

# THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

## Students

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January 22, 2014

### How Liberal-Arts Majors Fare Over the Long Haul

*By Beckie Supiano*

Skepticism over the value of a college degree, especially one in the liberal arts, is common these days. Rising college prices, increasing levels of student debt, and a still weak job market all heighten doubts. [Return on investment](#) has become a popular research question, and a higher-education association released on Wednesday a report arguing that a liberal-arts major is a worthwhile choice.

In recent years, new data have helped paint a detailed picture of [what college graduates earn](#). Analyses have focused on what they make by major, or by degree program at particular colleges.

On Wednesday the Association of American Colleges and Universities—a champion of liberal education—stepped into the fray with a [report](#), based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, that examines the payoff of a liberal-arts degree over the course of a career.

While the group does not buy into the idea that earnings are the most important college outcome, it had to respond to the “growing myth” that liberal-arts majors leave students “unemployed and unemployable,” said Carol Geary Schneider, its president.

The liberal arts and sciences have traditionally been seen as laying “a foundation for future learning in the professions and in scholarly work,” said Ms. Schneider. The report, she said, shows that to be true.

While humanities and social-science majors started out near the

bottom of all college graduates in terms of salary, the report says, older people who majored in those fields—many of whom also held graduate degrees—outearned their peers who'd picked professional and pre-professional majors.

Right out of college, graduates in humanities and social science made, on average, \$26,271 in 2010 and 2011, a bit more than those in science and mathematics but less than those in engineering and in professional and pre-professional fields, according to the report. But at their peak earning ages, 56 to 60, humanities and social-science majors earned \$66,185, putting them some \$2,000 ahead of professional and pre-professional majors in the same age bracket.

### **Graduate Degrees Help**

Often the focus is on what graduates make right out of the gate, said Debra Humphreys, a co-author of the report and vice president for policy and public engagement at the group, known as AAC&U. But career success, she said, is “more a marathon than a sprint.”

Not surprisingly, people with engineering degrees do particularly well over the course of a career (making \$97,751 at peak earning ages). But, the report points out, they are a small group: only 9 percent of working college graduates. Science and math majors also do quite well over time (making \$86,550 at peak earning ages).

One big reason that older humanities and social-science majors outearn professional majors is that about 40 percent of people in the former group also hold a graduate degree. In fact, the report says, earning a graduate degree on top of a humanities or social-science undergraduate major corresponds with a median annual earnings rise of \$19,550. Excluding the graduate-degree holders, humanities and social-science majors earned less than professional and pre-professional majors.

Anthony P. Carnevale, director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, said he was glad to see the AAC&U tackle the issue of how degrees pay off, a topic he has

written a number of reports about. "They're essentially legitimizing the question," he said.

The report makes a solid argument against those who say liberal-arts degrees have no value in the marketplace, Mr. Carnevale said. At the same time, it sends a message to liberal-arts majors he would put more bluntly: "Go to graduate school."

### **Choosing a Major**

The AAC&U designed the report with two audiences in mind: policy makers, and students and their families, said Ms. Humphreys.

It's important that students start college with a good sense of what they're likely to earn with different majors—and not just immediately after graduation, she said. One need not choose a major that sounds like a job, Ms. Humphreys said, to have a successful professional life.

As for policy makers, she hopes they'll recognize that society needs workers in a broad array of fields, not just those that are most lucrative. Humanities and social-science graduates are overrepresented, the report points out, in fields that are important but not well paid, like social work and counseling.

The report, "How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment," relies on the American Community Survey, which recently began tracking college majors. The data, from 2010 and 2011, cover education and occupation for about three million people.

To give a sense of how workers fare over the course of a career, the report examines annual median earnings in age-group increments of five years, from 21 to 65.

Looking at earnings over a whole career is useful, said Mark S. Schneider, vice president of the American Institutes for Research, who has examined short-term earnings by degree program.

But the report doesn't give students what they need to make an

informed decision about how much debt to take on, said Mr. Schneider. “It’s the program-level data that is actually important.”

