

# Liberal Arts Education and Professional Success: Debunking Myths About What Employers Need and What the Economy Rewards

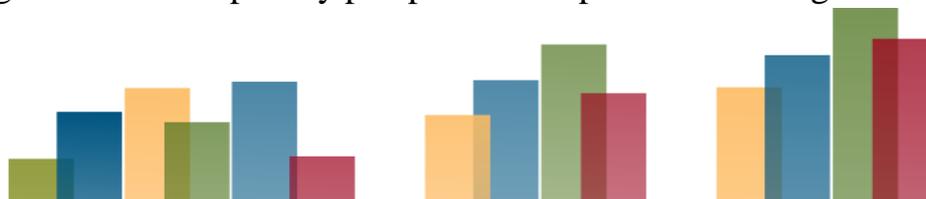
*Intellectual Foundations of Modern Liberal Education*  
(Saint Petersburg, Russia, November 2014)

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## Frequently Confused Terms

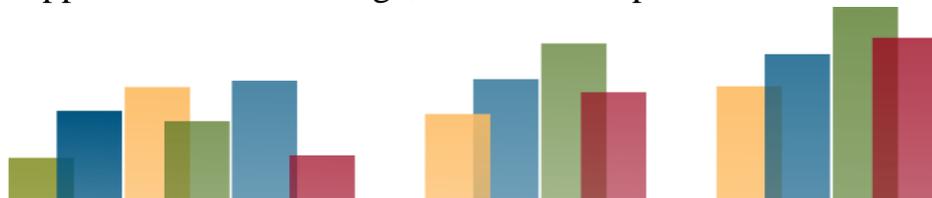
- **Liberal Education:** a broad philosophy of education that has traditionally been the standard of excellence in Baccalaureate level education in the United States. The philosophy has consistently entailed three broad educational goals: providing students the broad knowledge of society and culture required for full participation in the life of a democratic society; cultivating the powers of the mind to make sense of the world and to use evidence-based reasoning in making judgments; and nurturing an examined commitment to ethical and civic responsibility. This philosophy of education can apply and is being applied in the US to all sorts of degree programs—including those in arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences, but also professional fields like nursing, education, engineering, social work.
- **Liberal Arts and Sciences** (sometimes called just “liberal arts”): specific disciplines (e.g. the humanities, sciences, social sciences).
- **Liberal Arts College:** a particular type of institution—often small, often residential—that facilitates close interaction between faculty and students, and a curriculum grounded in liberal arts disciplines.
- **General Education:** the part of the curriculum shared by all students. A uniquely American feature, general education programs provide broad exposure to multiple disciplines, development of essential intellectual and civic skills, and practice in applying different disciplinary perspectives to problem-solving.



# Essential Learning Outcomes

Developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (adopted by hundreds of colleges and universities in the US and abroad)

- *Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World*  
**Focused** on engagement with big questions, enduring and contemporary
- *Intellectual and Practical Skills*  
**Practiced** extensively across the curriculum, in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance
- *Personal and Social Responsibility*  
**Anchored** through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges
- *Integrative and Applied Learning*  
**Demonstrated** through the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to new settings and complex problems



## Current Debates

- Should all students in all fields get a broad liberal education?
- Is it a luxury we cannot afford to provide a broad liberal education to all college students?
- Should we enact state policies to encourage students to major in particular fields (e.g. science, technology, professional fields whose graduates are currently in demand in the economy)?
- Aren't liberal arts majors, in particular, a waste of time and money for individuals and for taxpayers?



