Are Humanities Students Less Employable? Student and Employer Perspectives and Recommendations for Harvard

SOCIOL 1104: Higher Education: Institutions, Inequalities, and Controversies
Final Research Paper

Cindy Jung

Introduction

When people ask me about what I want to do after graduation, they often specify if I want to become a historian or a curator, implying that there are only few career options that are closely related to my background in history or humanities disciplines generally. Furthermore, conversations around the intended careers of humanities students frequently allude to a persistent and widespread assumption in our culture: that the history and english majors of the world have less promising job prospects compared to those in STEM or pre-professional areas of study. The concerns that humanities graduates will struggle more to find stable, lucrative, or meaningful employment has been a timeless topic in higher education but also a timely one. With mounting student debt and tuition costs, students have increasingly viewed higher education in terms of a return on their investment, leading colleges and universities to pitch themselves to prospective students as a boost for employability or create programs in more practical realms like entrepreneurship. Despite worries that it would devalue the liberal arts and the humanities in particular, such "bottom-line" approach by higher education institutions is mirrored by the continued enrollment decline in humanities departments in the past ten years nationally (Jaschik 2017).

Harvard College has seen similar enrollment changes, and the topic of where the humanities and the liberal arts stand at the present moment has consistently elicited a range of responses from students and administrators alike. Unsurprisingly, many spokesmen for Harvard like former President Drew Faust have defended the institution's pristine liberal arts identity. In one of her letters to the Harvard Magazine, she wrote, "Students in the humanities learn how to think critically and communicate their ideas clearly, and those transferrable skills lead to rewarding lives and careers in every field of endeavor," adding that "Interpretation, judgment,

and discernment will always be in demand." (Faust 2014). Numerous student commentaries have echoed Faust's view, while others have taken a more cynical stance. For instance, one Crimson writer opined on the funnel into the big three industry—finance, consulting, and tech—that dominates the job culture at Harvard, quoting Ezra Klein's statement that those industries are "taking advantage of the weakness of liberal arts education"; in other words, "Wall Street is promising to give graduates the skills their university education didn't" (Korn 2013). Likewise, growing efforts by humanities departments to strengthen job-oriented advising events—the title of one of the panels in 2016, "The Humanities and Your Financial Future" is especially telling— also suggest that Harvard students are not immune to anxieties about the repercussions of following their genuine interests in the humanities. Although a Harvard degree may offer a greater psychological reassurance about postgraduate success than non-elite credentials, being "well trained also to see, compare, reason, and decide" due to a liberal arts background does not always translate into a sense of confidence about one's competitiveness in the job market (Faust 2014).

Therefore, I was motivated to investigate three main questions that arose from the aforementioned realities: at Harvard, 1) how do humanities students think about their job prospects relative to those of non-humanities concentrators? 2) what are the main reasons behind their position on the issue? And finally, 3) which facet of their undergraduate life has most set them up for success in the labor market? Moreover, my research garnered employers' insights on how concentration or academics in general figures into their consideration of an applicant, the role of a liberal arts education in graduates' job-readiness, and more. I also tried to capture administrative perspective on employment concerns around the humanities and what constitutes an appropriate reaction to declining enrollment. Ultimately, the commonalities and divergences

that emerge from student, employer, and administrator perceptions have informed my

recommendations for various actors of the university to help alleviate the stresses of securing

employment in the short-run, benefiting the undergraduate population at large but geared

towards addressing the hardships of humanities concentrators.

Literature Review

There is abundant literature commentating on the changing enrollment patterns in the

humanities in the late twentieth century and at the present moment, often described as indicative

of a "crisis" in the field. Almost every humanities field has seen a rapid drop in its share of

degrees granted, declining continuously since before 2008. The absolute number is lower as well,

with the big-four humanities fields—philosophy, history, languages, and english—at risk of

falling below 100,000 degrees for the first time in almost 20 years (Schmidt 2018). Many

analyses stress that the demise of humanities majors is uniquely bad in its latest phase, compared

to similar drops throughout the 1970s into the mid-1980s. The decline we are seeing since the

recession does not correspond to a decline in undergraduate enrollments overall or in the liberal

arts at large. Some say the current trend is unlikely to be reversed because the humanities are

"institutionally more alone and more vulnerable than they have ever been, more at the mercy of a

university's financial decisions" (Hayot 2018).

The exodus from the humanities is commonly attributed to "many forces [that] are

pushing for education [to be] viewed as a commodity, as an expectation with a return," which

have influenced students to increasingly view higher education in practical, "bottom-line" terms

(Ellis 2018). According to the University of California at Los Angeles's Higher Education

Research Institute, 88 percent of freshmen surveyed in 2012 stated "to get a better job" as a very

important reason to attend college, then an all-time high in the institute's long-running survey

(Ellis 2018). Even in Cavoti's report a few decades prior (1983, pg. 3), surveys measuring the attitudes of contemporary college and university students "demonstrate a strong expectation that higher education should contribute toward employability." Sikula (1992) states, "Students and parents generally view a business major as better preparation for the labor market, especially when the economy is weak," explaining that strong economic forecasts often fuel renewed interest in the humanities. He also mentions college students' growing preoccupation with their material welfare over life goals like developing a meaningful philosophy of life. Overall, attempts to explain the decreasing popularity of the humanities agree that employment-related concerns have altered student views of what they should be studying in college.

