

Profiles in the Humanities 2.0

This document represents the results of an informal survey conducted beginning July 18, 2017 via Google Forms. Participants were asked for their first name, the Humanities discipline(s) they studied in undergraduate coursework, their current position of employment, and a short narrative about the relationship between their studies and their current work and life. Most participants also supplied a picture of themselves. All participants agreed to allow their responses to be used for the purpose of advising undergraduates about possible careers after undergraduate Humanities study. I am making this document available so that readers may discuss it with their students, friends, and families as they make choices about how to plan for a good life in an uncertain world.

The results of this survey are qualitative. The survey does not attempt to predict causal relationships between majors and careers, or between careers and happiness. Participants are not asked to supply their financial information, such as income, tuition, debt, or family wealth, all of which are better represented by quantitative analysis. Rather, the survey results merely describe a wide range of real experiences and employment opportunities that some former students of the Humanities have pursued. Edits to responses have been made for length or style when necessary. Many respondents have provided pictures so that their narratives appear in an appropriately individual context. Some of the participants are recent graduates in their first jobs; others are at the peak or end of long and distinguished careers.

I conducted this survey because, as a professor in the Humanities, I have students who are passionate about their studies but unsure about whether a Humanities degree can result in meaningful employment, even though our discipline is not as obviously focused on vocational training as some other disciplines are. Rather, the Humanities can (and I believe, should) serve as the backbone of the “liberal arts”—an education traditionally designed for free people who are empowered to define and seek happiness for themselves, including in their work. As the results of this survey show, the paths taken by former Humanities students are astoundingly varied, deeply reflective, and often richly rewarding.

Although it is clear that Humanities students often go on to brilliant, joyful work lives after college, it is also clear that Humanities professors and our institutions often fail to provide adequate counseling about post-graduation possibilities for Humanities students. For many of these students, the most obvious career path for a Humanities graduate is to teach, as we do. Teaching can be enormously satisfying work, but a student without an inclination for it will never teach well or happily. Teaching and academic research are represented here alongside many other experiences of post-graduate employment. This document provides teachers, professors, counselors, administrators, students, and families with a series of narratives about a range of careers and lives that can be (and have been) possible for Humanities graduates in the past. The profiles are roughly organized into groups: technology, marketing, communications, journalism, publication, arts, government, social work, law, libraries, archives, education, academic administration.

This document will continue to grow as more participants respond to the survey. Write to carrie_shanafelt@fdu.edu to request an updated version or to participate in the survey.

Dr. Carrie Shanafelt
Fairleigh Dickinson University, University College
Assistant Professor of English, School of the Humanities



Kiran – Bellevue, WA
English major
Senior content manager

I created content for Alexa, Amazon's artificial intelligence, before moving to a startup called Likewise. My ability to understand how humans can and should communicate stood me in good stead. "Code" is basically language, with grammar and punctuation, that rewards attention to detail. If you can learn a language, you can learn code. I found the academic world harsh. Though chock-full of Marxists, English departments offer few jobs with living wages, and hiring practices are opaque. The tech world, on the other hand, pays (in my case) four to five times as much as an academic job, with great benefits. I have a lot of fun and I learn new things every day.

Jared – Huntsville, AL
Russian Language and Culture major
Aerospace engineer

It broadens my perspective beyond the narrow technical focus of my field, and builds an appreciation for different cultures and philosophies and how they all contribute to the world around us. While it is my technical studies that I apply at my day job (which I love), I live my lessons from the Humanities.



Steve – Cleveland, OH
English and Mathematics major
Computer programmer

There's obviously very little overlap between computer programming and writing about poetry, but being able to write a coherent argument at modest length (usually less than five pages; I'm not cranking out white papers)—particularly one establishing a background and then working forward, step by step, to the conclusion I want my reader to reach—is a skill I use constantly. Beyond that, I think the most general-purpose skill from the humanities is the ability to read deeply. The humanities and social sciences work I did in college was largely driven by narratives, rather than quantification: literature, history, underclassman-level anthropology. Developing a willingness to march through Boas or Fielding (and even take pleasure in it) has served me better than anything more purportedly relevant to my workaday life.