# How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment

A REPORT ON EARNINGS AND  
LONG-TERM CAREER PATHS

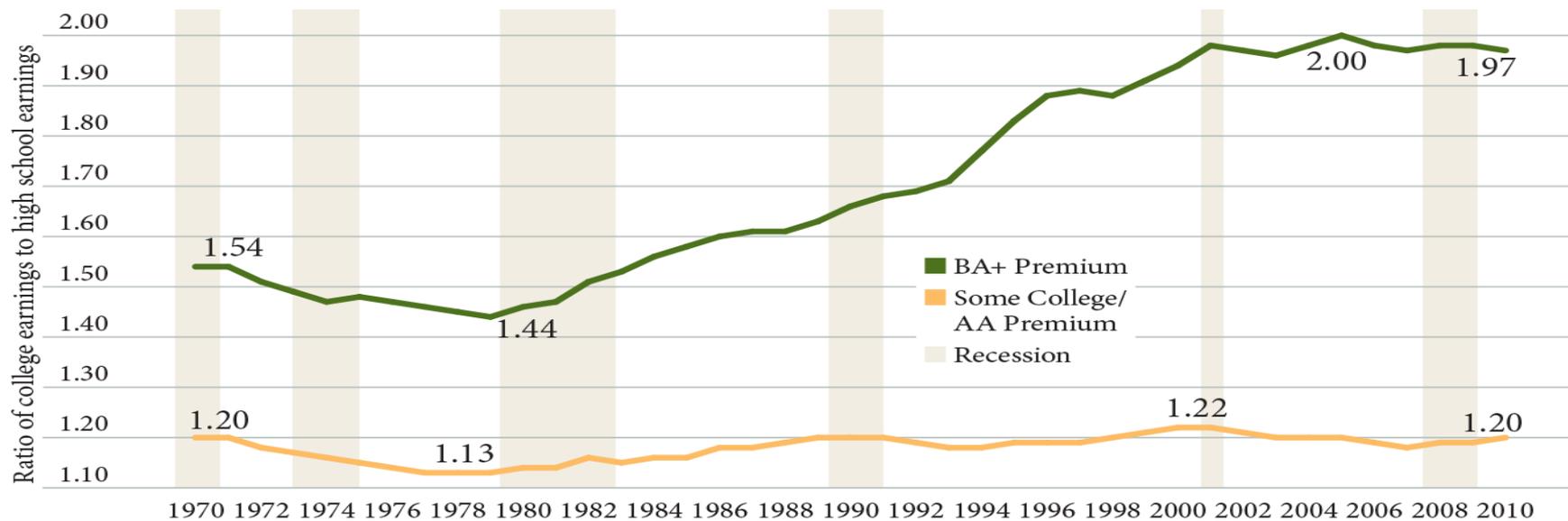
By *Debra Humphreys and Patrick Kelly*

Published by the  
Association of American Colleges  
and Universities and the  
National Center for Higher  
Education Management Systems



Association  
of American  
Colleges and  
Universities

# The College Earnings Premium



Source: Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Cheah (2013)



# Employers Prioritize Innovation and Transferable Skills

Percentage of employers who agree “somewhat” or “strongly” with each statement

Our company puts a priority on hiring people with the intellectual and interpersonal skills that will help them contribute to innovation in the workplace.	95%
Candidates’ demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.	93%
Whatever their major, all students should have experience in solving problems with colleagues whose views are different from their own.	91%

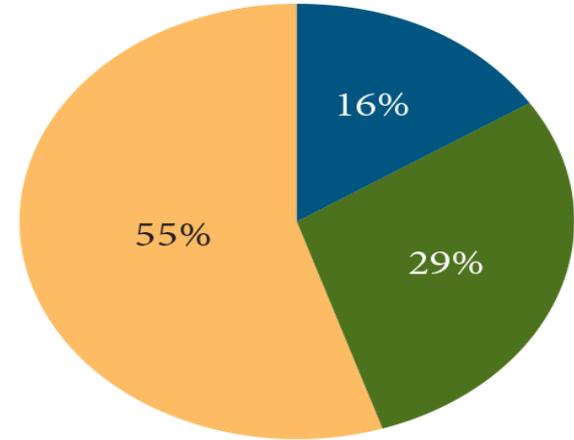
Source: Hart Research Associates, *It Takes More Than a Major* (2013)



# Employers Want Both Broad Knowledge and Specific Skills

Which of the following ranges of knowledge and skills are more important for recent graduates who want to pursue advancement and long-term career success at your company?