Scholars have also implied that actual career outcomes have contributed to such shifting perceptions, discussing how humanities students have fared in the job market in comparison to students of STEM or pre-professional concentrations. Despite the general consensus that humanities students fall on the lower end of the salary distribution of college graduates, profitability is just one of the many aspects of graduates' careers that are explored. Moreover, many scholars started their research with the assumption the humanities puts students at a disadvantage in the job market but found contrary or mixed results. For instance, a study derived from a deep concern with the future of humanities education on American campuses concluded that "Though a sizeable aspect of humanities graduates have not been launched on professional careers during the early post-college years, their work experiences have not been discouraging" (Sharp and Weidman, 1989, pg. 556). Yet a bigger proportion of the humanities graduates experience greater difficulties with embarking on careers commensurate with their educational background right after graduation (Sharp and Weidman 1989). It also showed that humanities graduates did not differ dramatically from graduates in other fields during the early career stage,

in terms of prestige of jobs, pay, and extent to which jobs entailed substantive work. Similarly, Cavoti (1983) writes that humanities students perceived their study as "contributing relatively more to the personal development of three critical skills in this culture—writing, speaking, and understanding written information" than the business majors in his study. Lastly, Sikula (1992) states, "despite earning lower salaries, recent humanities graduates were as satisfied with their work as recent graduates in other fields," adding that humanities and social sciences graduates exceed their business, engineering, or STEM counterparts in an array of soft skills valued by employers.

Some scholarship argues for evaluating the worth of studying the humanities and the liberal arts through other measures. One article cites various manifestations of the decreasing support for the humanities on college campuses and the politics surrounding it; for instance, during the Obama era the federal government suggested that Congress should link schools' eligibility for federal student aid to measureable characteristics of colleges' effectiveness, such as graduates' salaries, graduation rates, and tuition affordability, and many universities have diminished support for the humanities out of practical considerations. The article is in part sympathetic to such a pragmatic move yet at the same time states, "it is simplistic, and ultimately mischievous, to suggest that students should choose their major on the basis of 'graduate earnings because "There is no way to put a precise monetary value on different types of learning" (CQ Press 2013). The rationale comes in part from the view that the "future of the world's democracies hangs in the balance" if nations don't prioritize the general learning and higher-order thinking humanities education encourages," and from a 2011 survey of hiring managers in which more people stated that most students would be better served by pursuing a broad-based education than a vocational education (CQ Press 2013). A similar piece in defense

of the humanities claims that as college students abandon the field "employers lament the fact that college graduates lack critical thinking, writing, and communication skills" (Hiner 2012). Apparently, today's complex and fluid economic condition has led some employers to seek "broader set[s] of skills and...higher levels of learning and knowledge," contrary to popular assumptions (Hiner 2012).

Ultimately, prevailing scholarship on the questions at stake suggests two major conclusions: 1) career-related anxieties are critical to popular beliefs about the humanities and employability, but 2) exactly what is causing those notions remain undecided, with the career statistics on humanities graduates revealing little about those questions. Besides, it is unlikely that students are reacting directly to data points about their post-college occupational fate, satisfaction with work circumstances, or expected earnings, although they probably have a general conception of variations in job market rewards by concentration area. Thus, the literature around my topic motivated me to illuminate how humanities concentrators navigate the job process in comparison to the non-humanities students, and more importantly, why. I am primarily interested in how humanities students become cognizant of the heightened challenges with securing employment once they start looking actively for jobs, and how those hardships influence their views of their choice to study the humanities. Statistics on graduates' job outcomes are not part of my analysis because they are unrepresentative of the difficulties encountered in the process of finding jobs, not to mention significant barriers to accessing job-related data on Harvard graduates by department.

I also decided alumni's job statistics would not be very helpful for deciding whether there is any "truth" to the notions underlying students' beliefs about their employability. Instead, employer views on the ideal employee would be a more reliable basis for understanding the real

life value of a humanities degree. If employment-related stresses are primarily driving students

away from the humanities or forcing them to regret their decision to enter the field, employers'

perspectives on the usefulness of a liberal arts/ humanities education could suggest that those

anxieties are misguided, or provide ideas for alleviating the challenges faced by students. Student

perspectives of what employers want from applicants may diverge from what employers say that

they prioritize, but both vantage points have influenced my suggestions for better supporting

students of the humanities in their career search.

Research and Data Collection Methods

In order to obtain student perspectives, I first conducted an anonymous survey of 58

humanities concentrators in different houses who are seniors, with the last question asking for an

email address if the person was willing to be interviewed. Survey questions were designed to

collect basic information that I aggregated to draw broad conclusions on humanities students' job

search status, desired industry type, participation in finance or consulting recruiting, and other

characteristics. The survey also asks for respondents' opinion on the relative difficulty of

humanities concentrators' job search process, which factors—coursework in or outside their

concentration, extracurriculars, and Office of Career Services—most prepared them for the job

market, and other relevant issues. Seniors were my target subjects because they are going

through or have gone through the process of applying to jobs and interviewing, and are best

equipped to reflect on their concentration, extracurriculars, and other aspects of their time as an

undergraduate in relation to their career prospects.

Concentration (Joint is counted twice, once for each concentration)	Number of Survey Respondents
English	12
History	12

History and Literature	6
African and African American Studies	2
Folklore and Mythology	1
Classics	2
Comparative Literature	1
Government	5
History of Art and Architecture	3
History of Science	1
East Asian Studies	1
Theater, Dance and Media	1
Linguistics	1
Psychology	1
Philosophy	2
Music	1
Social Studies	2
Romance Languages and Literatures	1
Visual and Environmental Studies	1
Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies	1
Environmental Science and Public Policy	1

Figure 1: Concentration of Survey Respondents

In addition to this quantitative data, I have conducted eleven qualitative interviews also with seniors who are concentrating the humanities, all of whom had taken the survey and indicated their willingness to be interviewed on the form. The interviews took advantage of this overlap, asking students to provide more nuanced or detailed explanations of their survey responses. In my first few interviews, I asked a rather generic question in regards to the relationship between concentration and employment—"Has your academic experience prepared

you for your job search process?"—that I had included it in my survey. However, I quickly realized that there were two main ways through which concentration tended to shape students' careers search: giving students a sense of clarity on their job vision, or making them feel qualified for employment. I thus changed my interview questions to incorporate this distinction, but my survey stayed the same since I had circulated it before starting interviews and had already gotten many responses. Overall, the interviews constituted my main evidence base because my subjects elaborated on topics in ways that the survey did not permit, such as their perspective on the mission of the liberal arts and its relevance today, and the desired type of career-related services provided by the OCS and humanities departments.

