

A. OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES

2021

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS & SCIENCES
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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ISBN: 0-87724-144-9











This publication is available online at www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators.

Suggested citation: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2021).

The views expressed in this report are those held by the authors and are not necessarily those of the Officers and Members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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Introduction

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A Note on Interpreting the Information

 This report draws on three major national surveys—the American Community Survey, the National Survey of College Graduates, and the Gallup Alumni Survey. Unfortunately, each classifies academic fields and disciplines in a different way, and thus the broad field categories shown in the following graphs vary somewhat depending on the

by Field of Bachelor's Degree, 2019

whether they are satisfied

What College Graduates are Looking for in a Job, by Field of Bachelor's Degree, 2019

The information of what college graduates are looking for in a job provides helpful context for a discussion of their employment outcomes. For instance, the data reveal that humanities graduates are similar to college graduates generally in whether they consider key aspects of work important.

Humanities majors, however, were less likely than business or health/medi4 (o)15ties547
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8
(by Field of Degree) versus Those without a Four-Year Degree, 2018

ANNEX 8
of conversations about the value of college degrees, in part because they are relatively easy to measure. Median annual earnings for workers with a terminal bachelor's degree in the humanities stood at \$58,000 in 2018, which was somewhat below the median for all college graduates (\$63,000) but similar to the earnings for graduates from the behavioral/social and life sciences and considerably higher than those with a baccalaureate degree in education (\$46,000). The relatively low median earnings

Figure 1. Earnings by Field of Bachelor's and Highest Degree, 2018

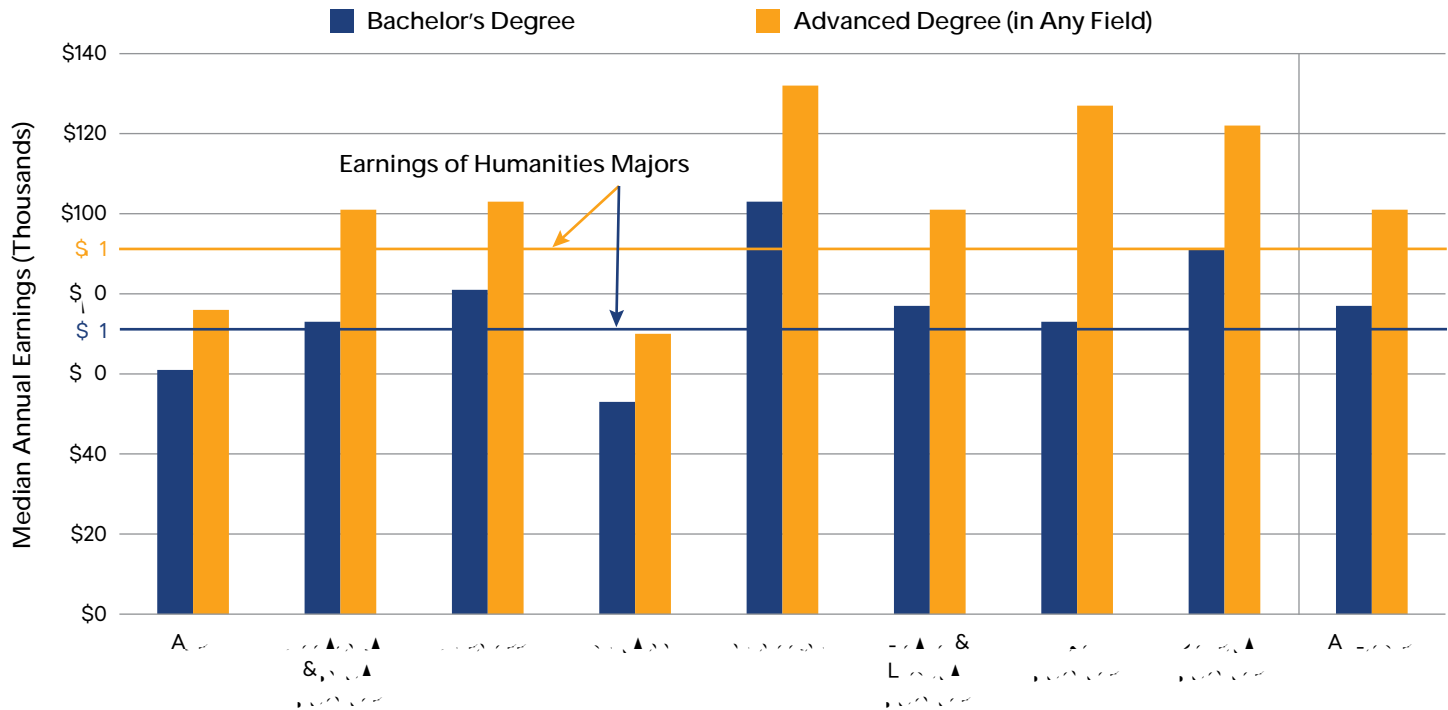
As shown in Figure 1, approximately 41% of humanities graduates held an advanced degree (similar to the share of all college graduates who had earned such a degree).¹⁰ As with other college graduates, obtaining an advanced degree made a substantial difference in the earnings of humanities majors (A)-3 (q0uy 4)0 (e)-4.9

Earnings by Field of Bachelor's and Highest Degree, 2018

Among college graduates generally, women earned substantially less than their male counterparts, though the 16% gender gap in earnings among holders of terminal bachelor's degrees in the humanities was smaller than the gap among graduates from business, the physical sciences, or the behavioral/social sciences.