- Knowledge and skills that apply to a specific field or position
- A range of knowledge and skills that apply to a range of fields or positions
- Both field-specific knowledge and skills *and* a broad range of knowledge and skills



Source: Hart Research Associates, *It Takes More Than a Major* (2013).



# Employers Support Liberal Arts, Diversity, and Civic Learning

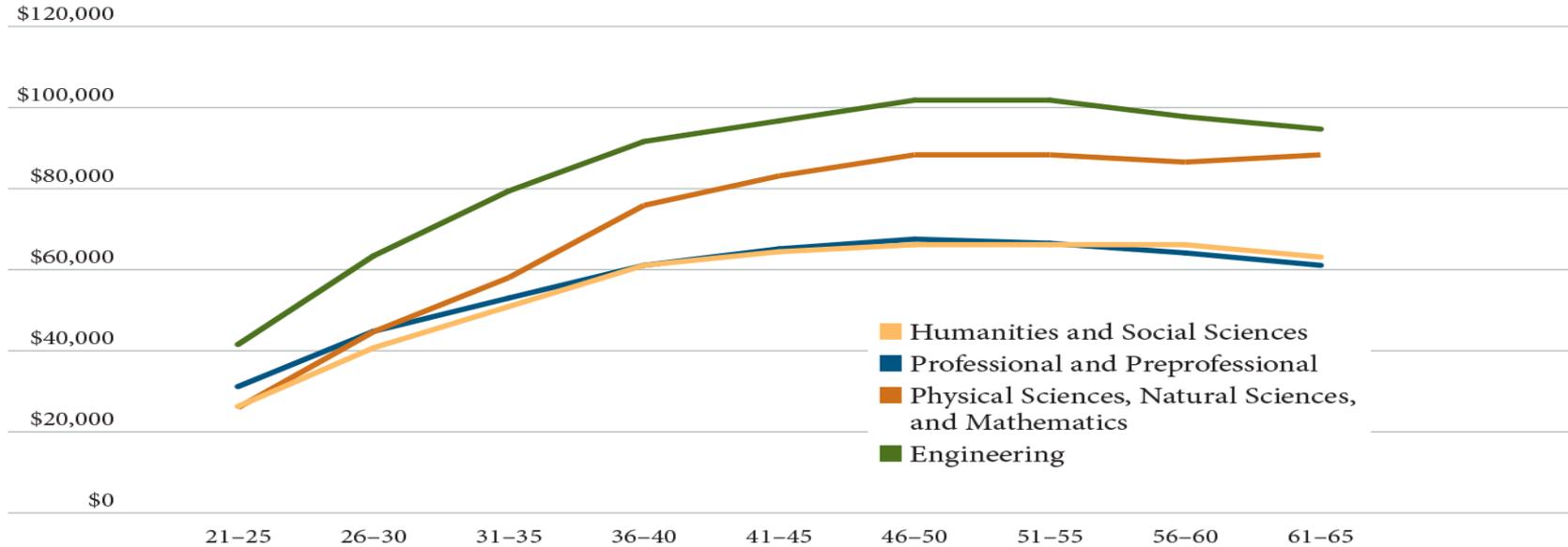
Percentage of employers who agree “somewhat” or “strongly” with each statement

All students should have educational experiences that teach them how to solve problems with people whose views are different from their own.	91%
All students should learn about ethical issues and public debates important in their field.	87%
All students should have direct learning experiences working with others to solve problems important in their communities.	86%
All students should take courses that build knowledge, judgment, commitment to communities, ensure integrity/vitality of democracy.	82%
All students should acquire broad knowledge in liberal arts and sciences.	80%

Source: Hart Research Associates, *It Takes More Than A Major* (2013).



