

*THE ART OF EMPLOYMENT: How Liberal Arts Graduates Can Improve Their Labor Market Prospects.* Burning Glass Technologies, August 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.burning-glass.com/Liberalarts/BGTReportLiberalArts.pdf>

## PROBLEM

- Liberal Arts and non-professional degree graduates face limited employment opportunities according to a recent report from the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce. ***Liberal Arts and Humanities (9.0%), Social Science (10.3%) and Arts (9.8%) graduates have among the highest unemployment rates of all college graduates.***<sup>1</sup> (The overall unemployment rate for recent graduates is 7%.)<sup>2</sup> (Refer to attached Tables for more detailed information on employment statistics).
- Ongoing employment challenges for Liberal Arts colleges and their students raise the question: **How can Liberal Arts graduates improve their employment prospects?**

## STUDY PROTOCOL

- Focusing specifically on Liberal Arts and other non-professional degree program graduates and their success in obtaining employment, Burning Glass Technologies<sup>3</sup> analyzed the availability of entry-level jobs and the skills required to compete successfully. This analysis found that when liberal education skills are augmented with field-specific skills, Liberal Arts graduates nearly doubled the number of jobs available. Between June 2012 and June 2013, Burning Glass identified 955,000 job postings open to recent Liberal Arts graduates. Burning Glass next “...Identified 8 skill sets - Marketing, Sales, Business, Social Media, Graphic Design, Data Analysis, Computer Programming and IT Networking - that can be acquired with a modest amount of coursework, such as a minor or through internships. By developing one or more of these skill sets, Liberal Arts graduates can enhance their competitiveness for the 955,000 jobs they already qualify for and tap into an additional 62,000 jobs, nearly doubling the number of jobs available to them. These newly-available positions fall into occupations such as marketing specialist, operations analyst and computer programmer, and offer an approximately \$6,000 annual salary premium over jobs traditionally open to Liberal Arts graduates.”<sup>4</sup> (p 3-4).

## FINDINGS

- Nearly one million job postings were open to Liberal Arts graduates in the past 12 months. Most postings required three (3) years or less of experience and are in occupational categories that typically require or prefer a college degree, but have no technical skill requirements (e.g., Recruiters, Administrative Assistants, Store Managers, and Account Representatives). Because these jobs typically demand no formal qualifications beyond a Bachelor's degree of any kind – and even lesser academic credentials will sometimes suffice – the 607,000 Liberal Arts graduates (annual rate) are also competing with a multitude of Bachelor's and Associate's level graduates, existing workers with experience in the field, and underemployed job seekers.
- The broad-based skills that a Liberal Arts education offers are highly valued in the labor market, and help Liberal Arts graduates differentiate themselves from rival job seekers.
- Employers report the greatest disparity between the skills they demand and those that recent graduates possess for written and oral communication skills, adaptability, and problem solving– all staples of a Liberal Arts education.
- Employers desire candidates with both field-specific and broad-based knowledge and skills. Adding relatively few field-specific skills to a Liberal Arts program, students can significantly improve and broaden their labor market prospects.<sup>5</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

- Technical Skills Double the Jobs Available to Recent Graduates: Burning Glass Identified sets of technical skills in high-demand among employers include Marketing, Sales, Business, Social Media, Graphic Design, Data Analysis, Computer Programming and IT Networking. These workplace-focused technical skills can be easily integrated into students' college experiences, enhancing significantly their labor market prospects without dramatically altering their chosen program of study.

- Generally, the skill sets selected can be learned through “...internships and other active learning experiences, or through coursework equivalent to a minor. By acquiring one or more of these technical skill sets, Liberal Arts graduates can compete for an additional 862,000 jobs in occupations that require more specialized expertise – such as business analysts, marketing specialists, and search engine optimization strategists. These additional occupations offer a \$6,000 annual salary premium over the less-technical jobs traditionally open to Liberal Arts graduates.” (p 4)<sup>6</sup>

The Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2013). *It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success*. Retrieved from [http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/2013\\_EmployerSurvey.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/2013_EmployerSurvey.pdf)

## **EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES ON LIBERAL ARTS GRADUATES’**

### **EMPLOYABILITY**

From January 9 to 13, 2013, Hart Research Associates conducted an online survey among 318 employers whose organizations have at least 25 employees and report that 25% or more of their new hires hold either an associate degree from a two-year college or a Bachelor’s degree from a four-year college. The following excerpts highlight some of employers’ priorities for the kinds of learning today’s college graduates and students need to succeed in today’s economy. The excerpts are most specifically directed toward liberal arts programs of study.