For most fields, including the humanities, the gap in earnings between men and women was larger for those who had earned advanced degrees. But the difference between humanities graduates with only a bachelor's and those who had gone on to earn an advanced degree was modest compared to that found among life or health/medical science graduates.¹³

Humanities Compared to Other Fields of Bachelor's Degree, 2018



Humanities graduates have substantial median earnings in their peak earnings years (from their late 40s into their 50s), they earned less than graduates from business and several STEM fields. The median earnings of terminal bachelor's degree holders generally were 8.5% higher than those of humanities graduates whose highest degree was a bachelor's.

The differential between every higher-earning field and the humanities was almost as large if not larger when the focus

shifts to workers with an advanced degree. A particularly dramatic example is the life sciences, whose advanced degree holders earned 40% more than their counterparts in the humanities, even though median earnings of the two fields' graduates were almost identical for those with just a bachelor's degree. Advanced degree holders generally earned 11% more than humanities graduates with the same level of education.¹⁴

Confidence in the U.S. Economy by Field of Bachelor's Degree, 2019

Graduates from the high side and the arts on the low side, from 46% to 55% of each field's graduates agreed they had "enough money to do everything I want to do." Conversely, from 31% to 41% of the graduates from those "typical" fields reported they had worried about money in the past seven days.

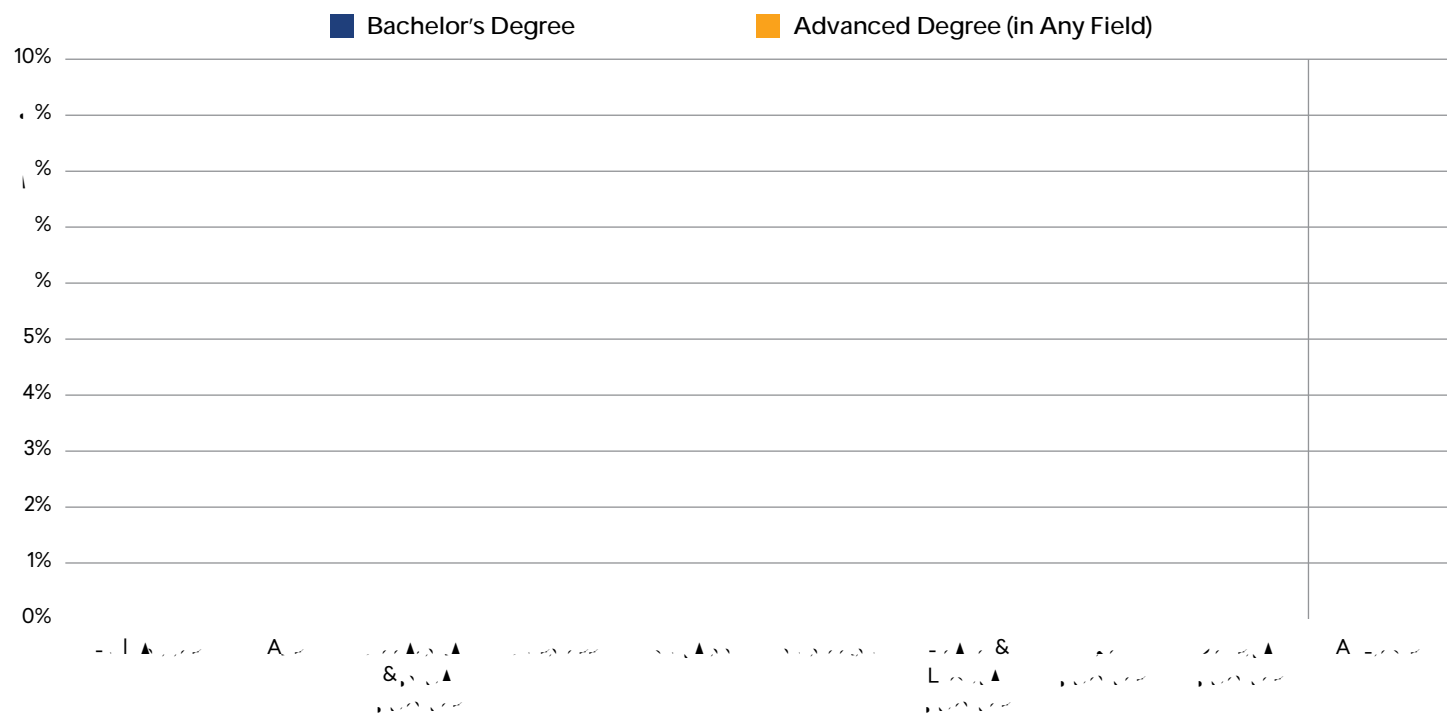
Graduates from the humani/C-0.017 Tw 0 -1.Tw 0 -1.Tw 0 -1wI, (

by Age and Highest Degree, 2013–2018

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Monthly Labor Review*, 2019, Table 3.1.1.