Interviewee	Concentration	Interview Date
Student 1	Social Studies	11/14/18
Student 2	History	11/12/18
Student 3	History	11/11/18
Student 4	Women and Gender Studies	11/12/18
Student 5	History (formerly Classics)	11/10/18
Student 6	English	11/6/18
Student 7	Classics and History	11/13/18
Student 8	English (with a secondary in Computer Science)	11/11/18
Student 9	History and African American Studies	11/8/18
Student 10	History	11/28/18
Student 11	English	11/5/18

Figure 2: Student Interviewee Profiles

I also interviewed employers across industries to demonstrate their key evaluation criteria and the relative significance of applicant's area of study. As with student surveys, I ensured anonymity and confidentiality of employer interviewees to encourage candidness and their willingness to be interviewed. My outreach strategy involved in-person outreach at the Nonprofit, Government, and Global Health Fair Employer on October 25, 2018 and the Public Service Recruiting Day the following day, as well as email outreach via contacts on the Crimson Careers Employer database and those provided by the OCS coordinator for On-Campus Interviews. Employers from corporate (2 marketing roles, in different consumer goods companies) and nonprofit (2 education, 1 public health, 1 academic) sectors are represented; my attempts to maximize the diversity of industry were limited by general non-receptiveness to my interview requests.

Interviewee	Industry Type
Employer 1	Consumer Products (marketing)
Employer 2	Consumer Products (marketing)
Employer 3	Education Non-profit
Employer 4	Education Non-profit
Employer 5	Public Health Non-profit
Employer 6	Academia

Figure 3: Employer Interviewee Profiles

My expectation was that employers look primarily for several essential competencies for the jobs they recruit for, and there are numerous aspects of an applicant's profile or resume that

are indicative of those qualities in their eyes. I assumed that one's concentration hardly ever serves as a disadvantage or advantage on a resume, and is only relevant in an interview if the applicant can elaborate how it helped them cultivate central skills or experiences. Given these personal biases, I asked recruiters to articulate what makes an applicant competitive before asking specifically about the relationship between a student's area of study and his or her qualifications. My last question for employers pertained to their perception of the benefits or shortcomings of a liberal arts education for getting jobs, which obviously has implications for the employability of humanities students.

Recruiters' views aided my understanding of the most desired skills or experiences for full-time positions generally and how successful applicants usually obtain those qualifications, allowing me to put student concerns about employment into perspective. Moreover, I inquired about any common characteristics employers discern in track records of successful candidates. Responses to these questions suggested that internships or extracurricular activities spoke most loudly for an applicant's fit within an organization or role, although employers also discussed instances where certain a student's concentration was closely correlated with his or her competitiveness.

My last qualitative interview was with a high-level administrator relevant to the division of the arts and humanities; the number of administrators I could speak to was also limited by their unresponsiveness to my requests. Nonetheless, his responses validated students' struggles with translating their humanities background into career opportunities and their desire for greater exposure to humanities-related careers. Meanwhile, he advocated for preserving the liberal arts character of Harvard's curriculum, which was corroborated by recruiters' emphasis on internship experiences and overall positive commentaries on the competitiveness of a humanities

background. Hence, his input was central to my proposals for how OCS and humanities departments could better support students of the humanities in their efforts to enter the labor market.

Now I want to acknowledge potential limitations of my research, a primary being that I did not collect data on non-humanities seniors in order to keep the scope of my project manageable. Therefore, I did not have the means to compare the aggregate data (on job search status, participation in finance or consulting recruiting, etc.) of humanities students and their perception of their relative difficulties in finding a job. Including STEM concentrators in my project might have revealed their unique hardships in the career process that humanities students have a limited understanding of. For instance, it is possible that STEM students face a more competitive job scene in exchange for having more clearly defined pathways and recruiting structures, making it equally or more difficult to secure employment. Another major limitation of my study is that I did not ask for my survey respondents' demographic information like race, gender, and socioeconomic status in my attempt to ensure complete anonymity. Thus, I was prevented from analyzing how students' social and cultural capital facilitated their entry into certain industries or companies or affected their choice of concentration.

While it is worth noting my preconceptions going into my research, I strived to construct neutral questions and prevent my personal biases from affecting my conversations with my interviewees. I was very mindful not to convey my prior notions about my central research questions, OCS, the liberal arts, or career disposition of humanities students. Firstly, I assumed that many humanities students do feel like they face greater barriers to securing interviews and jobs because it is more difficult for them to convince employers how their undergraduate education led them to pursue a particular profession or industry. I also suspected that they

struggled more because of their stronger leaning towards industries that are less centralized in their recruiting and receive less support from the university. As an important caveat, I presumed that humanities concentrators faced only a moderately greater challenge; it has always been my impression that there are very few professions that require hard, STEM-based skills. It has therefore appeared to me that Harvard students are on a roughly equal playing field in competing for the most jobs, including the most sought-out positions in consulting and finance—industries with interviews that require a lot of networking and preparation and research outside of the academic curriculum for success. Secondly, I expected the majority of my subjects to have a mildly negative view of the Office of Career Services and the viability of the liberal arts in the current economic climate.