No data to calculate the value of a degree are perfect. Median earnings, on which many analyses are based, have their limits, said Sandy Baum, a research professor at George Washington University’s Graduate School of Education and Human Development and author of the College Board’s “Education Pays” reports. Medians can’t answer the real question, she said: Do most people make a reasonable amount of money?

Research on the extent to which graduates come out ahead—and which ones, by how much—is a complex, charged exercise. With everyone asking about return on investment, even groups that don't think the value of a degree can be quantified are doing the math.

*Correction (1/22/2014, 11:24 a.m.):* This article originally said that humanities and social-science majors make \$66,185, on average, during their peak earning years, ages 56 to 60, putting them some \$2,000 ahead of professional and pre-professional majors at their peak. It has been corrected to say that humanities and social-science majors earn some \$2,000 ahead of professional and pre-professional majors in the same age bracket.

## College Majors and Long-Term Prospects for Pay

Baccalaureate graduates in the humanities and social sciences earn less right out of college than those who majored in professional and pre-professional fields.

By midcareer, they catch up ...

### HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



### PROFESSIONAL AND PRE-PROFESSIONAL



... but much of that wage growth is due to the graduate degrees they received.

	Median wage increase for holders of advanced degrees	% of undergraduate majors earning advanced degrees
Humanities and social sciences	\$19,550	40%
Professional and pre-professional	\$14,214	30%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey

87 Comments

The Chronicle of Higher Education

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uophysics • 21 days ago

Why don't you have STEM numbers on your charts? It would appear STEM grads do better than liberal arts and pre-professional (does that include Journalism, for example?) grads.

"Not surprisingly, people with engineering degrees do particularly well over the course of a career (making \$97,751 at peak earning ages). But, the report points out, they are a small group: only 9 percent of working college graduates. Science and math majors also do quite well over time (making \$86,550 at peak earning ages)."

14 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share



**judithryan43** → uophysics • 21 days ago

The problem is that two conflicting understandings of the "liberal arts" are at work here. Traditionally, the "liberal arts" have included mathematics and the sciences. Many students graduate from "liberal arts colleges" with degrees in science and math; and at some liberal arts colleges a case has been made for engineering as having a place if not in, then at least in close conjunction with, the liberal arts. More and more, however, there also seems to be an idea that the "liberal arts" are identical to the humanities. In this article, they are seen as identical to the humanities and social sciences. We may be going through some kind of meaning change in the term "liberal arts," but right now, the result is confusion.

46 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**ddavisva** → judithryan43 • 21 days ago

Once upon a time, it was actually known as "the liberal arts and sciences," or "arts and sciences schools," or "arts and sciences education." We have, unfortunately, and more importantly INACCURATELY, dropped this language from the vocabulary I think entirely. Now, we just say the ambiguous "liberal arts," often now a days with a kind of degrading sneer to it. Saying the "liberal arts" now means whatever one wants it to mean, no longer a commonly shared term or meaning. It's like a suitcase with a false bottom. One puts into it whatever they want to be there.

IMO the term "liberal arts" should be exactly equivalent to saying "education." It is only one of the broad sub-sets of education.

5 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›



**michellewiss** → ddavisva • 21 days ago

Often, too, "applied sciences" are in colleges of Engineering, whereas "pure sciences" reside in A&S or Liberal Arts. There is a place for Physics, Biology, and Mathematics alongside Literature and Psychology. All of that said, I know many institutions have experienced dissent about where Computer Science (often an outgrowth of Mathematics) should reside.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Reythia** → judithryan43 • 21 days ago

Granted, but given that this article specifically separates out "graduates in humanities and social science" from "those in engineering and in professional and pre-professional fields" as well as "Science and math majors", I think it's clear that they are NOT lumping engineers, mathematicians, and scientists into "liberal arts" in this particular article.

