer usage, and conflict resolution were all rated highly important. Compared to these high importance ratings, the satisfaction ratings of these skills are low. Likewise, even though foreign language is of low importance, its satisfaction rating was low enough to be of concern.

	% Important ^(a)	% Dissatisfied ^(b)	% Satisfied ^(a)
Communicate well orally	97.0%	1.5%	75.8%
Solve problems effectively	97.0%	3.0%	77.3%
Think critically	95.5%	1.5%	71.2%
Use computer adequately	95.5%	* 7.6%	65.2%
Write effectively	93.9%	0.0%	77.3%
Listen effectively	93.9%	3.0%	68.2%
Take responsibility for my actions	92.4%	4.5%	77.3%
Make moral and ethical decisions	90.9%	4.5%	84.8%
Locate appropriate sources of information	89.4%	6.1%	65.2%
Respect individual differences	89.4%	4.5%	75.8%
Resolve conflicts effectively	87.9%	* 9.1%	59.1%
Work effectively in a group	80.3%	1.5%	84.8%
Think quantitatively	80.3%	7.6%	69.7%
Make healthy life decisions	78.8%	7.6%	65.2%
Recognize freedom of inquiry allows for dissent	74.2%	7.6%	57.6%
Participate in the life of my community	71.2%	4.5%	66.7%
Appreciate artistic and other events	63.6%	3.0%	69.7%
Place issues in historical perspective	* 39.4%	* 13.6%	* 42.4%
Express self through an artistic medium	* 33.3%	* 10.6%	51.5%
Communicate in a foreign language	* 22.7%	* 30.3%	* 16.7%

(a) Percentage of subjects who rated each skill a 4-5

(b) Percentage of subjects who rated each skill a 1-2

Since the skills were rated on a scale from 1-5, it is more meaningful to look at the percentage of alumni who rated each skill high or low.

97% of those surveyed rated the importance of *communicate well orally* a 4 or higher. Only 22.7% believed *communicate in a foreign language* was very important to them today.

Less than half of those surveyed believed the following skills were very important:

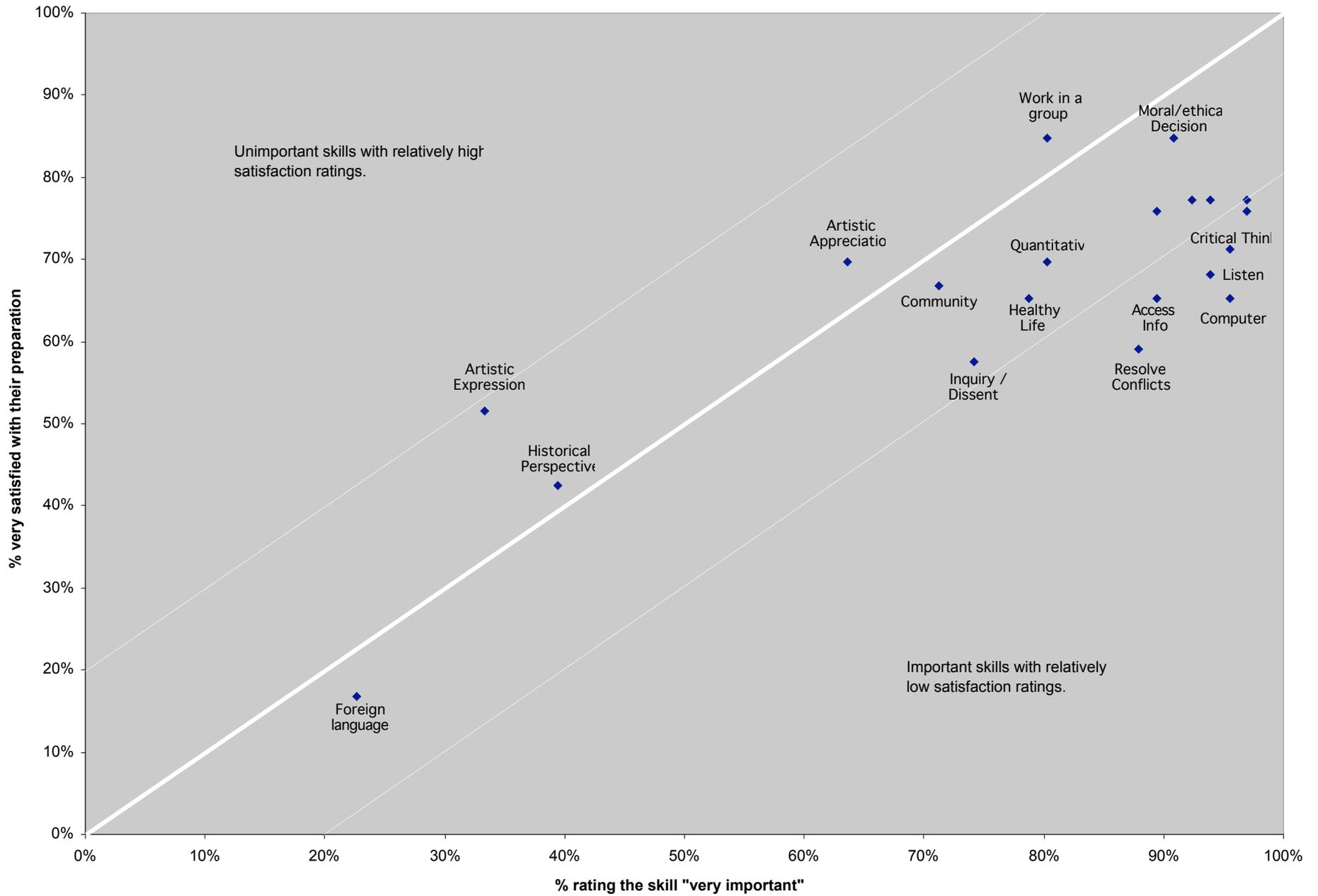
- (1) *Communicate in a foreign language*
- (2) *Express self through an artistic medium*
- (3) *Place issues in a historical perspective*

Students were least satisfied with their preparation in these “unimportant” skills. Nearly one-third of those surveyed were dissatisfied with the preparation they received at SAU in *communicating in a foreign language*. Only 16.7% rated their satisfaction high in this skill. Over 13% were dissatisfied (and fewer than half were satisfied) with the preparation they received in *placing issues in historical perspective*.

If we compare the level of satisfaction for each skill to its perceived importance, we notice the largest gaps between importance and satisfaction are for:

- (1) *Use computer adequately*. While this skill was rated very important by 95.5% of respondents, only 65.2% were very satisfied with the preparation they received at SAU.
- (2) *Resolve conflicts effectively*. 88% thought the skill was important; 59% were well prepared.
- (3) *Listen effectively*. 94% thought the skill was important; 68% were well prepared
- (4) *Think critically*. 95.5% thought the skill was important; 71% were well prepared
- (5) *Locate appropriate sources of information*. 89% thought the skill was important; 65% were well prepared

The scatterplot on the next page shows the relationship between perceived importance and level of satisfaction for all twenty skills.



The next question to be answered was: *Why do respondents differ in their levels of satisfaction in the preparation they received in each skill?*

More specifically: *Does a student's major influence his or her level of satisfaction?*

With such a small sample size, it wasn't possible to examine the effects of a student's major on the skill ratings. We can, however, examine the data to identify potential factors that influenced the ratings for each skill. A nonmetric multidimensional scaling analysis was conducted to see how many dimensions underlie the satisfaction ratings. This type of analysis will show if any factors besides response patterns (i.e. some alumni rate everything low; others rate everything high) influence the satisfaction ratings.

The analysis seemed to indicate 3 dimensions underlie the data. The following two pages show scatterplots of the three dimensions.