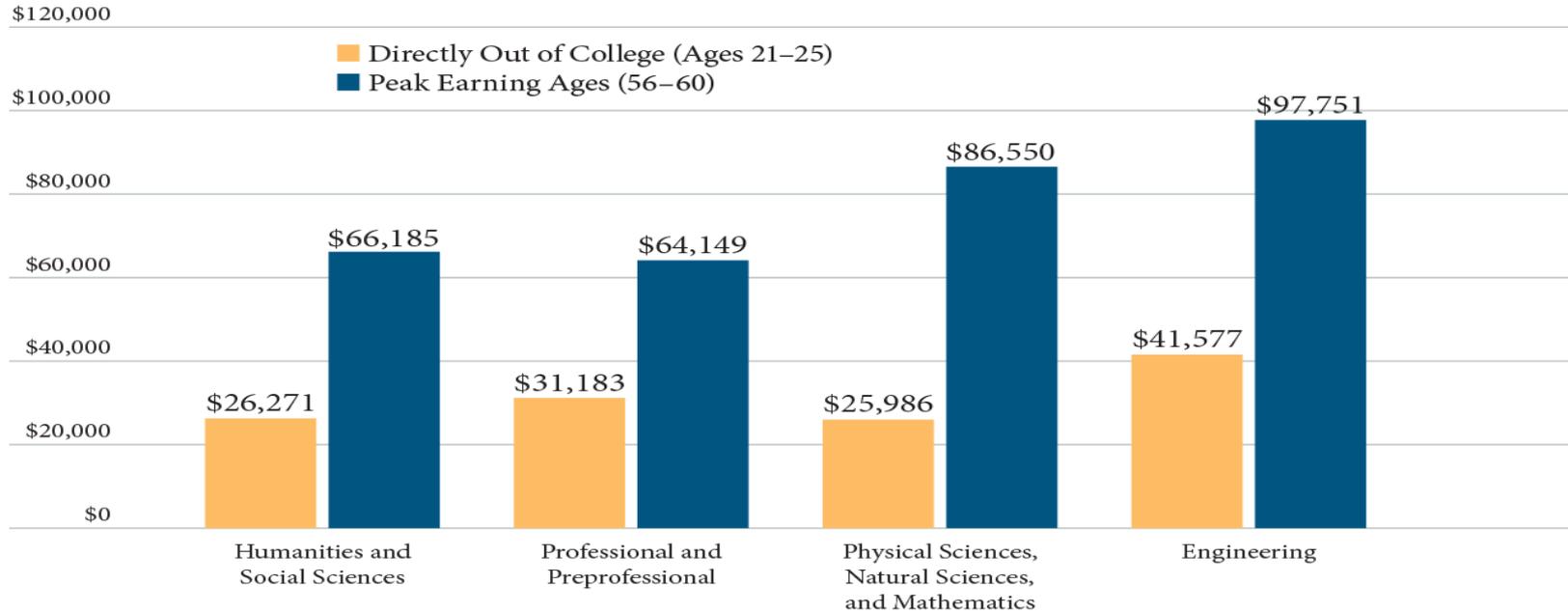
# Median Annual Earnings by Age-Group and Undergraduate Major (2010-11)