As a result, the unemployment rate for humanities graduates can also play an important part in perceptions of the postcollegiate outcomes of humanities graduates. Like graduates from every other field, holders of bachelor's degrees in the humanities experienced a sharp drop in unemployment from the Great Recession to the COVID-19 pandemic. From 2013 to 2018,

Unemployment Rates by Field of Bachelor's and Highest Degree, 2018



Unemployment rates among terminal bachelor's degree holders had declined since the Great Recession, humanities graduates in 2018 had a slightly higher level of unemployment than the bachelor's-holding population as a whole. The 3.6% unemployment rate among terminal bachelor's degree holders in the humanities compares to 2.9% among graduates from all fields combined. Education and health/medical sciences graduates had the lowest levels of unemployment among terminal bachelor's degree holders (2.0%).

For every field, unemployment was lower among advanced degree holders than among those with just a bachelor's degree. Among graduates with an advanced degree, the humanities' rate (2.4%) was virtually identical to that of business and engineering. Education graduates had the lowest rate among advanced degree holders (1.4%).¹⁷

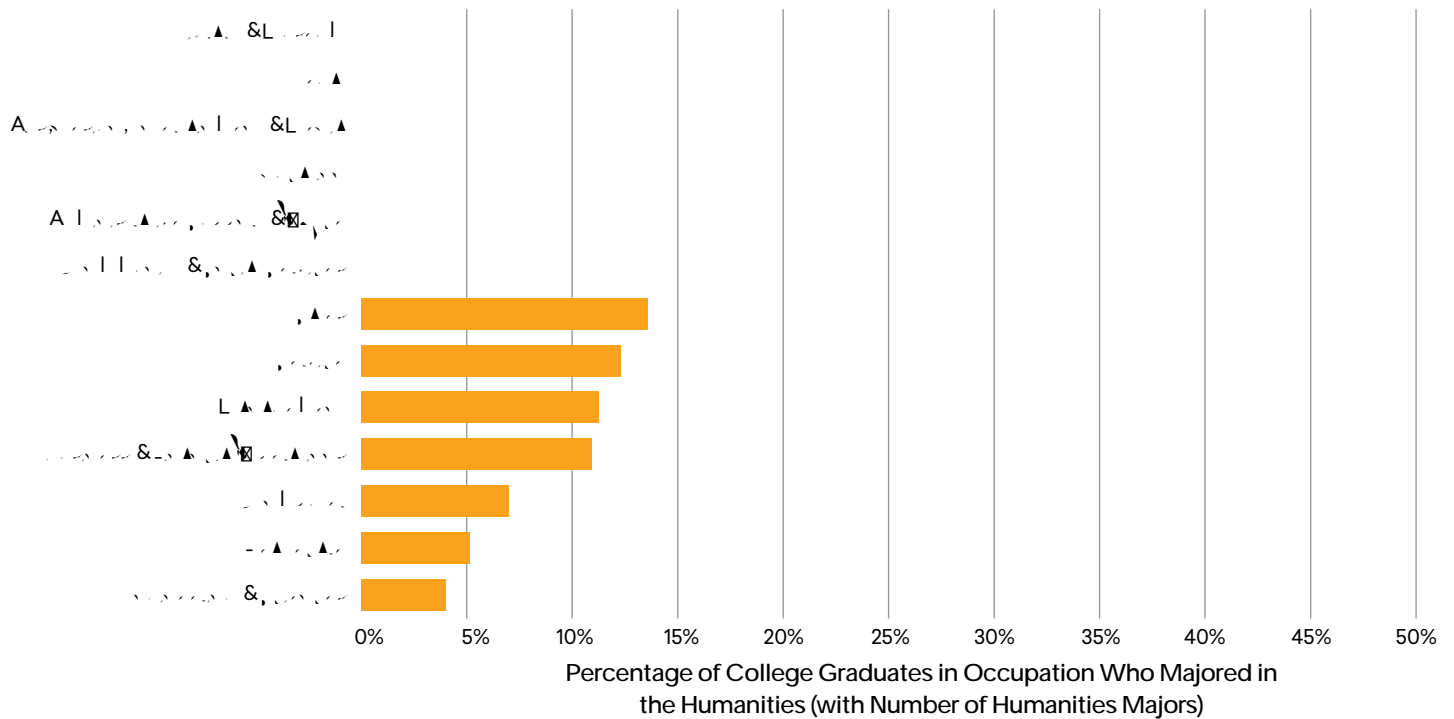
Satisfaction with Median Earnings, by Field of Bachelor's Degree, 2019

Source: American Association of University Professors, "Satisfaction with Median Earnings, by Field of Bachelor's Degree, 2019," https://www.aup.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/2019-01-06_Satisfaction-with-Median-Earnings-by-Field-of-Bachelor's-Degree-2019.pdf

As shown in graduates' median earnings, when college graduates were asked about their satisfaction with various financial aspects of their job, humanities majors' responses were similar to those of college graduates in general. The figure above highlights a few of the fields to which the humanities is often compared.