<div align="center">*Findings*</div>

Students

The majority of my survey respondents and interviewees, 74.1 percent and 90.9 percent, respectively, expressed that the job search process is harder for humanities students compared to non-humanities students. Three main reasons for this predominant view emerged from my study.

The first major reason was that the humanities are connected to fewer obvious pathways in contrast to "STEM people [who] generally have a track built into their concentration" (survey text entry), leading to broader and unclear career options. Students repeatedly voiced that academia was one of the only job expectations that they saw as being built into the humanities curriculum. Although the most popular industry preference on the survey was graduate schools, those respondents nonetheless noted that they struggled more than non-humanities people to find jobs. This may speak to the toughness of the academic job market, the tendency for humanities concentrators without to default to graduate studies, or the arduous and long process of actually

obtaining a esteemed role in academia. At the same time, students did not necessarily criticize their concentration for causing their lacking sense of direction, or imply that their experience in their major *should* clarify specific job routes for its students. Pursuit of interest seemed to have mainly influenced their choice of major, some stating that they knew from the outset that going into their field would not illuminate their postgraduate options. For instance, Christopher Hopkins'19 said, "I knew I was interested in social justice so I chose something that would allow me to explore that, and that in turn reinforced my sense that this is what I want to do with life" (Interview on 11/14/18). He was satisfied with his concentration for strengthening his commitment to social causes, which was also the expected outcome of his coursework, although it has by no means elucidated his thoughts about jobs. Likewise, many of my subjects' attitude towards their major was marked by the experience of "enjoying" what they study and the high priority they placed on academics relative to their peers, suggesting that they perceived the purpose of their coursework beyond its connection to employment.

Students did not necessarily resent that their concentration failed to narrow down their career options, as also seen in the motif of *self-selection* as a contributing factor to their career ambiguities. Matthew Rodriguez'19 said, "Students who don't really know what they want to do go into humanities thinking it would lead to a lot of options open," and "therefore when they have to start thinking about jobs they don't really know [what they want to do]" (Interview on 11/12/18). It was an interesting observation that individuals with uncertain postgraduate vision are attracted to the humanities in the hopes of gaining a more concrete sense of their career paths, but know that they would still end up with "a lot of options," or a pretty broad understanding of jobs suitable for them. A high-level administrator referred to self-selection of a slightly different kind; he said, "if your number one interest is in making money you are unlikely to major in the

humanities" (Interview on 11/20/18) Hence, he further argued, "Interpretations of graduates' salary data should account for the fact that many people who opt for the humanities are not primarily interested in gaining immediate profits, compared to economics or engineering students" (Interview on 11/20/18). It is hard to verify the existence of bias against income-centric professions among Harvard students because I collected no information about how much lucrativeness mattered in a career for them. Nonetheless, their choice of major could have been influenced by their relatively weak motive to figure out their career preference early during college or to land a very high-paying first job out of college.

Of course, humanities students were by no means cavalier about jobs as underclassmen or as seniors. For instance, Tyler Jenkins'19 has been heavily involved in the IOP since freshman year, saying, "I always preferenced extracurriculars [over academics], I felt like that would serve me better in the long-run than what I'm learning about the byzantine empire...it was like a cost-benefit analysis" (Interview on 11/11/18). Even Arthur Schott-Lopez'19, who is and has always wanted to go into academia, had "an internal sigh of relief" when switching from the most hardcore humanities concentration—classics—to history in order to access greater real life opportunities. On the one hand, these reflections show that humanities students have concerns about the impracticality of their major at varying points of their time in college, but they also highlight that the students chose and stayed with the humanities regardless of such worries.

Furthermore, students suggested that their confusion about job paths was not just inherent to the humanities, pointing to the second major reason that humanities students face harder job prospects: inadequate advising for industries other than the "mainstream" ones at Harvard (consulting, finance, and technology, or more broadly, companies that participate in on-campus recruiting). The common sentiment was there was not enough of an established pipeline, or

"funnel," for individuals who do not want to go into those pathways that are dominant at Harvard, with the top three industry preferences on my survey being "Government, law" "Nonprofits, think tanks" and "Journalism, Writing, Publishing" after "Graduate schools." These grievances often suggested that the Office of Career Services perpetuated the funnel that is ingrained in Harvard's culture, for instance saying, "there is no real structure in place for introducing students to potential employers, and most of the staff [at OCS] only know about business and consulting opportunities" (survey text entry) Hopson'19 even suspected that there might be an **"**implicit pressure from the administration to continue that pipeline for the typical industries because it wants to see its graduates in powerful positions [in consulting or finance] so they'll bring back prestige and wealth." Insufficient assistance with navigating the vast majority of employment sectors proved to be problematic even for humanities students who were more certain about their desired careers, as embodied in comments from a Julia Wiener'19 who wants to find a job in combatting sexual violence. Recounting her futile efforts to seek help from OCS and career advisors in her house, she said, "they could have showed me my options more so that I could go out and explore them in my summers" (Interview on 11/12/18). While her Women and Gender Studies professors were more helpful, she added that departments usually suggest "you can do absolutely anything [with a humanities degree] but don't tell you what any of those things are" (Interview on 11/12/18).