Source: *How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment*. 2013



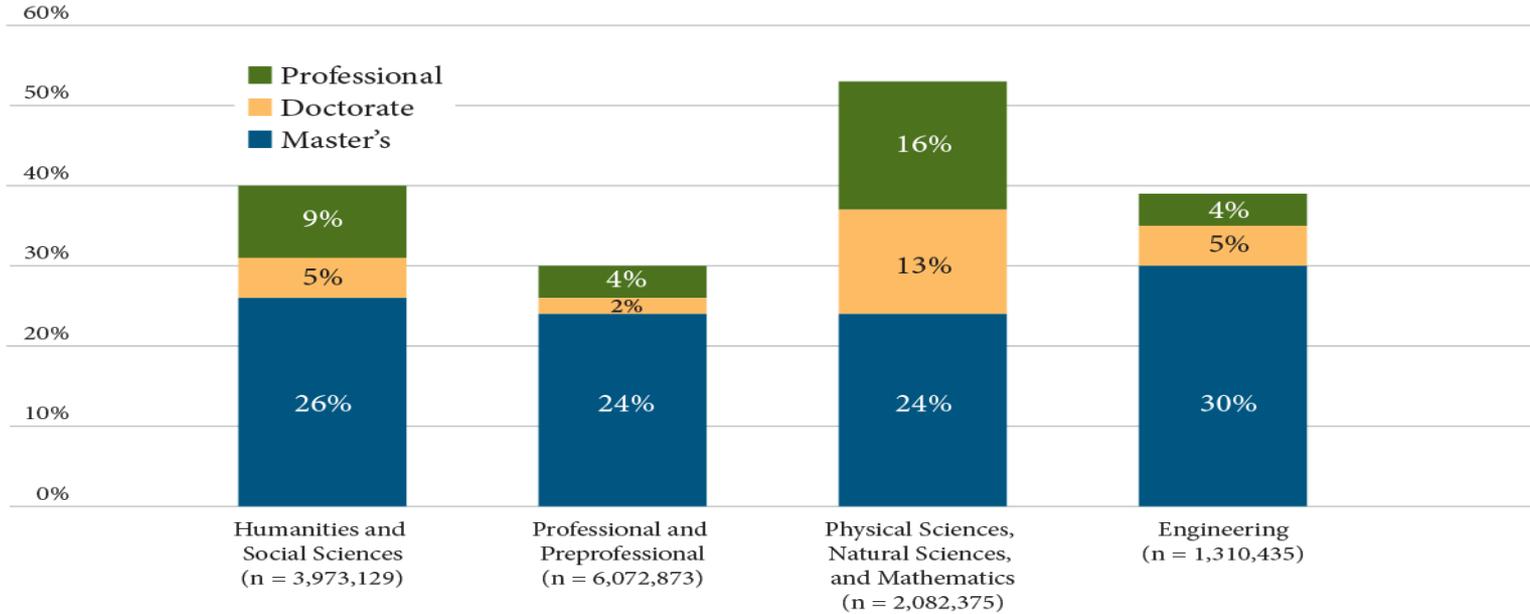
# Short-term vs. Long-term Earnings (2010-11)



Source: *How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment*. 2013



# Graduate and Professional Degree Attainment



Source: *How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment*. 2013



# Economy Rewards Liberally Educated Graduates—But More Is Needed

% of Employers Who Want “More Emphasis On” Essential Intellectual and Practical Skills

Critical thinking and analytic reasoning	82%
Complex problem solving	81%
Written and oral communication	80%
Applied knowledge in real-world settings	78%
Information literacy	72%
Innovation and creativity	71%
Teamwork skills in diverse groups	67%
Ethical decision making	64%



# Other Perspectives from Around the World

## Skills That Matter

While more than 2/3 of employers in a global survey ranked problem solving, written communication, creativity, basic math, English proficiency, and leadership as important to professional success, less than half rate college graduates as competent in those areas.

(McKinsey 2013)

“Employers interviewed say things like: I have never fired an engineer for bad engineering, but I have fired an engineer for lack of teamwork. People have to work together. They have to collaborate.”

(Mona Mourshed, Leader, Education Practice, McKinsey 2013)

“Many technical programs around the world have historically focused more on technical depth. We’ve been communicating to universities the importance of soft skills.”

(Paul McIntyre, VP for Global Recruiting, BP 2013)

## Experiences with Impact

Student international exchange study programs boost employability and job mobility. 5 years after graduation, young people who studied abroad were half as likely to face long-term unemployment.

(Erasmus Impact Study, EU 2014)

Graduates who participated in internships, extracurricular and cocurricular activities, and projects that took a semester or more to complete are more than twice as likely to report being engaged at work as those who haven’t had these educational experiences.

(Gallup-Purdue Index 2014)