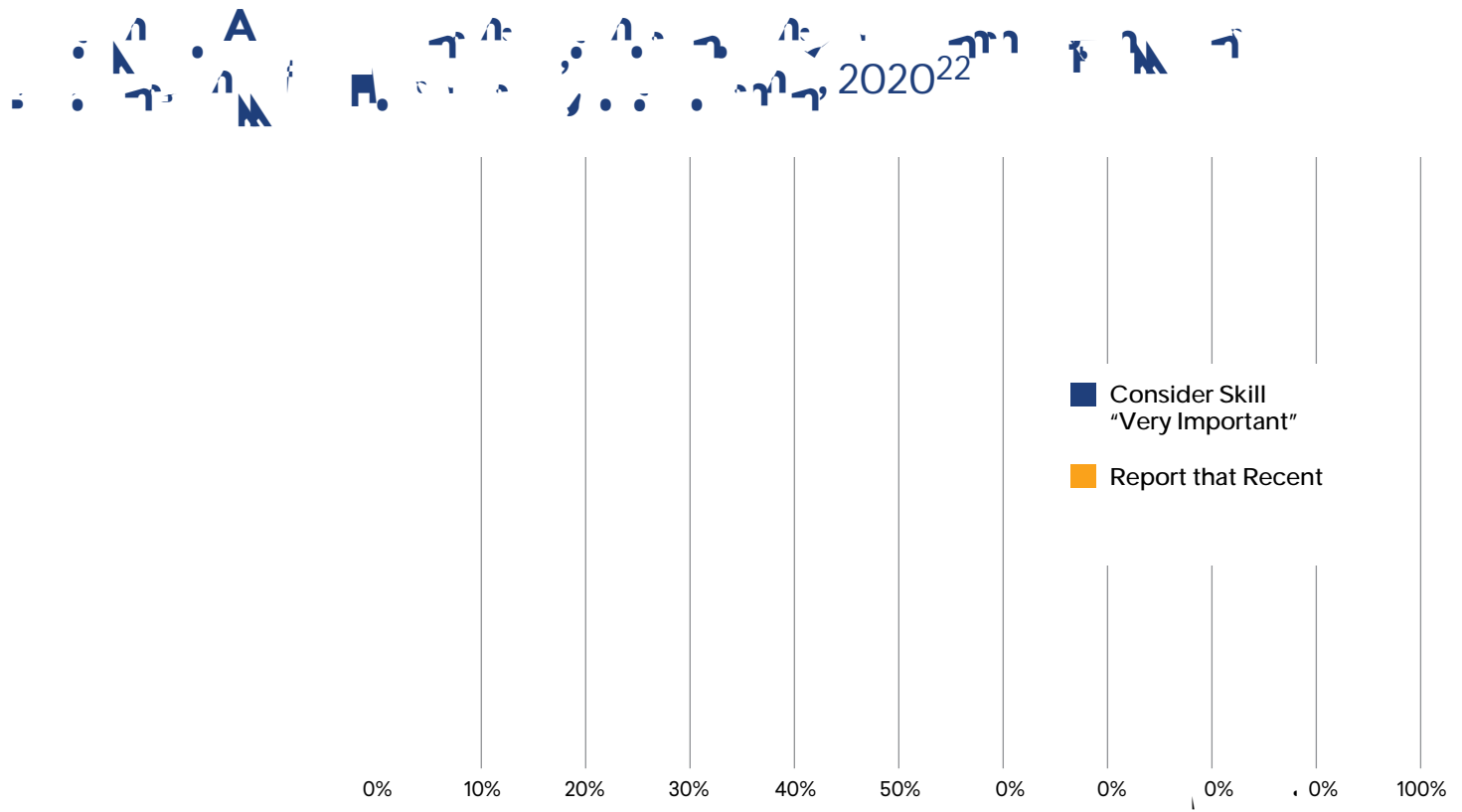
On salary, 74% of humanities graduates expressed satisfaction, a slightly smaller share than among college graduates generally (78%) but almost 11 percentage points smaller than for engineering graduates. Graduates from education, engineering, and health/medical sciences were somewhat more likely to express satisfaction about their opportunities for advancement than humanities majors. The share of humanities graduates expressing satisfaction with job security was very similar to the shares in the other fields examined here.¹⁸

Humanities Majors in Occupations, 2018



Humanities majors can be found in every broad occupation category, they account for a widely varying share of the college graduates in each, ranging from more than a third of the graduates in library/museum jobs to less than 5% of those in engineering/sciences positions. In addition to the sizable share of baccalaureate-holding library/museum workers they represented, humanities majors accounted for more than 20% of the college graduates in both legal and arts/media jobs.

Given the disparities in the size of each occupation, however, the largest number of employees with a bachelor's degree in the humanities, over 1.1 million, was found in the education category. Over 900,000 humanities graduates were employed in management positions. Substantial numbers were also employed in administrative support/office, business/financial, and sales occupations (with more than 600,000 humanities graduates in each of these categories).²¹