### **STUDY PROTOCOL**

- Definition of Liberal Arts used in the employer survey: “This approach to a college education provides both broad knowledge in a variety of areas of study and knowledge in a specific major or field of interest. It also helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as intellectual and practical skills that span all areas of study, such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings” (p 2).
- Respondents were executives at private sector and nonprofit organizations, including owners, CEOs, presidents, C-suite level executives, and vice presidents.

### **FINDINGS**

- When given the above description of liberal education, fully 94% of employers say it is important for today’s colleges to provide this type of education, including half (51%) who say it is very important to do so.
- Employers recognize the importance of today’s colleges and universities providing a liberal education—one that focuses on both broad knowledge in a variety of areas and knowledge in a specific field of interest, as well as intellectual and practical skills that span all areas of study and a sense of social responsibility.
- Nearly all those surveyed (93%) agree, “a candidate’s demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.”
- Employers widely agree that all students should receive civic education and learn about cultures outside the U.S. Fully 82% agree (27% strongly) that every student should take classes that build civic capacity, and learning about societies and cultures outside the United States (78% total agree; 26% strongly) is widely valued for all students. Additionally, four in five agree (32% strongly) that all students should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences, regardless of a student’s chosen field of study (p 9).
- “[A Liberal Arts] approach to a college education provides both broad knowledge in a variety of areas of study and knowledge in a specific major or field of interest. It also helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as intellectual and practical skills that span all areas of study, such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real world settings. ” p 13
- Employers place the greatest degree of importance on the following areas:

- Ethics: “Demonstrate ethical judgment and integrity” (96% important, including 76% very important)
- Intercultural Skills: “Comfortable working with colleagues, customers, and/or clients from diverse cultural backgrounds” (96% important, including 63% very important)
- Professional Development: “Demonstrate the capacity for professional development and continued new learning” (94% important, including 61% very important) (p 6).

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION (Consolidated Findings from Cited Studies)**

- The evidence suggests that colleges and universities can help liberal arts students by focusing on the following strategies:
  - **Help Students Understand the Skills Required by Employers:** Career preparation should become the norm rather than the exception when students select courses or college major. A recent National Association of Colleges and Employers study revealed that fewer than 10% of college students spoke to a career counselor about their choice of major.<sup>7</sup> Colleges can give students information about jobs available to graduates of various programs of study and the skills required to get those jobs.
  - **Build Labor Market Skills through Complementary Coursework:** Schools can encourage Liberal Arts students to enroll in courses that enhance their labor market value as electives outside of core Liberal Arts requirements. Most schools already offer courses that enable students to build graphic design, data analysis, or computer programming skills, and those with business programs also address general business and marketing areas.
  - **Build Labor Market Skills through Internships and Active Learning:** Internships are increasingly critical for helping recent graduates find employment. A Chronicle of Higher Education survey found that internships and employment during school were the two most important factors to employers in their hiring decisions, ranking above college major, GPA, and college reputation.<sup>8</sup> Many skills employers seek are learned outside of the classroom, through internships, community service, student leadership, or other active learning experiences. Relevant internships and employment can help students develop the workplace-specific skills that complement abroad-based Liberal Arts background.<sup>9</sup>
- Liberal Arts students are also able to increase their employability in a number of ways:
  - Accessing career preparation early in their college careers, help graduates improve job prospects. By understanding the needed skills of the labor market, they can build skill sets through coursework, internships, and other active-learning experiences in conjunction with their core Liberal Arts studies.
  - In addition to emphasizing skills developed through liberal arts programs – such as communication skills, research skills, and critical thinking – students can build workforce-specific competencies to increase their labor market value. Given the premium employers place on experience, students can seek internships, jobs, or other active-learning experiences where they can build and demonstrate proficiency in the technical skills employers demand.<sup>10</sup>
- Colleges and universities should seek to break down the false dichotomy of liberal arts and career development – they are intrinsically linked.
- Colleges and universities should support rich experiential opportunities that truly integrate the liberal arts with real-world learning as communication skills and problem solving skills. These are in high demand, seen as lacking, and seen as a colleges’ responsibility to teach.
- Colleges and universities should view the working lives of their students not as a challenge, but as an opportunity, given the weight employers of all kinds place on experiential elements of a recent graduate’s resume.
- Colleges should go beyond a vision of majors articulating to specific careers. Majors matter to some extent, but in many cases, college major is not the determinant of career entry. A college should approach career development as career exploration for a great many of its students guiding and supporting students with the right mix of solid liberal arts skills and content knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