The first graph plots Dimension 1 vs. Dimension 3. Skills such as *foreign language* and *historical perspective* were opposite *work in a group* and *make moral/ethical decisions*. These skills were among the lowest and highest rated skills in terms of importance. Therefore, the importance of each skill seemed to influence a respondent's satisfaction with the skill. On the same graph, one can see the skills *computer* and *access information* were opposite *community involvement* and *responsibility*. This dimension seemed to separate skills in terms of social skills vs. data/science skills. Thus, alumni satisfaction ratings were seemingly influenced by whether the skill was a social or scientific skill.

The second plot shows Dimension 2 vs. Dimension 3. Once again, one can see the social vs. science continuum of Dimension 3. Dimension 2 seems to be an expression vs. communication dimension, with language and social skills on one side and expression and academic freedom on the other.

These plots, taken together, indicate the rating given to a particular skill was influenced by:

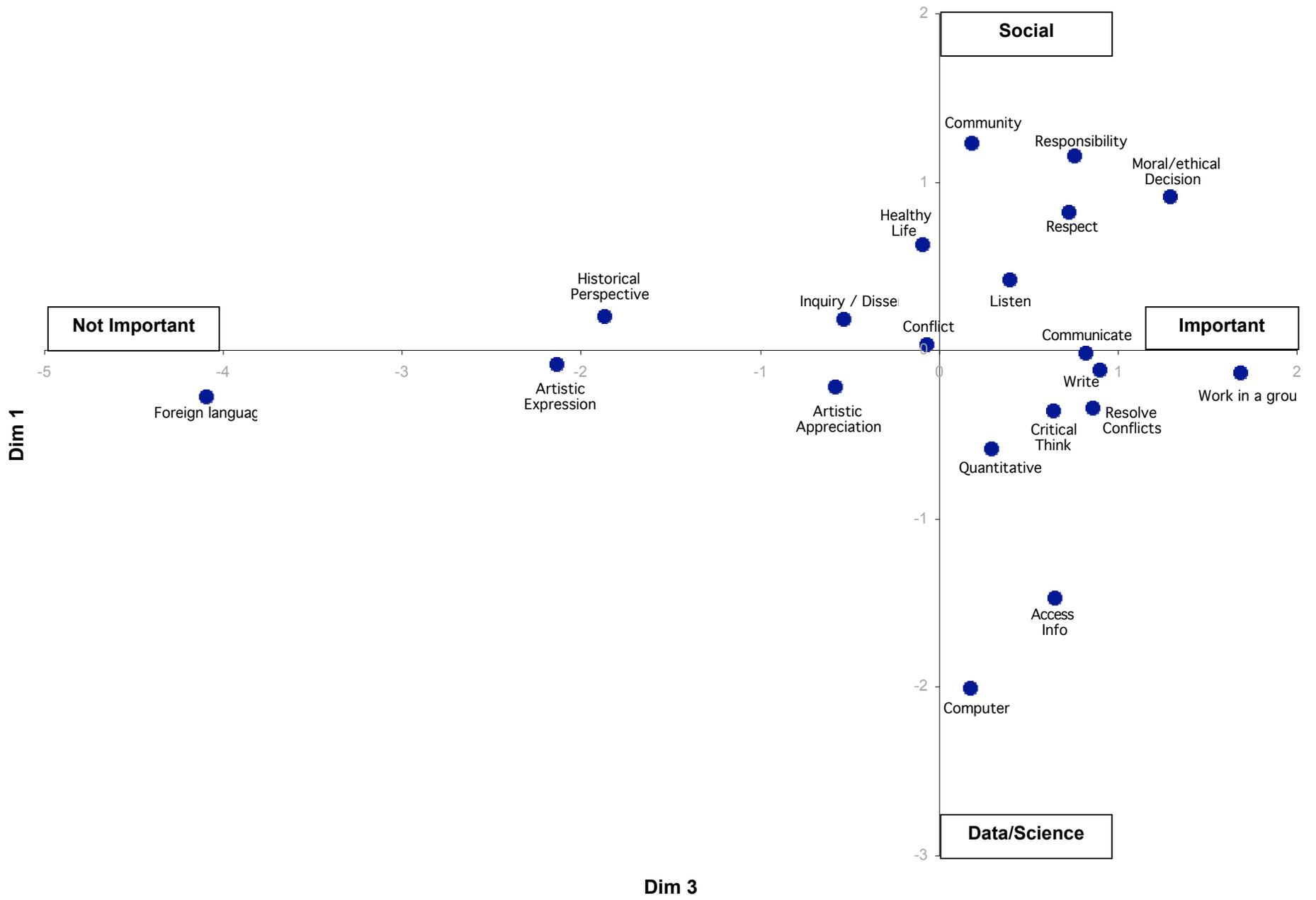
1. The importance of the skill
2. The location of the skill on the social – science continuum
3. The location of the skill on the communication – expression continuum