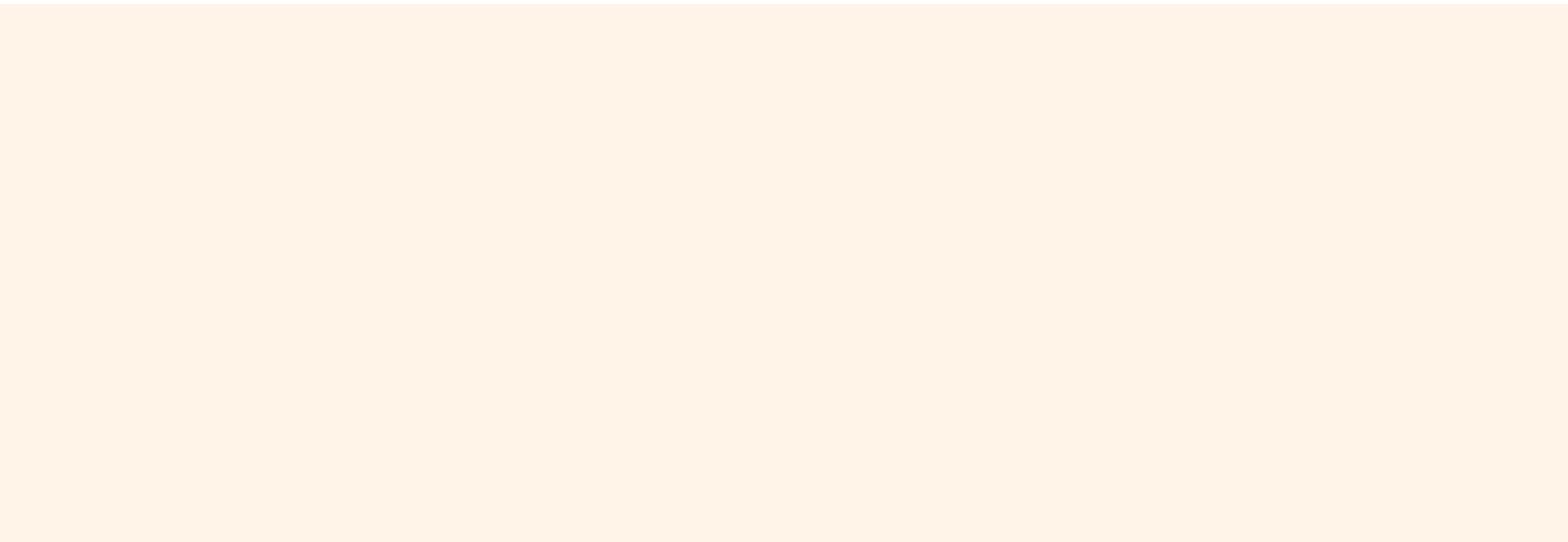


Further study is needed to assess how their college coursework prepares them for employment. What research does exist highlights the value to employers of a range of skills thought to be developed in humanities courses. For instance, a recent survey of 500 employers commissioned by the Association of American

Colleges & Universities found that a majority of employers considered several such skills—including writing, public speaking, and collaborating with people of different cultures—to be very important for their employees. For every skill, a smaller share of employers believed recent college graduates were “very well prepared” to use the skill in the workplace.²³

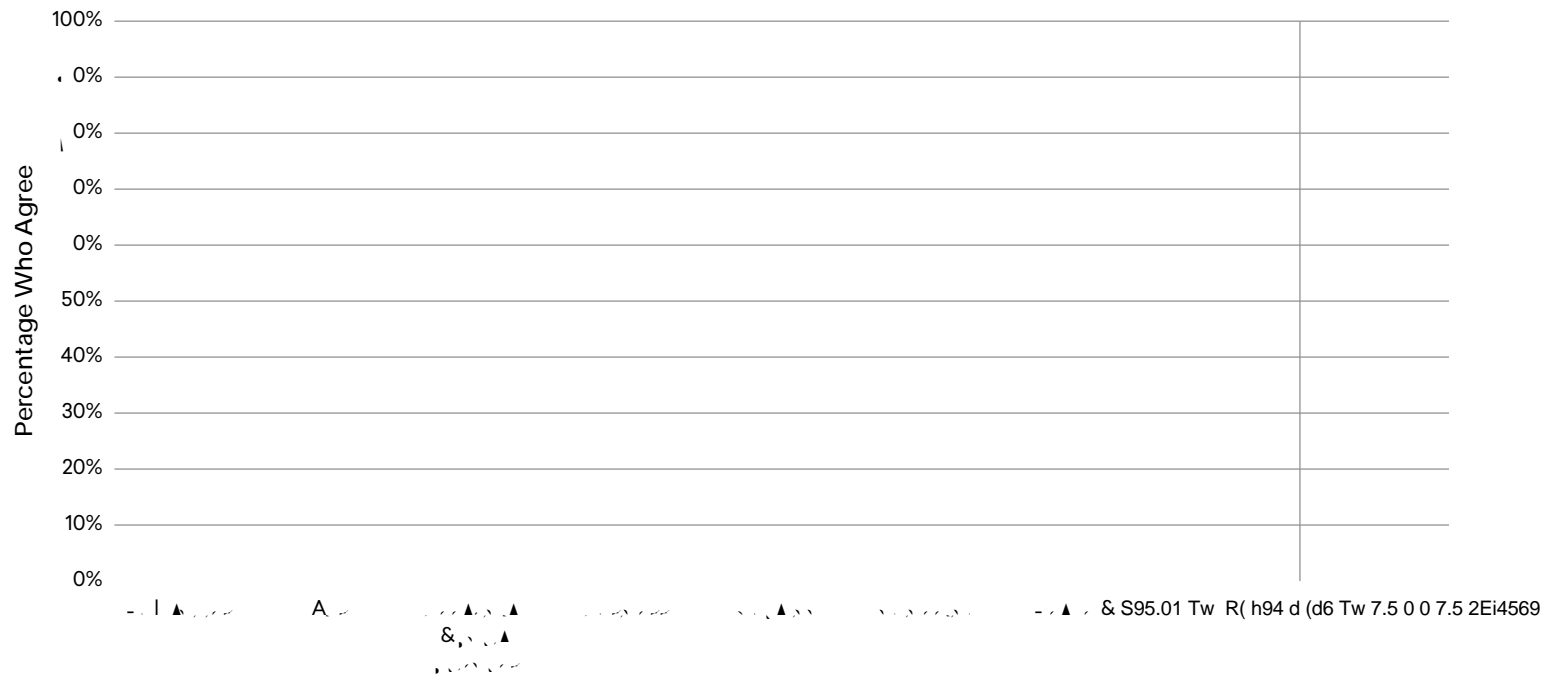
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Amninnu' (Self-Reported), 2019



