Universities and the New World of Work

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Students, graduates and employers are asking a lot of universities. As always, universities are expected to guide students to the current frontier of knowledge in subjects. But as the failures to incite business R&D pile up, universities are increasingly expected to push out those frontiers and bring the new ideas to commercialization. And universities are expected to instill in their students a lifelong ability to learn and adapt to ever-changing knowledge requirements. As always, universities are expected to produce graduates who can write well. But businesses are now saying there are a host of other competencies they value including oral communication, the ability to work in teams and creativity. Universities are still expected to educate the top high school graduates who come to their door. But they are also now expected to play a key role in promoting diversity and equal opportunity, even if the obstacles are in schools or the workplace. Trends such as the larger classroom make the challenges tougher. Data inadequacies also impose a cost. New, longer-term tracking of graduates’ employment and income, for example, paints a very different picture of the relative values to studying in various disciplines than the traditional short-term snapshots. Can universities deliver on the new, higher expectations? They must. The Canadian economy and all the people working in it depend on universities succeeding.