Industry Type	Number of Survey Respondents
Education, Sociology, Social Services	12
Government, Law	19
Non-profits, Think Tanks	16
International Relations, Global Development, Human Rights	8
Medicine, Public Health, Life Sciences	2

Advertising, Marketing, Public Relations	10
Consulting	8
Finance	5
Graduate Schools	20
Startups and Entrepreneurships	9
Journalism, Writing, Publishing	14
Media, Entertainment, Sports Management	8
Museums, Galleries, Libraries	5
Art, Theater, Comedy	9
Environment, Energy, Food	2
Data Analytics, Technology	1
Fashion, Retail, Consumer Products, Hospitality	7

Figure 4: Industry Preferences of Student Survey Respondents

As such, Harvard's disproportionate resources for finance and consulting—perpetuated by OCS, institutional culture, and departments—leave many students to fend for themselves as they try to venture into careers that are virtually invisible in the campus recruiting scene. Lack of guidance for options beyond the McKinseys and Morgan Stanleys of the world is a university-wide issue but may affect humanities concentrators more acutely due to their industry orientation. Only one of my interviewees was interested in (and found a job) in consulting and no one said the same for finance, and 72.4 percent of survey respondents reported not having recruited for either of the two industries. Although the implications of this data are limited by absence of information non-humanities students, the numbers are most likely much higher for students in economics or STEM.

Humanities Concentrators' Participation in Finance or Consulting Recruitment

- Yes
- No
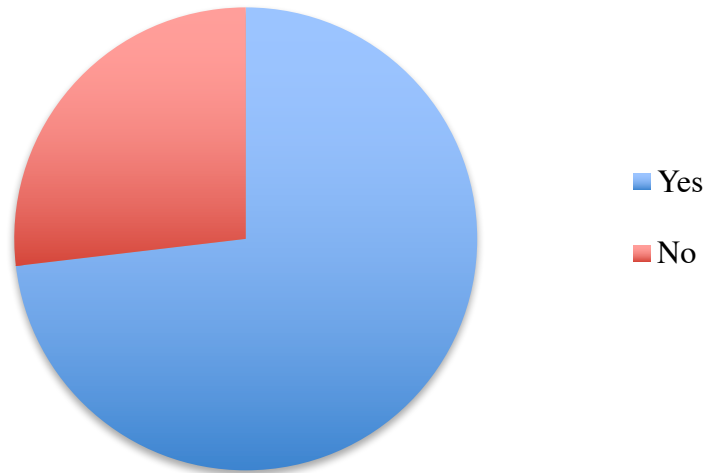
Having to navigate the job process independently, students consistently identified extracurricular activities as being most useful for getting information about employers, tapping into relevant networks, and excelling in interviews. Some students who envisioned doing work related to their academic passion sought out activities that were similar to their coursework in subject matter so that their "main extracurricular is basically academics" (Hopson 11/14/18). Others like Jenkins'19 deliberately joined organizations aligned with their career interests because they knew that their classes would be essentially irrelevant to their job search. But extracurriculars frequently ended up being helpful by chance; Miranda Sadler'19, who is considering law school down the road but unclear about her career in the short-run, said that her varsity track team was most instrumental to getting interviews due to the internal network it provided (Interview on 11/6/18). Likewise, Justin Walthier'19, the one student who had secured a consulting job said, "the only reason why I knew about consulting was that there was this strange pipeline from mock trial to consulting...pretty much every single person ended up working at Bain or BCG, which is like bizarre" (Interview on 11/13/18). The network, peer

advice, and leadership experience that mock trial provided were the key to his success in case interviews.[1] He felt extremely prepared for the recruiting process without any help from OCS or other university services; he also had no backup career plans other than consulting, further showing that mock trial was imperative to gaining familiarity with the job process and securing employment.

The importance that interviewees attributed to their extracurricular activities was in line with responses to the survey question about the most critical factor in one's job search—56.8 percent said extracurriculars, compared to 22.4 percent for academics. This trend was observable across industries, albeit more defined among students who preferred careers with little established support systems at the College. But students' reliance on independent efforts—considering extracurriculars as a form of self-effort—illuminated the need for better assistance from advisors or professors, as will be discussed in the Recommendations section.

Another commonly cited hindrance to humanities students' employability was the restricted job options caused by stronger demand for technical and quantitative skills from employers. Here, it is worth noting that this view could be influenced by the outsized visibility of STEM-oriented careers at Harvard, rather than representing the actual dearth of jobs that humanities students are eligible for. What was more interesting, though, was the concern that an individual is "more employable even in traditionally humanities-dominated industries if [he or she] know[s] how to code, have experience with statistics, etc." (survey text entry). Jenkins'19 said, "my number one regret academically is that I didn't get a stat secondary. I feel as though almost everyone is looking for….'I know what data entry is' or something even at a basic or

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[1] Mock Trial refers to an extracurricular program in which students simulate a real trial, in order to learn about and navigate the legal system in a competitive manner. Interscholastic mock trials take place on all levels including primary school, middle school, high school, college, and law school.

tangential level that I don't have" (Interview on 11/11/18). Another history concentrator stated, "I often see friends who concentrate in the humanities get a secondary in economics or applied math to be "marketable," adding, "I do think I would really have to highlight the analytical skills my concentration has given me to get a job—and even then, I think I would have had to have taken a couple of economics classes to go into consulting" (survey text entry).

The weaker marketability of humanities-based soft skills was both explicitly stated by students and implied through the ways that they talked about what they took away from their concentration. Other than critical thinking and writing, students had a hard time precisely identifying the competencies they cultivated through their major and mentioned a greater knowledgeablity in certain subject areas rather than specifying skills they learned. Mitchell Jones'19, an English concentrator with a secondary in Computer Science, stated that in terms of career computer science classes and math classes was most important: "They look best on a resume, help me get interviews, helpful in the role that you get [after graduation]...which I hate to say it because I still love the spirit of humanities" (Interview on 11/11/18). He believed that educational experience is better in the humanities and stressed that that he has enjoyed his classes and engaging faculty in the English department, in line with the common belief that concentration and academics is valuable as a means of exploring one's genuine interests. Regardless, his assessment of the outcomes of his English coursework was neutral at best, as he said, "Yeah, I thought and wrote critically, but honestly I don't know if it extends beyond fiction or scholarship. People always say, 'oh, English trains you in communications, and that is so key whatever you do,' but I wouldn't call it communications" (Interview on 11/11/18).