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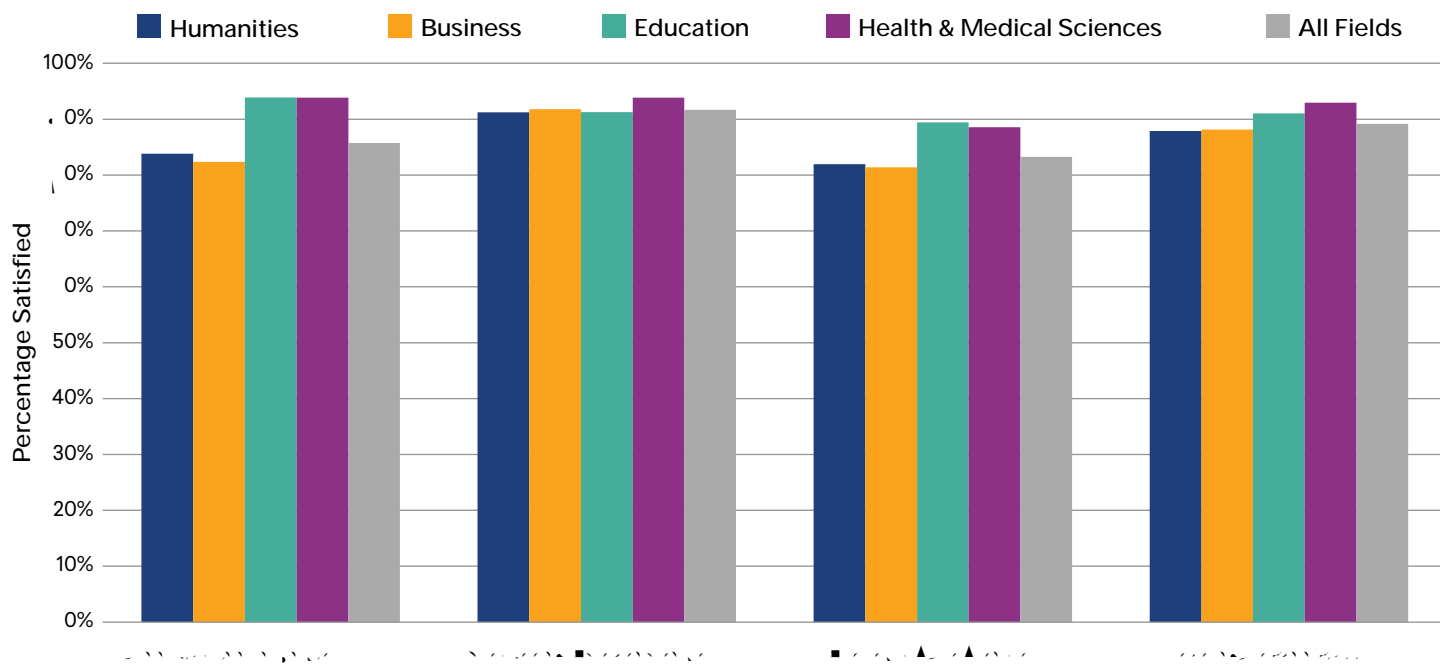
Percentage Who Agree with the Statement “I am deeply interested in the work that I do,” by Field of Bachelor’s Degree, 2019



Analysis of job satisfaction reveal similarities between the humanities and other fields. For instance, more than half of humanities graduates believe they have the “ideal job” for them, which was similar to college graduates in general but a modestly smaller share than for education or STEM majors (with the exception of behavioral/social sciences graduates).

Approximately two-thirds of humanities graduates reported they were “deeply interested in the work that I do,” and a nearly equal share indicated that their job provided the “opportunity to do what I do best every day.” This was again similar to the share for college students in general but a somewhat smaller percentage than for education or STEM graduates (again excluding behavioral/social sciences majors).²⁶