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Reythia** → uophysics • 21 days ago

For the obvious reason, UOPhysics: because 90% of the readers on this website are humanities majors. They don't particularly like to hear about the rest of us, and surely not in an easily comparable nature in studies like this one. Which is a shame, really, since there's plenty we could learn from each other.

6 ^ | 5 v • Reply • Share ›



**sciencegrad** → Reythia • 21 days ago

It does seem that most readers here are humanities faculty, but I never felt like they don't like hearing about STEM stuff.



**Reythia** → sciencegrad • 21 days ago

Perhaps not, but take a look at the percentage of articles which discuss, in any depth, engineering/science/math/computer topics, or for that matter business or medical or law topics, versus those focused squarely upon the humanities and social sciences. And, frankly, many of the articles focused on those "other" subjects are of far lesser depth and quality than articles written for the "main" humanities/social subjects.

Obviously I'm not surprised about the preponderance of education articles, given the topic of the website. That makes sense. But there's a clear preference in terms of the choice of other articles offered, as well as the number of comments made on those articles.

Also, take articles on "neutral" topics like this one. There's no reason this data HAD to describe "How

[see more](#)



**minerva9** → Reythia • 21 days ago

The paucity of articles about academics with technical expertise probably derives from the fact that most journalists are innumerate and scientifically illiterate. It's hard to write about that which you cannot understand.



**Cdude** → minerva9 • 21 days ago

I disagree minerva9. It's that most academics with technical expertise are so rich they can't see through the dollar signs to the structural inequalities inherent in the system. Why read an article which questions the very system that places you firmly on the top of the money heap? :-). Or, could it be that the social revolutions of the '60s are still with us in the editors of The Chronicle, and mathematics and the sciences got left out? I don't see any calculator-totin' hippies when I watch footage of Woodstock. I'm sure in that footage there are a lot of Hunter S. Thompsons in disguise though! :-)



**comicsprof** → Reythia • 16 days ago

You want an article offering an in-depth perspective on the sciences and math? Write one, instead of complaining about the work of others. It will enhance your CV and fill the void of which you gripe.



**Reythia** → comicsprof • 15 days ago

\*shrug\* I was already interviewed by one of the regular authors on this site once, on the topic of women in engineering. She flat out didn't believe what I had to say, or what other STEM women have written on these comment sections, and no article ever came of it.

And I can't figure out why writing an article would

enhance my engineering CV in any way, given that writing newspaper articles is completely a different skill set than writing technical papers. Moreover, why should I spend the time doing so, when there are people PAID to spend their time on that matter?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Guest → uophysics • 21 days ago

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Raymond → uophysics • 21 days ago

You probably need to read the study that this information was taken from. This article is focusing on a comparison between liberal arts and pre-professional undergraduate degrees.

Along with the quote above:

"Right out of college, graduates in humanities and social science made, on average, \$26,271 in 2010 and 2011, a bit more than those in science and mathematics but less than those in engineering and in professional and pre-professional fields, according to the report."

So it would appear that, starting off the gate they do a little better, but over time the science and math majors come up ahead, probably do to the kinds of graduate degrees they go on to obtain.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



mkt42 → uophysics • 21 days ago

A recent study showed that it is misleading to look at STEM majors' incomes; "TEM" majors have higher incomes but "S" majors (science majors) do not.

<http://www.air.org/reports-pro...>

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



22081781 • 21 days ago

The older age groups have lived most of their working lives in a much better economy than those age 30 and under. So the information above is not that helpful to younger people. If their major isn't technical (engineering, IT, and the like), we have little idea how they will fare in our nation's very uncertain future, .

33 ^ | 1 v • Reply • Share ›



ddavisva → 22081781 • 21 days ago

Which is one of the CORE arguments in favor is earning an undergraduate degree in the liberal arts and sciences. The future is uncertain? Whoa - there's news! It, of course, wasn't when those now 40 and 50-something earners graduated with their degrees, right? Whew, anyone who thinks this is a more uncertain time did not live through Viet Nam, the Arab Oil Embargo, stag-flation, the greed of the 1980's, and so on.