For Johns'19, having a practical secondary gave him greater "credibility" in entering the CS space although he does not plan on pursuing hardcore CS roles like an engineer. Similarly,

Jenkins'19 expressed that statistical skills on a resume would have been instrumental to getting more interview requests for politics jobs he is interested in, which is reasonable considering the quantitative elements involved in studying or working in government. He also believed that secondary credentials were by no means necessary to learn quantitative competencies; one can easily learn those skills on their own, over a shorter period of time, without taking college classes. Irregardless, he described secondaries as a plus for employability because it accounted for the possibility that "some firms don't want to invest their time and money for people our age anymore," saying, "I mean, it's a cost benefit calculation right? Why pay for training them in basic data analysis, coding, and what not if people can just switch careers" (interview on 11/11/18). Schott-Lopez'19 also suggested that secondaries boosted one's competitiveness, although the skills they cultivate are easy to obtain through other channels or after college. He stated, "you can teach yourself [those skills] the summer before going into your job. You don't need a degree for that. But all of these places are like we might as well go with the person who already has the background/knowledge" (Interview on 11/10/18).

Of course, there were respondents who did not think that humanities concentrators were less employable, either because qualifications for jobs come from factors outside of one's control or from non-academic experiences. One student alluded to the role of social and cultural capital—"I think this all depends on your parents, network and connections (which is shown by research)"—while some other comments read, "it is what you make of it" and "opportunities outside of consulting or finance are harder for anyone regardless of concentration" (survey text entry). A respondent noted that she has received internship offers from firms like Goldman Sachs and Facebook and will be working full-time at Google, concluding, "I think that its just important to pursue extracurriculars that point towards interest in corporate America and have a

strong link between concentration interests and the job. Also having leadership is important—but again these are traits that all students must have" (survey text entry).

Although these responses took the opposite stance on my research inquiry, their underlying notions did not actually conflict with those of students who said humanities students had a more difficult time. True, tenuous connection to career paths, disproportionately little guidance for non-typical industries, and devalued skill set due to the changing labor market were worrying for many humanities concentrators, and they alluded to ideas for how different university actors could address these issues. But in the end, their expectation was not for their coursework to make them more career-ready or more aware of their postgraduate options; instead, their suggestions for improvement entailed illuminating internship or career opportunities for humanities students or guiding them to make academic decisions that would be more advantageous for finding jobs. This shared understanding of concentration and academics as a whole to be separate from employment—and valuable on their own—was embodied by the uniformly positive student views of their liberal arts education. Highlights included a reflection that drew the connection between liberal arts experience and democracy:

> The education in Brazil doesn't teach [students] history, or how to think. Even in the US, which has liberal arts education, the demographic that voted against Trump are primarily affluent, college-educated...at least most of the white people who voted for Hilary had a liberal arts background. You see, those who didn't have a liberal arts education don't know the dangers of voting for a demagogue. Through philosophy, literature, history, political theory...they teach us how to understand the past and build a better future…this sounds so empty…but when you get exposure to those ideas you really do become better citizen because you learn to think and not to conform (Interview on 11/10/18).

Bailey Colfax'19 remarked, "there is a value in forcing people to expand and try different things, especially at Harvard that is educating people from such different backgrounds for such different opportunities, so it's important to have everyone to some common ground," adding that

as Harvard students we are "passing on intellectual heritage" of the institution. Another succinct comment reiterated the reason why humanities, which in some sense encapsulates the liberal arts more than STEM fields, is essential for society: "[they] cultivate a knowledge of history, empathy and community...things that are really lacking in the world" (Interview on 11/14/18).

Employers

Recruiter views offered a solid means to verify student perspectives on the devaluation of humanities-based skill set in the labor market, the importance of nonacademic experiences to build qualifications, and other topics, given their obviously limited generalizability due to the number of employers I interviewed. When asked about the factors that make an applicant competitive, all interviewees emphasized 1) soft skills like being a problem-solver and a self-starter, adaptability, collaborative skills, and communications abilities and 2) a demonstrated interest in the role and organization. As expected, both categories entailed varying things depending on the nature of the job or company; for instance, creativity and level of engagement with generation Z were especially important for marketing positions, whereas for non-profits the focus was more on alignment with the mission of the organization.

Hence, humanities concentrators did not appear to be at a noticeable disadvantage based on these key qualifications for different industries, and more, they actually had an edge over STEM students according to some employers. Susan Akkad underscored the ability to be an agile learner about consumer orientation in the incredibly consumer-centric marketing landscape today—she described the sector as "a combination of psychology and anthropology"—explaining that a humanities background was therefore more important than ever (Interview on 11/15/18). She stated that such applicants tend to have a more "well-rounded education," which "demonstrates that you are plugged into how people think and behave," and spoke less favorably

of individuals with "cookie-cutter business experiences" who she found to be more rigid and ultimately less competitive (Interview on 11/15/18). Since marketing roles are not highly prohibitive for humanities students but are often seen as such for its analytical component, her comment was particularly validating for the usefulness of humanities-based skill sets. And although it may be anomalous for humanities education to act as a distinct advantage for employment, every recruiter I interviewed said that they can "teach pretty much everything" to employees once they are on the job. Such willingness to train new employees (as long as they meet the essential criteria, often including adaptability) provided reassurance that a lack of technical skills would not hurt the chances of otherwise qualified humanities students.