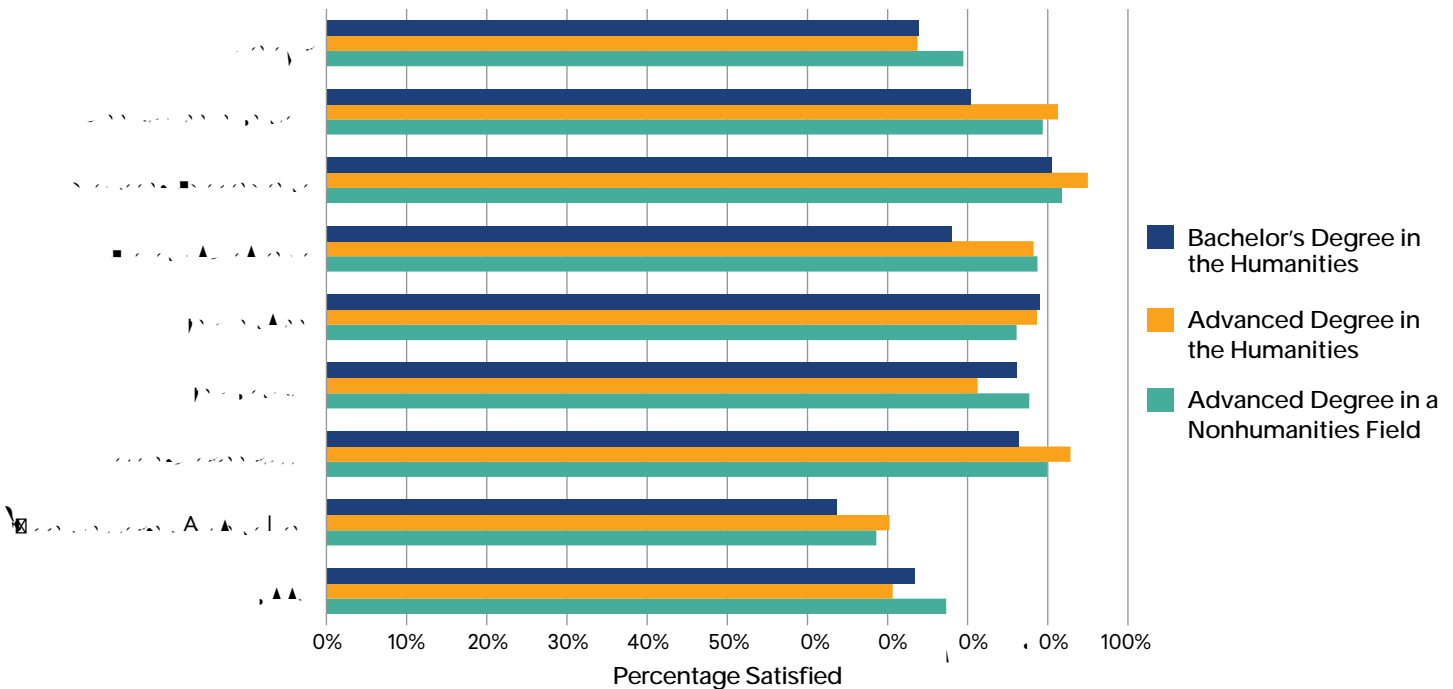
Job Satisfaction, by Field of Bachelor's Degree, 2019



to college graduates generally in their attitudes about some of the less tangible aspects of their job. The shares of graduates with bachelor's degrees in the humanities who expressed satisfaction about the degree of independence and level of responsibility in their job were very similar to the shares for fields to which the humanities is often compared. Two fields,

however, stand out for the satisfaction their graduates derive from their work.²⁷ Education and health/medical sciences graduates were appreciably more likely to express satisfaction (in comparison both to the humanities and to college graduates generally) with the intellectual challenges and contributions to society afforded by their jobs.

Job Satisfaction, by Highest Degree, 2019



Among those with a bachelor's degree in the humanities, the rates of satisfaction with various aspects of their job tended to be at least somewhat higher among those who had gone on to complete an advanced degree. Humanities majors who had earned an advanced degree (in either the humanities or a nonhumanities field) were appreciably more likely to be satisfied with the contribution their work allowed them to make to society as well as the intellectual challenge of their job.

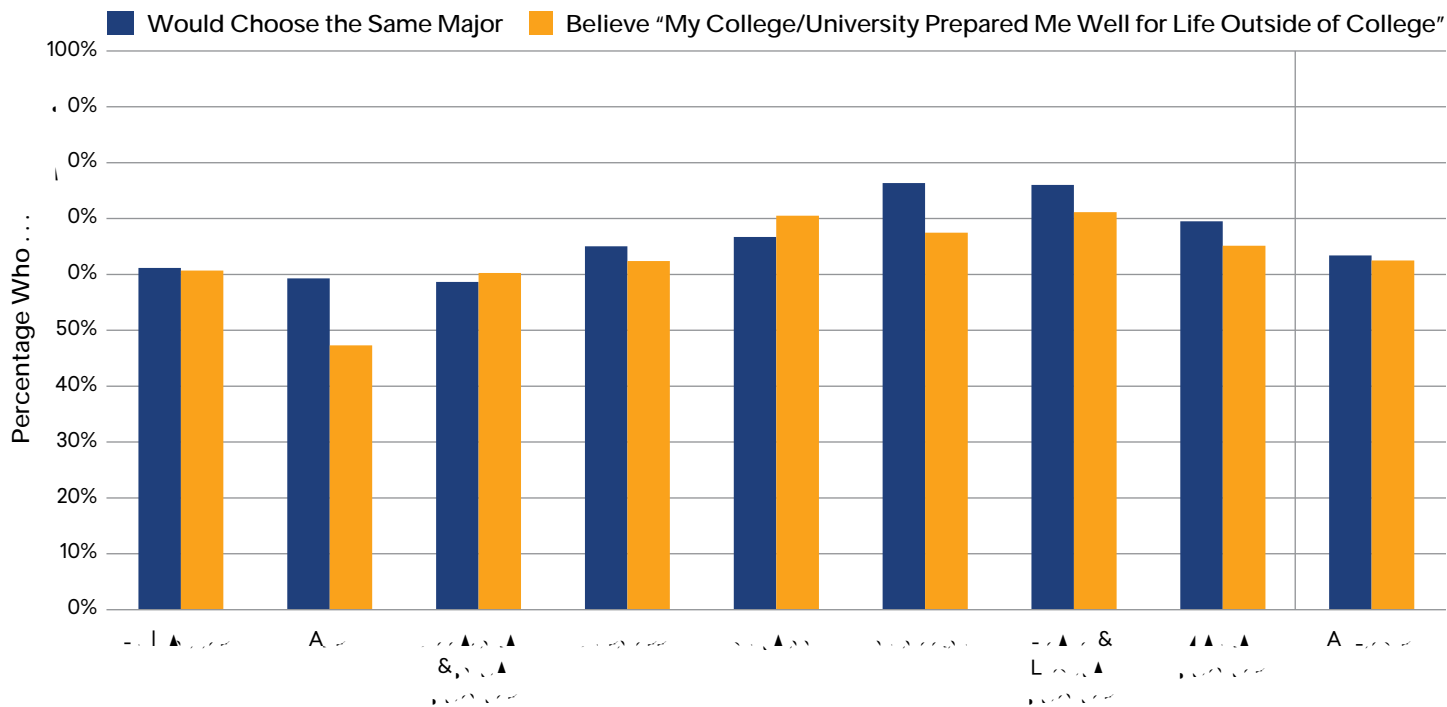
Advanced degree holders were also modestly more likely to express satisfaction with their opportunities for advancement. A similar difference—though still quite modest—was observed between terminal humanities bachelor's degree holders and holders of an advanced degree in the humanities with regard to their level of job responsibility.²⁸