Chris – Brooklyn, NY
Philosophy major
Software developer

People assume I'm smart because I spent years studying Aristotle. This is useful in job interviews.



Amy – Hartford, CT
Creative Writing major, Philosophy minor
Technical writer

My experience studying writing, and in particular, my experience as a writing tutor, directly enabled me to land my current job as a Technical Writer in the aerospace industry. While my degree in English/Creative Writing indicated to my current employer that I had a firm understanding of the mechanics of the English language, my ability to *talk* about that language and my approaches to capturing it on the page was what really impressed them. I find that many technically-minded professionals need help translating their ideas into accessible text, and being able to act as an expert in that area is satisfying and sets me apart from my peers. As an added benefit, I get paid really well, and they're paying for my Masters degree! I find that working in the for-profit sector gives me the stability I need as a creative individual to continue my education while also avoiding significant financial burdens that many writers, unfortunately, face. I write actively in my personal time, and I continue to sharpen my craft of language through my profession. It's a career I never anticipated having that works exceptionally well for my current lifestyle.

Matt – London, UK
Philosophy major, English minor
Product owner and technical architect in a software consultancy

Much of what I do involves: working out what people want; working out how to solve problems that may lie in the way of that; and communicating that clearly to people in language that's appropriate to their particular domain. A humanities background is helpful for all of that. I also find the ability to read large amounts of text analytically, synthesise information from multiple sources, and communicate with others through writing invaluable. Doing this in bulk, and most importantly, quickly, is something that comes almost entirely from my humanities education. Being able to extemporise apparently pre-prepared talks at technical meetings, conferences, roundtable sessions is also useful. I almost never sound ill-prepared, even if I am. I find the ability to think about meaning in nuanced ways, and switch between abstract and concrete ways of thinking invaluable in problem solving. Also, I work a lot with cultural heritage and educational organisations, and my humanities background means I understand the problems they are trying to solve, and the language they are using to describe them.

Kathy – Phoenix, AZ
English major
Editor and Technical Writer

I have been able to apply critical thinking skills to my work, questioning and testing resources before including their evidence in my work.

Ben – Berkeley, CA

Philosophy major
Software developer

The generic answer holds for me: the ability to decode unclear communications, and produce clear ones, is useful everywhere. There are more specific ways, too—specific both to philosophy and to my current career. Much of reading philosophy involves noticing what isn't explicit: what presuppositions aren't being stated? why is this new line of argument being brought in? what is the author trying to establish? The author says that *this* supports *that*—does it? What other possibilities aren't being considered? And productively reading and writing philosophy requires sensitivity to connections between apparently disparate fields, seeing applications of ideas in one realm to problems in another, attention to forms of argument in addition to substance. Being practiced in these skills has indisputably helped me in both heads-down programming tasks, and in discussing potential features, implementation strategies, and product directions with co-workers.



Asdghig – Toronto, Canada

English major
Instructional designer/learning manager

I think studying the Humanities but working in the corporate world has presented me with an interesting dichotomy. I have a more critical view of things that are taken for granted in business. I find myself favouring deep thinking and deliberation over quick and opportune deal-making or quickly moving things along. But in many ways I've learned not to aspire to 100% satisfaction and be quicker on my feet. At the same time, I call for more critical assessment and creative adventuring, and while I have made my written and oral communication less academic and more conversational, I adhere to and promote standards of good communication in terms of clarity, simplicity, and engagement through appeals in argument. Humanities has definitely broadened my mind and solidified my values while business has put me in touch with the world.