At the same time, employers' praise of the various soft skills was not always unqualified, as articulated by Jonathan Figueroa from Pepsico who said that hard skills were very important as well. While he stated that the humanities instill valuable "frameworks of thinking," such majors fell short in cultivating hard, business skills that are essential to thriving at his company (Interview on 11/30/18). This emphasis on both the theoretical and technical was reflected in his view that studying liberal arts comes with tradeoffs; one learns "very different perspectives and ways to think about society and socioeconomic problems, but that has nothing to do with helping drive the bottom line" as a pre-professional or a more quantitative concentration would (Interview on 11/30/18). When asked about the commonalities that emerge among successful applicants, he talked about involvement with clubs like the Hasty Pudding and Harvard Student Agencies and marketing/media internships. He also stressed that football players or swimmers tend to be predominantly represented in finance because of the huge networks and training in competitive spirit that athletics provides. Thus, the implications of his comments were that

humanities-based proficiencies alone were not recipes for success, but that experiences outside of academics could fill in the skills gap.

Overall, the predominant message from employers was that there were certain sets of desired skills common to many industries, and those qualifications were frequently signaled through internships or extracurricular activities on a resume. Of course, these insights also spoke to the role that humanities background plays in one's employability; it is neutral or beneficial the majority of the times, although it could be a disadvantage in cases where substantial technical abilities are also sought after. But whichever is the case, non-academic experiences were the clearest testaments to an individual's capacity to work well with others, think quickly on their feet, start initiatives, and excel in professional settings in other ways, not to mention his or her continued passion for a particular field. Whereas employers did not explicitly state which aspect of the undergraduate life was most critical to getting an interview or interviewing successfully, recruiters hardly ever located an applicant's potential to thrive at their organization in his or her concentration or coursework.

Recommendations

In terms of ways that Harvard can improve, student and employer interviews mostly pointed towards devising an advising system that better illuminates the plethora of career or industry options for students who want to work outside of consulting, finance, or technology. Regrettably, the dominant recruitment narrative on campus casts professions outside of those sectors as marginal or niche, due to the outsized visibility and institutional support for the big three sectors. Even when students know that there is a much more vast, unexplored world of jobs out there, they feel like they are entirely on their own in navigating them. Although current economic trends may disfavor humanities graduates to a small extent, the greater problem seems

to be the inadequate assistance for humanities students including those who have more clarity on career preference. As also suggested by employer views on the most valued skills and teachability of job-specific skills, it is less that there is a serious dearth of career paths other than academia or museums that are related to the humanities, but that those links remain hidden to students.

The new advising program should focus on showing students concrete industries that they can pursue summer and full-time positions in, based on discussions about their interests and strengths. It should also connect them to internship opportunities themselves and to successful alumni who can speak about their experiences at companies or professions that are relevant to the advisee. Since internship experiences are best indicative of applicant's qualifications and enthusiasm for a sector in the eyes of recruiters, they warrant a separate advising team that would also be responsible for service and research opportunities in the summer. The other, complementary advising corps would exclusively focus on connecting students to full-time opportunities, while both corps would provide frequent career counseling to accommodate students' shifting priorities and postgraduate visions. Harvard's career services should no longer default to the explanation that inequitable support for certain sectors is rooted in the inevitable characteristics of those industries' hiring timeline or structures. Hence, the new system should build on the current operations of OCS but bring special attention to constructing many more pipelines to internships and professions related to the humanities and the arts. Each advisor would not only have expertise in particular industries but also in particular concentrations, so that students of all areas of study know exactly whom to seek help for careers that are more relevant to what they study.

An important consideration is "where this apparatus sits," in other words whether the guidance should come from departments, an enhanced version of OCS, or some other party (Kelsey 11/20/18). Having humanities faculty members spearhead the new initiative could benefit from their deeper knowledge about the practical applications of their respective concentrations or about the career profiles of alumni from their departments. The faculty advisors who usually only counsel students about their concentration coursework (or at times just make sure they are meeting their requirements) could shift the conversation to be more career-oriented. But given the research and teaching workload of professors, the more realistic place for this "apparatus" would be a reformed OCS or a new group of administrators hired by departments specifically for the purpose of career advising. Either way, the advisors (for internships and for full-time opportunities, as previously discussed) would maintain close relationships with faculty in their assigned concentration areas to understand their background. This way, advisors can frequently request professors for alumni recommendations and ideas for where concentrators with certain orientations could find employment, at the same time letting them know that the bulk of the responsibilities in career services do not fall on them.

Faculty could also play a more active role in boosting humanities students' employability by helping bolster their academic portfolio. Professors can guide students towards making academic choices that are better aligned with their internship or career plans, but this does not have to be as drastic as telling students to choose classes or majors with the most perceivable benefits to employment. Jenkins'19 argued for advising that encourages students to strike a balance between learning for its own sake and augmenting their career-readiness, saying, "there is this narrative perpetrated by the college that you should take whatever interests you, which is great, but it has slung so far in that direction that we've forgotten to advise freshmen to be like

you should probably also take a class or two that will help you in the longer-run" (Interview on 11/11/18). For instance, secondary in a non-humanities field may not be a panacea, especially if employers are willing to teach technical skills, but for some students having the added credential could make their resume more attractive. Considering how recruiters for highly competitive positions winnow out applicants based on the resume, a proof of the ability to code, perform statistical analysis, or interpret sales data even on a basic level could make a difference.

As my interviews revealed, humanities students at Harvard tend to be self-motivated to use their classes as channels to explore their passions, rather than strategizing their course selection for maximum returns on their investment. Therefore, a slightly more practical bent to academic advising is unlikely to erode the fundamental liberal arts ideals of the college. And after all, Harvard should cannot continue to ignore the fact that at least in the short-run, an entirely humanities academic background or lacking summer experiences are going to hamper students' entry into most industries no matter how excellent of a scholar someone is.