Perceptions of the Relationship Between Job and Degree, by Field of Degree, 2019



Researchers have highlighted areas in which humanities graduates tend to be similar to their counterparts in other fields, humanities graduates differ in at least one key way that may reinforce negative perceptions of the field. A wide gap separates humanities majors and graduates from certain professional and STEM fields in their perception of the relationship between their job and their degree. (Graduates from the behavioral/social sciences were

more similar to humanities graduates in this regard.) Excluding those with advanced degrees, more than a third of bachelor's degree holders from the humanities saw no relationship between their degree and their job, as compared to less than 15% of graduates from engineering and the health/medical sciences, and approximately 20% of education and business graduates.²⁹



Approximately 40% of humanities graduates also expressed ambivalence about their degrees. Approximately 40% indicated that they would not choose the same major again, and a similar share reported they did not believe that their undergraduate institution prepared them for life. In these respects, humanities majors were similar to college students in general and also to business and behavioral/social sciences majors. Engineering and health/medical sciences graduates were considerably more likely to say that they would choose the same major again.

Because graduates were not asked to identify a major they would have preferred, we cannot conclude that they would have chosen a major in a different field. Some humanities graduates, for example, might have chosen to major in a different discipline within the humanities. Nevertheless, this finding and the lack of a perceived relationship between job and degree point to a challenge for the field.

How far along are you about realizing your “best possible” life? by Field of Degree, 2019

When asked how far along they were about their degrees, more than three-quarters of humanities graduates saw themselves at least 70% of the way to realizing their “best possible” life, a similar share to that for college graduates generally. Health/medical sciences majors were the most likely to feel they had made that much progress (with a share of 84%).

The difference between the humanities and other fields was even smaller in terms of graduates’ estimate about where

11. 2018 American Community Survey [P12002](#)
12. In keeping with the practice of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the gap was calculated by dividing the difference between men's and women's median earnings by men's median earnings. For a breakdown of humanities graduates' earnings by gender, see the Humanities Indicators website.
13. 2018 American Community Survey [P12002](#)
14. Ibid.
15. Gallup Alumni Survey, 2019.
16. 2018 American Community Survey [P12002](#)
17. Ibid.
18. National Survey of College Graduates, 2019. Information for the other fields can be found on the report website.
19. 2018 American Community Survey [P12002](#) Degree holders are those employed at any time in the five years preceding their response to the survey.
20. Currently employed workers only.
21. 2018 American Community Survey [P12002](#)
22. The preparedness opinions refer to all recent graduates, not just humanities majors.
23. Ashley Finley, *Employment of Humanities Graduates* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2021), 16, <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/research/AACUEmployerReport2021.pdf>. This study involved a survey of approximately 500 employers chosen to ensure equal representation of firms in terms of size, as well as diversity with respect to industry, control (for-profit, not-for-profit, government, etc.), and geographic scale of operation (local/regional/national/multinational). Because the survey used nonprobability sampling, its findings may not be nationally representative.
24. Humanities Indicators of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *Humanities Indicators* (Cambridge, Mass.: American

29. Ibid.

30. Gallup Alumni Survey, 2018 (for item about college major); and Gallup Alumni Survey, 2019 (for item about preparation for life).

31. Gallup Alumni Survey, 2019.

Humanities Indicators



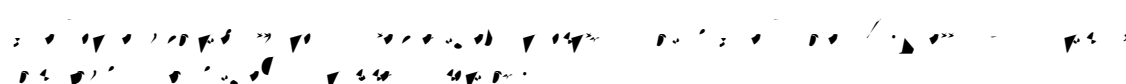
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