Casi – Brooklyn, NY

Studied Literature, Religion, Philosophy
Educational technology product manager

Studying the humanities helped me to form empathy with end users, cultivate interdisciplinary thinking, form connections between disparate subjects, and form habits of lifelong learning.

Kathryn – Phoenix, AZ

English Literature major
Technical writer

I learned critical thinking techniques and refined the skill of concise writing, and I also honed my research capabilities, which I use every day as a professional writer (and as a parent). I learned to question, to listen, and how to work with people from other cultures, religions, lifestyles, and social classes. This is invaluable in my daily life, both within and outside of the workplace.



Chelsea – Atlanta, GA

Media Studies and English literature
Senior UX researcher and digital product specialist

Being a student of the humanities helps me constantly. Critical thinking and analysis, persuasive argumentation, inquiry into the human condition, compassion, coalition-building, teamwork, and leadership are all central to my daily work, and are skills I developed throughout my humanities education.



Matthew – Aptos, CA

Liberal Arts major
Director of user experience

My education gives me an edge in Silicon Valley, using a broad range of disciplines and empathetic sense to inform product, business, strategy, and design.



Natalie – Los Angeles, CA

Religious Studies major, English and Philosophy minors
Co-owner of a web and marketing company

Studying religion taught me to see the world through multiple lenses—ethics, literature, history, ethnography, psychology—and I’ve been able to translate this into online marketing: understanding how people use the internet and how communities and groups of people behave online. I currently co-own a small web development and online marketing company, and we almost always hire people with degrees in the Humanities. While I initially did marketing for all sorts of businesses, we’re trying to work only with organizations we’re ethically aligned with, and now our clients are almost exclusively nonprofits. Humanities people often approach problems with such intelligence, thoughtfulness, and creativity that it makes work more interesting and fun, and our clients notice it and appreciate it too.



Stefan – Durham, NC

English major
Manager at a college admissions counseling company

My statistics teachers always told me, "Let the data tell a story." No matter what you do to pay rent, you will need to weave narratives in order to communicate effectively. Studying literature, with all its complexity, has taught me how to wrestle with that process: What might your story be in danger of leaving out? How can you reach someone whose most treasured narratives are different from your own? As a college admissions counselor I try to help young people learn how to tell stories about themselves that don't feel cheap but do fit into the bizarre bureaucratic apparatus of the college application. No one's life fits into a single story, but stories always point outside themselves to everything they can't contain. And, indeed, beyond my "job," literature has helped me stay curious, alive, and excited—and find people who share that passion. I love discussing the SCUM manifesto, trading recitations of Gerald Manley Hopkins, or working through a Kafka-inspired D&D campaign.



Matt – Brooklyn, NY

English major
Email marketer

My work in English literature helps me read with a critical eye and critique constructively. I’m able to point to a reason why I do or don’t like someone else’s copy, which makes it much, much easier to work together on a solution or compromise.



Paul – New York, NY

English major
Media industry executive

I am a much better writer, communicator and critical thinker.



Pearl – Denver, CO

English and Political Theory major
Outdoor industry retail manager

The humanities gave me an ability to communicate effectively with my team, and to use diverse strategies to drive our business that are embedded in big questions about what our business wants to offer to the world. It also gives me a love of learning that I used when learning about management and supply chains without taking business school classes.

Katy – Grand Rapids, MI

English major
Communications specialist

Studying the Humanities taught me to write, think critically, take apart what people and texts are saying to understand motivations and consequences. It taught me to find and use good sources, and to be in conversation with other perspectives.



Bridget – Milwaukee, WI
English and Classics major
Product manager

The humanities have helped me be creative in my daily problem-solving, how I deliver compassion to determine the best way to address others in a variety of situations, honing the skill with which I flex my wit and breadth of knowledge in negotiations, and why I persevere through every issue to own the resolution through apt documentation. The humanities taught me to be a human in a world of other humans who make mistakes, get angry, find confusion in certain tasks, and sometimes just need to talk through issues to truly understand how to move forward. The humanities taught me the value of big-picture complexity and why we need to break down those complexities to better understand the whole and the pieces. I love what the humanities have instilled in me and I love that I get to practice this work in a technical industry that appreciates the value of thinking things through.