Yes, it's really uncertain now. No questions. And no more uncertain than it ever was. Folks, this is just life.

What one really needs in a UG education is flexibility. And the more the better. You'll change jobs, or even careers, and average of 7 times, some more than this. With a highly trained, highly-specific major in the UG degree, one can often be assured of quick educational obsolescence, except for those individuals who are just inherently creative, adaptive, and flexible. Much better it is for the long run to get a degree with real and generalized knowledge and equally generalized

skills.

Esp. in this uncertain world.

25 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**wswail** → ddavisva • 21 days ago

But the truth is that many, if not most, of LA degree owners are working in fields unrelated to their studies. I disagree with Mr. Carnevale that this says "Go To Graduate School." Just more education... we don't need more.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Raymond** → wswail • 21 days ago

That isn't the point though. Most people who major in philosophy aren't trying to become philosophers. Why do people even think that? I mean really who is a philosopher these days? Very few people are. No, many of these people major in LA undergraduate degrees with the intention of graduating and doing something in the professional world (such as something in politics, law, or business).

10 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**jkline** → wswail • 21 days ago

Going to graduate school IS great advice as soon as you know what kind of grad school interests you. This is probably why older liberal arts grads do well. After some time in business, government, or non-profits they find a suitable career path and get a grad degree in it. LA degrees are excellent for grad programs because they build writing, critical thinking, and analysis skills. These are transferable to many career paths and graduate programs.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Unemployed\_Northeastern** → ddavisva • 20 days ago

"What one really needs in a UG education is flexibility. And the more the better. You'll change jobs, or even careers, and average of 7 times, some more than this. "

Ah, but since employers use HR software that can (and does) auto-block anyone without the proper major, particularly for entry-level jobs, and since the liberal arts are very infrequently considered those proper majors, well, there's a reason why everyone goes to grad school. If you disbelieve me, I suggest you go to the website of your local big corporation and see how many job listings are looking for liberal arts majors.

- Unemployed graduate of a NESCAC liberal arts school, attorney

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**inver** • 21 days ago

I chose to study philosophy because I was interested in it, not because of how much money I would/could make. But what do I know?

14 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**music\_librarian** → inver • 21 days ago

As did I, and then I went to graduate school (not in philosophy). And now I make a respectable living.

8 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Mary Ellen Waithe** → inver • 21 days ago

You've touched on something very important and difficult to quantify: the satisfaction and happiness you get by working at something you love. I love philosophy. It enriches me. I love teaching philosophy. It brings me happiness to see the lightbulbs go on in my students' heads. Total lifetime earnings are easy to measure, but they are not the sole, or even primary measure of living a satisfied life every day, working at something you love.

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**heconsultant** → inver • 21 days ago

Doing what you love will generally lead to a good career because you will apply yourself beyond other's expectations and do well. In the end, others may have more money but you will be satisfied. The last three words of Sam Walton, the founder of Wall-Mart and SAMS were, "I blew it!" Scripture says it best, "Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness and all these things will be added unto you. May God bless,

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**jkline** → inver • 21 days ago

If you can think and write about philosophy, you can think and write about less complex things...like business reports, advertising copy, proposals, business strategy, or government grants. It's a uniquely exceptional area of study as many posters below note.

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**mathmaven** • 21 days ago

It matters that liberal arts majors take a long time to catch up to their peers in other disciplines. Due to the handy phenomenon of compounding, being able to start saving for retirement early in life matters a lot. People who are spending the early years of their working life in lower-income jobs and paying for grad school, maybe even with loans, are less able to start building a nest egg. If they're making \$2K more than their peers later in life, who cares? All of that money and more will be needed to catch up to those peers in terms of retirement savings.

18 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**minerva9** → mathmaven • 21 days ago

Beyond the poverty line, being able to save is more a function of individual choice than it is of income. I make mid-five figures and save far more than most people with twice my income.