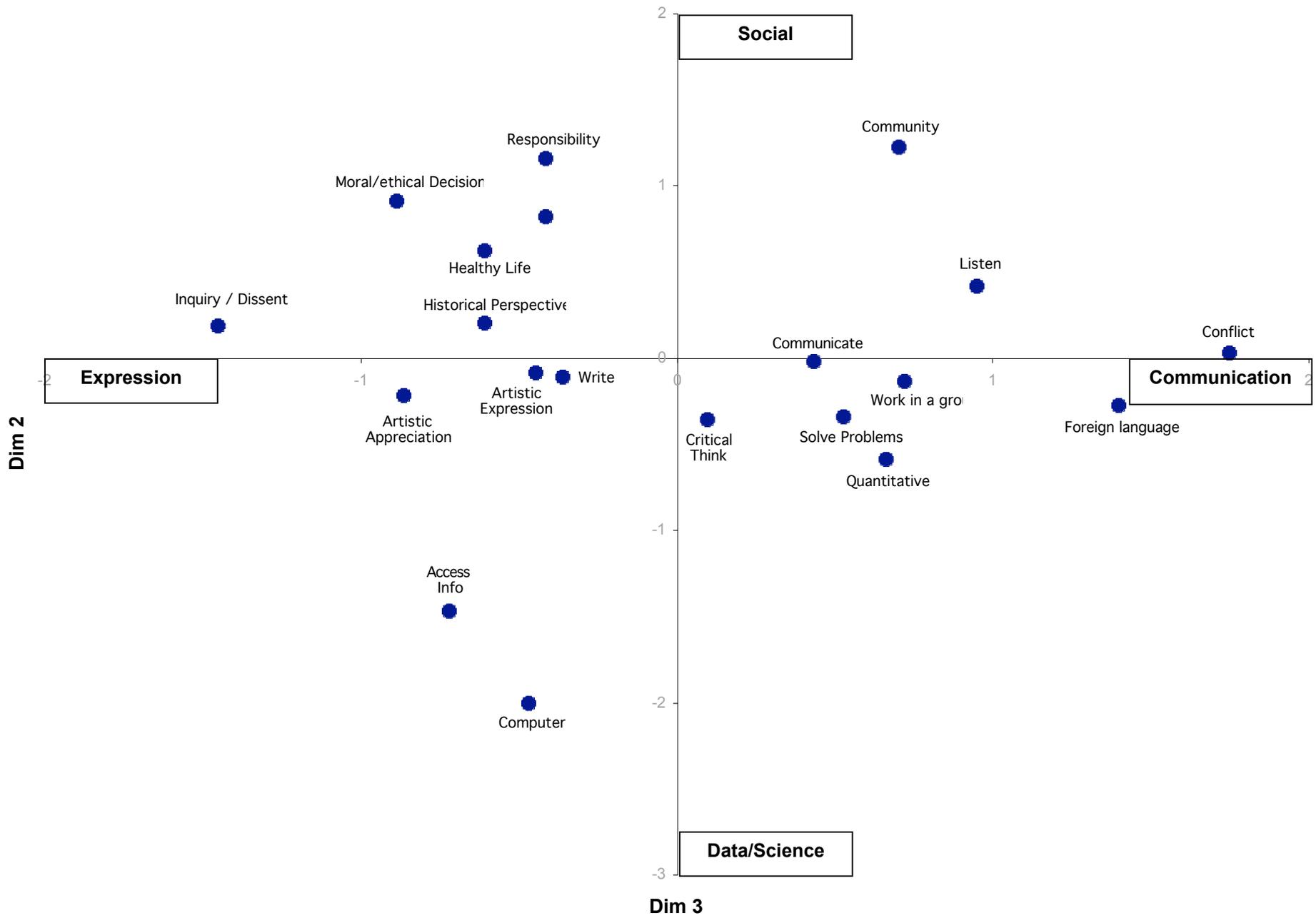
We might then expect students with different majors (social science/humanities vs. natural science) to have different ratings for particular skills. To test this, majors were somewhat arbitrarily classified into two broad categories: (a) majors focused on social skills (education, nursing) and (b) science/data – based majors (accounting, biology).