Lastly, advising-focused reforms could come hand-in-hand with moderate changes to classes in a more pragmatic direction. Course offerings could be diversified to include pre-professional classes in business, journalism, communications, or other fields that humanities students would be especially interested in entering. These classes would serve as counterparts to the essentially pre-professional courses that STEM departments already offer, such as Statistics 123: "Applied Quantitative Finance," which uses a "methodology motivated by real problems from the financial industry" and is "designed for those seeking an understanding of the quantitative challenges on Wall Street" or Computer Science 164: "Software Engineering," students will learn "principles of software engineering and best practices… projects include web apps with front-end UIs (mobile and desktop) and back-end APIs." A more conservative

alternative to instituting new courses would be to encourage professors to be very conscious

about incorporating practical elements of theoretical concepts to their classes, making "the

applied value of humanists' work apparent without forfeiting the values of the liberal arts

enterprise.

Dean Kelsey was not alone in resisting the "the world from starting to coming back into

the curriculum" of Harvard, as humanities students understand their education here to be

valuable largely for the experience of scholarship (Kelsey, Interview on 11/20/18). Nor did they

resent their academic background for harming their chances at employment, despite expressing

feelings of being at a disadvantage in the job market compared to non-humanities students for

different reasons. Fortunately, the main causes of elevated stress that emerged from my study are

amenable to improvements through the university's new approach to career resources. Harvard

should and most likely always will champion a broad-based undergraduate education, but

strengthening its graduates' employability is not mutually exclusive to maintaining such noble

mission. When humanist graduates can understand the utility of their academic background,

reconciling their cognitive dissonance caused by the enriching yet unpragmatic aspects of their

studies, this will only bode well for the future of the humanities at Harvard and across the higher

education landscape.

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Appendix

Interview questions

Students:

1. Can you talk about your concentration - why you chose it, what you like or don't like about it, what kinds of skills it's helped you develop?
2. What is the place of your concentration and academics in your undergraduate experience?
3. How do you see the role of concentration in giving you clarity on your job preference/ vision (follow-up: relative to extracurriculars, internships, term-time work, etc.)?
4. What about concentration's role in making you feeling qualified for employment (follow-up: relative to extracurriculars, internships, term-time work, etc.)
5. Do you think your closest friend groups assign a similar importance to academics as you do? (If yes, what do they study/ do they have similar thoughts about careers?)
6. Do you think the job search process is different humanities students versus non-humanities students, and if so, in what ways?
7. What are your reasons for your answer to the previous question?
8. Is there anything that your department/OCS can do differently to help humanities students feel more career-ready?
9. What do you see as the role of the liberal arts in preparing graduates for the job market/ making people employable? Do you see this changing according to changes in the economy and job market?

Employers:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement in recruiting for your organization?
2. What type of interview do you conduct?
3. What kinds of colleges and universities do you recruit at?
4. What makes an applicant competitive for your company or the role that you recruit for? What are the key skills/experiences you look for in an applicant?
5. What is the proportion of skills you expect individuals to possess coming in versus ones that can be learned on the job?
6. Where do you usually see that applicants developed the key competencies or qualities, when you look at a resume or during an interview?
7. Does your company/industry attract certain types of students? Is there any pattern you can identify among competitive applicants in terms of major, extracurricular activities, or work experiences?
8. Are there any majors that are overrepresented in applicant or employee pool?
9. How does concentration or academics in general figure into the holistic consideration of an applicant? Does it come up during interviewees?
10. Are there any challenges with recruiting that are specific to your company or industry?
11. What do you think is the role of liberal arts education in preparing students for jobs in your industry and for jobs at large?

Administrator:

1. Can you describe your goals as the Dean of the Arts and Humanities Divison?
2. Concerns about the impracticality of humanities has been around for a while and certainly prevent today, as reflected in the drop in humanities enrollment numbers nationally as well as at Harvard. What do you make of this trend?
3. Why do you think many humanities concentrators here express that they struggle more in navigating the job process than their STEM peers?
4. Generally speaking, do you think humanities concentrators less competitive in the job market in the short-run? Why or why not?
5. In light of declining enrollment, what are department doing to ensure their students feel more prepared for employment? Has the division rolled out any initiatives to help humanities students clarify their career paths/ visions?
6. What should department-led career advising for humanities students look like? To what extent should/ can departments play this role, as opposed to the Office of Career Services or some other body?
7. Do you see the need for more career-oriented course offerings in the humanities to respond to increasing demand for practical education?
8. What do the enrollment numbers at Harvard and the way Harvard responds to the trend mean for other higher education institutions?
9. Would you like to add anything else or suggest additional angles or questions that would shed light on my research topic?

Interviewee list:

- Students (concentration, interview date; all were in-person)
  - Student 1: Social Studies, 11/14/18
  - Student 2: History, 11/12/18
  - Student 3: History, 11/11/18
  - Student 4: Women and Gender Studies, 11/12/18
  - Student 5: History (formerly Classics), 11/10/18
  - Student 6: English, 11/6/18
  - Student 7: Classics and History, 11/13/18
  - Student 8: English (with a secondary in Computer Science), 11/11/18
  - Student 9: History and African American Studies, 11/8/18
  - Student 10: History, 11/28/18
  - Student 11: English, 11/5/18

- Employers (position, industry type; all were by phone)
  - Employer 1: Senior Vice President (Local and Cultural Platforms), Consumer Products, 11/15/18
  - Employer 2: Customer Marketing Manager, Consumer Products, 11/30/18
  - Employer 3: Founder & CEO, Education Non-profit, 11/12/18
  - Employer 4: Recruitment Specialist-Northeast, Education Non-profit, 11/16/18
  - Employer 5: Program Coordinator, Public Health Non-profit11/8/18
  - Employer 6: Community Relations Fellow, Academia, 11/5/18

- Administrator (date; in-person)
  - Administrator 1, 11/20/18