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**juillet** → mathmaven • 21 days ago

But if you are able to sufficiently save for retirement to support yourself, who cares? It's just like if you make \$50,000 and your 40-year-old peer makes \$70,000 - someone is always going to make more money than you, but are you personally happy with what you make and is it enough to take care of your needs? Same with retirement - maybe you were able to put away enough to have \$4,000/month during your retirement but your best friend lives on \$7,000/month during his retirement. So what? Your needs are cared for! Success in post-college careers has often been boiled down to earnings over time and it's not that simple.

10 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**joelcairo** • 21 days ago

This entire discussion thread is ridiculous.

^ | 3 v • Reply • Share ›



Guest → joelcairo • 21 days ago

No one forced you to read it, or comment on it.

19 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



breckin • 21 days ago

Predicting salaries 20, 30, or 40 years out from a degree also depends on structural changes in the economy, labor market, technology, and a host of other things. A liberal arts and sciences degree provides a strong, deep, and wide platform of knowledge and skills that can prepare people for flexibility and seizing opportunities because the major is not training for a particular job, it is part of (often less than half of) a bigger package of education that emphasizes breadth, depth, and skills. The major itself is often not what is driving the employment prospects; it is what the major might tell us about a person's interests and willingness, for ability, to develop further technical skills, people skills, originality and creativity, etc. Further, it is important to remember that salary simply isn't the only measure of success. Societies need the teachers and other educators, social service professionals, public and civil professionals, artists and writers, and many others who make important contributions to society; do interesting, fulfilling, creative, satisfying work; but aren't rewarded with the very highest salaries.

19 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



wassall → breckin • 21 days ago

No, we cannot predict salaries 20 or more years out, but we can look back 20 or more years and see what liberal arts degree-holders have achieved financially, and what jobs they currently hold. That's what this report does.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



wassall • 21 days ago

If "much of that wage growth" in those holding liberal arts degrees is due to their obtaining a graduate degree, then it is not the liberal arts degree that is valuable. People from a variety of backgrounds outside liberal arts can earn law degrees and M.D. degrees, for example. And it is not holding an MFA that boosts liberal arts grads' salaries.

21 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



CCHistory Prof → wassall • 21 days ago

But perhaps the liberal arts experience was valuable in earning the graduate degree?

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



tgroleau → wassall • 20 days ago

This was my first thought, what are the graduate degrees? Along with the JD and MD, MBA students can have almost any background. Depending on the state, a variety of undergraduate fields can become K12 teachers through an MAT. Yes, teacher salaries aren't spectacular but I assume that bachelor holding teachers are in the "professional" group. I'd like to see the details but the link to the study had only a purchase option and I'm too cheap to pay for it.

Based on the press alone, this study might simply say that a liberal-arts BA plus a professional graduate degree pays off as well as a professional BA.

In other words, a liberal arts degree prepares you to get another degree and that one will pay off financially. That's not a very strong economic argument for a liberal arts degree.

Disclaimer: Prior to my PhD I learned a liberal arts BA and an applied

Declaration that to my shame, I earned a liberal arts BFA and an applied masters. Given the chance, I'd probably do the same thing all over again, but it was not the most lucrative option available.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**mycantarella** • 21 days ago

Good piece. I agree with some of the comments here that there is confusion on the definition of liberal arts and secondly that we need the broad range of professions that people chose. There are even those who chose a vocationally oriented major who then switch gears to a lower paying but more personally gratifying job later. I was one of those-- corporate executive turned college dean. Much happier, but none of it had to do with my choice of a Political Science major. Like most people my vocational life has had more to do with chance than strategy. What we have to do is a better job explaining to students in college what the skills are that they are getting in their course work, regardless of discipline, that support them in long term work settings and can ultimately lead them to advancement, Solid communications, human interaction and research skills come to mind as the skill sets of highly paid executives.

