All across America, students are anxiously finishing their “What I Want To Be ...” college application essays, advised to focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) by pundits and parents who insist that’s the only way to become workforce ready. But two recent studies of workplace success contradict the conventional wisdom about “hard skills.” Surprisingly, this research comes from the company most identified with the STEM-only approach: Google.

Sergey Brin and Larry Page, both brilliant computer scientists, founded their company on the conviction that only technologists can understand technology. Google originally set its hiring algorithms to sort for computer science students with top grades from elite science universities.

In 2013, Google decided to test its hiring hypothesis by crunching every bit and byte of hiring, firing, and promotion data accumulated since the company’s incorporation in 1998. Project Oxygen shocked everyone by concluding that, among the eight most important qualities of Google’s top employees, STEM expertise comes in dead last. The seven top characteristics of success at Google are all soft skills: being a good coach; communicating and listening well; possessing insights into others (including others’ different values and points of view); having empathy toward and being supportive of one’s colleagues; being a good critical thinker and problem solver; and being able to make connections across complex ideas.

Those traits sound more like what one gains as an English or theater major than as a programmer. Could it be that top Google employees were succeeding despite their technical training, not because of it? After bringing in anthropologists and ethnographers to dive even deeper into the data, the company enlarged its previous hiring practices to include humanities majors, artists, and even the MBAs that, initially, Brin and Page viewed with disdain.

Project Aristotle, a study released by Google this past spring, further supports the importance of soft skills in high-tech environments. The study shows that the best teams at Google exhibit a range of soft skills: equality, generosity, curiosity toward the ideas of one’s teammates, empathy, and emotional intelligence. And topping the list: emotional safety. No bullying. To succeed, each and every team member must feel confident speaking up and making mistakes. They must know they are being heard.

Google’s studies concur with others trying to understand the secret of a great future employee. A recent survey of 260 employers by the nonprofit National Association of Colleges and Employers, which includes both small firms and behemoths like Chevron and IBM, also ranks communication skills in the top three most-sought after qualities by job recruiters. They prize both an ability to communicate with one’s workers and an aptitude for conveying the company’s product and mission outside the organization. Or, take billionaire venture capitalist and “Shark Tank” TV personality Mark Cuban: He looks for philosophy majors when he’s investing in sharks most likely to succeed.

STEM skills are vital to the world we live in today, but technology alone, as Steve Jobs famously insisted, is not enough. We desperately need the expertise of those who are educated to the human, cultural, and social as well as the computational. Broad learning skills are the key to long-term, satisfying, productive careers. What helps you thrive in a changing world isn’t rocket science. It may just well be social science, and, yes, even the humanities and the arts that contribute to making you not just workforce ready but world ready.

Prompt: After reading “The surprising thing Google learned about its employees,” write an essay between 500 and 800 words in which you argue whether or not Cal Poly prepares students to be workforce and world ready by emphasizing soft skills in its major degree programs. If you believe Cal Poly’s major degree programs help students communicate and listen well, possess insights into others (including others’ different values and points of view), have empathy toward and support colleagues, and make connections across complex ideas, support your position with compelling arguments that expand upon or go beyond those points already offered in the article. If you do not agree that Cal Poly’s major degree programs emphasize soft skills, then defend your position and explain why. Your essay should demonstrate an understanding of the article without simply repeating it, and you should incorporate specific details from your own experience and knowledge into your response.