The ratings for these two groups on the following skills were then compared using a Mann-Whitney U statistic:

1. Data-based skills: *computer use, access info, think quantitatively*
2. Social skills: *work in a group, communicate effectively, participate in community events*

The groups showed no statistically significant differences in satisfaction ratings for any of the 20 skills.





How adequate do you think the following features were within your major department or program?

	Mean	% Unsatisfied	% Satisfied
Overall, how satisfied were you with your major?	4.30	4.5%	69.7%
Faculty interest in academic development of students majoring in department	4.26	6.1%	71.2%
Departmental flexibility in meeting the needs of individual students	4.25	3.0%	69.7%
Communication between faculty members and students regarding student needs and concerns	4.18	7.6%	68.2%
Information provided by department academic advisor	4.16	9.1%	66.7%
Intellectual stimulation within the department	4.12	3.0%	62.1%
Teaching competency of the faculty in the department	4.12	7.6%	65.2%
Faculty interest in personal development of students majoring in department	4.02	7.6%	57.6%
Opportunity for involvement with department clubs/organizations	3.61	12.1%	47.0%
Preparation for advanced degrees in a related field	3.61	16.7%	47.0%
Preparation for employment in a related field	3.54	16.7%	48.5%
Department help with admission into an advanced degree program	3.44	19.7%	37.9%
Variety of resources with which to research careers	3.14	16.7%	27.3%
Number of network opportunities between potential employers and students	2.81	33.3%	22.7%
Department help in finding employment for graduated	2.78	31.8%	21.2%

Less than half of the alumni surveyed were satisfied with the following features of their department.

This table displays the attitudes graduates have towards their departments. Alumni read the above statements and rated them on a scale from 1 (very inadequate) to 5 (very adequate).

Unexpectedly, the overall level of satisfaction with their academic department was higher than the adequacy with any particular feature. Nearly 70% of alumni surveyed rated their overall satisfaction a 4 or a 5. The departmental features receiving the highest ratings were:

- (1) *Faculty interest in student academic development* (71.2% rated it either 4 or 5)
- (2) *Departmental flexibility* (69.7% rated it either 4 or 5)
- (3) *Faculty-student communication* (68.2% rated it either 4 or 5).

The lowest ratings were for the following features:

- (1) *Networking opportunities* (only 23% rated it high; 33% rated it low)
- (2) *Help finding employment* (only 21% rated it high; 32% rated it low)
- (3) *Resources to research careers* (only 27% rated it high; 17% rated it low)
- (4) *Help with admissions into advanced program* (only 38% rated it high; 20% rated it low)

Sample sizes were too small to compare departmental ratings. Nonparametric correlations and a stepwise regression analysis were conducted to determine which of the particular departmental features had the biggest impact on the overall level of satisfaction. Those features were discovered to be:

- (1) *Teaching competency*
- (2) *Employment preparation*
- (3) *Faculty-student communication*

The features having the least impact on overall satisfaction were: *networking opportunities, information from advisor, clubs/organizations, and intellectual stimulation.*