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**vpostrel** • 21 days ago

This study is about baby boomers (and heavily influenced by the earnings of baby boomers with law degrees and MBAs). The earnings debate is about how heavily indebted recent grads will pay their bills in the short term. I'm sympathetic to the study of liberal arts, but this study is embarrassingly irrelevant.

19 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Unemployed\_Northeastern** → vpostrel • 21 days ago

And of course, newly-minted lawyers and MBAs have their own enormous student loan and employment issues, which was not the case 20 - 30 years ago.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**DarthChewie** → vpostrel • 21 days ago

vpostrel, you've mischaracterized this study, and offered a misleadingly narrow account of the earnings debate.

First, this study is not "about baby boomers." Baby boomers were born from 1946-1964. This study tracked people born from 1948-1992.

Second, data about earnings is not "embarrassingly irrelevant" to the "earnings debate." I take your point that debt should be part of the earnings debate, but unless these students win the lottery, they'll be using their salaries to pay off their debts, so it's useful to know how much they're making.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**cristobal** • 21 days ago

Lifetime earnings are undoubtedly relevant, but from the standpoint of a student trying to figure out where to enroll, how much debt to take on, and what to study, the more important figures pertain to the outcomes of recent grads for specific programs, as Mark Schneider noted. Graduation rates, indebtedness, employment rates, first few years of earnings, loan default rates, success in grad school apps... it's nice to know that liberal arts majors' earnings "catch-up" in their late 50s, but students need data that clues them in to how different programs give them better or worse odds of graduating, getting hired or accepted into grad school, making a living wage, and paying down their loans.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**wswail** • 21 days ago

I find the data marginally important because they are based on a different era that was not globally competitive and did not require specialization. The truth is that many liberal arts grads are working in fields completely unrelated to their studies because we use the BA as a filter for basic employment; skills that are already defined by the 10th grade. This isn't a slight against the BA or a liberal arts education; but it is a slight toward our undeniable and unrelenting push by academics for more and more higher education. We don't need more. We don't need more student debt. We need a connection between the economy and the requisite skill sets, and we don't have that even on a marginal basis outside of the professions (e.g., accounting, lawyering, medicine, engineering). "Go to graduate school!" I find that a lousy conclusion based on correlation and filtering. Beware studies by membership groups for the obvious reasons.

6 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**mtyler** • 21 days ago

Apple and oranges. The study needs to correlate the comparison of liberal-arts majors beginning salaries back in the 60's and 70's to their current salaries and then project the 2010 and 2011 liberal-arts salaries out to the future and do the same for science salaries. The problem with aggregate research is it generalizes too much. The study needs to look at results from as many perspectives as possible keeping the constants constant, not as in this case.

10 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Reythia** • 21 days ago

This article presents some valuable (and unsurprising) information, but it does a really poor job of coming to any deep conclusions.

For example, let's consider a sharp high school student who is skilled at and interested in both, say, business and literature. She's not poor, but money is still tight, so since she doesn't have a strong personal preference between her two top choices of major, the amount of money she'll make after college is highly relevant to her. This article seems to suggest that, since she'll eventually make about the same amount of money per year, finances should be irrelevant to her choice in major, especially if she goes for at least a masters degree in either field.

Except that makes no sense! Sure, let's say that when she's 50-70, she'll make the same amount no matter which field she picks. But what about between 25-50? For ~25 years, she'll make \$5-10k/year LESS as a literature major than a business person -- and that's assuming she gets a higher degree in literature, but not in business, mind! Which, by the way, implies taking out debt, or at least not making much money for another 5-10 years -- while the average

[see more](#)

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**CCHistory Prof** → **Reythia** • 21 days ago

I usually encourage people with that kind of dual interest to double major. ie: I recently had a student talk to me about switching to history from economics, but she really liked (and received excellent grades in) both. I encouraged her to just add the extra 12 hours to her degree plan and replace a few unrelated electives with major courses to meet the requirements for two bachelor's degrees.

These folks tend to be the sharp, motivated 'A' students that can handle the extra course load anyway.