## Briefing: Rich Feller and Associates 6-4-14 Kansas School Counseling Camp

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<sup>1</sup> Carnevale, A. P., & Cheah, B. (2013). Hard Times, College Majors, Unemployment and Earnings 2013: Not All College Degrees Are Created Equal. Retrieved from <http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/HardTimes.2013.2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey. April 2013.

<sup>3</sup> About Burning Glass: Burning Glass Technologies, a Boston-based labor market analytics firm, has developed technologies to build detailed awareness of what is happening in the labor market in real time. We achieve this by collecting and analyzing job postings from job sites across the Internet including job boards, government sites, and employer sites. Our software deploys advanced, proprietary text mining to “read” each job description, allowing us to analyze jobs titles, experience level, educational requirements and even the particular skills that each employer is seeking.

Our tools are playing a growing role in informing the global conversation on education and the workforce by providing researchers, policy makers, educators, and employers with detailed real-time awareness into skill gaps and labor market demand. Burning Glass’s job seeker tools power several government workforce systems and have been shown to have substantive impact on reemployment outcomes and on labor market literacy.

With headquarters in Boston’s historic Faneuil Hall, Burning Glass is proud to serve a client base that spans six continents, including education institutions, government workforce agencies, academic research centers, global recruitment and staffing agencies, major employers, and leading job boards. [www.burning-glass.com](http://www.burning-glass.com) (617) 227-4800.

<sup>4</sup> THE ART OF EMPLOYMENT: How Liberal Arts Graduates Can Improve Their Labor Market Prospects Burning Glass Technologies, August 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.burning-glass.com/Liberalarts/BGTRReportLiberalArts.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> THE ART OF EMPLOYMENT: How Liberal Arts Graduates Can Improve Their Labor Market Prospects Burning Glass Technologies, August 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.burning-glass.com/Liberalarts/BGTRReportLiberalArts.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> THE ART OF EMPLOYMENT: How Liberal Arts Graduates Can Improve Their Labor Market Prospects Burning Glass Technologies, August 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.burning-glass.com/Liberalarts/BGTRReportLiberalArts.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> National Association of Colleges and Employers. The Class of 2012 Student Survey Report. 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Chronicle of Higher Education, American Public Media’s Marketplace. (December 2012). The Role of Higher Education in Career Development: Employer Perceptions. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/items/biz/pdf/Employers%20Survey.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> THE ART OF EMPLOYMENT: How Liberal Arts Graduates Can Improve Their Labor Market Prospects Burning Glass Technologies, August 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.burning-glass.com/Liberalarts/BGTRReportLiberalArts.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> THE ART OF EMPLOYMENT: How Liberal Arts Graduates Can Improve Their Labor Market Prospects Burning Glass Technologies, August 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.burning-glass.com/Liberalarts/BGTRReportLiberalArts.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Chronicle of Higher Education, American Public Media’s Marketplace. (December 2012). The Role of Higher Education in Career Development: Employer Perceptions. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/items/biz/pdf/Employers%20Survey.pdf>