7 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Reythia** → **CCHistory Prof** • 20 days ago



That works for some majors. But, as an aerospace engineer, I can tell you from personal experience that it doesn't work for all combinations. I'd have LOVED to double major in either economics or german language. But since engineering required a full 120 credits by itself, doing so would have meant multiple YEARS of more college. And I simply couldn't afford that, no matter what my interest level was. With just aerospace and a minor in astrophysics, I could barely squeeze in two piddly german classes and still finish in 4 years -- and that's by taking 18-19 credits each semester. I did actually have a friend who double majored in clarinet performance and computer science. It took him almost eight years to graduate, and he was a sharp cookie who took a full schedule the whole time.

My point is, double majoring works in combinations of majors which are closely related and have a lot of overlapping prereqs, and especially in cases where the individual majors don't have huge numbers of required classes. In those cases, taking an extra year of college makes sense, you're absolutely right. But it simply doesn't work for all majors. So a lot of us really did have to choose between multiple completely unrelated areas of interest, or else take (and pay for) 7+ years of school.

4 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Reythia** → CCHistory Prof • 20 days ago

...You can really get a whole second DEGREE with only 12 credit hours (3-4 classes, I assume) added? I knew (obviously) that history and econ were closely related, but I hadn't realized the differences were that small. Shoot. I had to add two full classes just to get the MINOR in astrophysics from aerospace engineering!

(By the way, I'm not saying I don't believe you. I'm just surprised at the amount of overlap.)

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Unemployed\_Northeastern** • 21 days ago

The employment market, via HR software filters that auto-reject X, Y, and Z majors before actual HR staff can see them, through credential inflation, automation, outsourcing, etc, is changing much faster, with seeming permanence, than labor economics can keep up. I mean, I think anyone reading this site is at least vaguely aware of the enormous student loan and lack-of-job time bombs awaiting the legal profession, and yet, the latest backwards-looking, non-student loan-including labor economics study for the legal profession determined that the law degree has a million-dollar lifetime premium over a BA/BS. This came as quite a surprise, and slap in the face, to all of the nation's long-term unemployed attorneys, as well as to those legions working in small law firms for considerably less money than the assistant manager of a McDonalds.

3 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**bdavi52** • 21 days ago

Sadly, it has come to this. How do we value learning? By our net earnings post-learning. And if we have to go out 3 or 4 decades to gather the right kind of income data to drive the right kind of NPV calculations to allow us to say, "See, we told you that majoring in History or Fine Arts or Music or English Poetry would pay off -- and look here! It Does!!!!" -- than, by God, that's what we need to do. Just look at those charts!!

Even more sadly, the people this study is targeting....those millions of 18 yr. olds who are choosing Marketing or Finance or some other Professional or

Pre-Professional major don't really care. They stopped reading after the paragraph that points out that Arts & Science Grads "start out near the bottom". Who wants to start out near the bottom? How will I get the car I want, the clothes I want, and my ultimate dream house (granite countertops and hardwood floors) if I "start out near the bottom?!! To heck with that nonsense.

Of course the studies reveal nothing we did not already know. If you're smart, well-educated, ambitious, dedicated, curious, open-minded, and not afraid of hard work (qualities which are shared by many A&S majors but which, by no

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**nsdonohoe** • 21 days ago

Individuals in the 51-65 categories, babyboomers, entered a marketplace in which "on the job training" was more the rule than the exception. A college degree, Liberal Arts or not, helped to get you in on the ground floor and grow. Employers preferred to train new graduates in the ways of their company culture, expecting loyalty, hard work, and offering such opportunities as graduate school tuition assistance and ultimately, a retirement package. Today, a college graduate who can include an internship on his or her resume, along with a degree that demonstrates understanding of concepts and issues that are current and relevant to the position, will be the preferred candidate. Employers find training to be expensive and actively seek out grads who can step into a position and perform.

I find the sentence, "...but much of that wage growth is due to the graduate degrees they received" puts the whole article in a questionable perspective.

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