Amanda – Sydney, AUS
English major
Project administrator and office manager

As English majors, we were taught critical thinking (so important), how to analyze characters (people) and plots (situations), and we did extensive writing and editing, which are all valuable real-world skills that took me from proofreading/copy-editing to HR to administrative project work (first in oil and gas, now in water and resource management).

Amanda – Minneapolis, MN
English major
Fundraising communications

I use my writing and editing skills almost every day at work. I also work at liberal arts college so pitching the value of humanities disciplines is something we do as a matter of course.

Lisa – St. Louis, MO
English major
Freelance copyeditor

I enjoy being able to work from home or while traveling. I learn a lot about the world and different viewpoints from editing manuscripts on a variety of topics.



Josh – Los Angeles, CA
American Studies major
Communications consultant and writer

I have no graduate degree or professional education. My first job out of school was as a union organizer in Los Angeles, but I quickly found I was better at combining my interest in social justice and politics with the more symbolic tools and skills I'd developed in my education. The bulk of my professional career has been in the field of communications, chiefly in the overlapping Los Angeles civic worlds of labor, non-profits, philanthropy and politics, with focuses on speechwriting and media relations. My background in the humanities has been the spine of a wide-ranging career. I use my writing and analytic skills every day. My humanities background has given me the tools to learn clients' needs quickly and understand both the challenges they face and the opportunities to tell their stories. It's helped me develop theories and methods that I can transplant from issue to issue.

Dana – Chapel Hill, NC
English major
Executive

My job as a Head of People, Strategy, and Partnerships requires me to think about my company's content strategy and how it impacts our business objectives and team. What is our narrative, what story are we pitching to our clients, and how do we execute this strategy? What partnerships help serve this narrative? What kind of company are we, and what is our mission? It feels much like writing a story and understanding character and motivation development. The skills I acquired in critical reading, thinking, and writing help me every day, both for my written work and for interpersonal skills and managing a team. I've gained the ability to context switch and synthesize a lot of disparate threads. At work, I'm known for my ability to integrate a lot of ideas and conversations quickly and develop a strategic plan.

Cate – Wisconsin
English major, Creative Writing, Philosophy, and Religious Studies minors
Cooperative manager in communications and human resources

I work in a position that is constantly evolving and requires daily problem-solving, team-building along with self-direction, and ultra-clear communication. My degree prepared me for all of these things, and allows me to work in a fast-paced setting with agility. It gave me several key strengths that some on our team have had to spend more time training on, not having the same humanities background. I graduated in 2010, and struggled to find a job that utilized or even

valued my skill set. To find a position where I feel as though my degree is an asset was a winding path. I am now involved in hiring, and we actively look for candidates with humanities backgrounds. It's gratifying to know there are places that see the value in these skill sets.



Kriston – Washington, DC
English and Art History major
Journalist

My studies in English literature helped me to develop tools that are absolutely critical to my work, from conceptualizing a problem to outlining an investigation. Rhetoric is my craft, and working to anticipate arguments and counterclaims and address them in advance (usually on a tight deadline) is my job. In studying art history, I built a subject-matter expertise that formed the foundation for my career, which has since expanded to include coverage of architecture, housing, policy, politics, and justice. I don't think there is any better training for a career in communication than to study works of art and learn from them how to shape ideas. As a writer for a popular magazine of letters, I am surrounded by colleagues who have taken many career paths, and the liberal arts is no more or less valid than any other road

here. Studying the humanities has given me endless benefits in my personal life: passions, pursuits, and pleasures that will frame my time in this world.



Susana – New York, NY
Creative Writing major, English minor
Journalist and editor

As a journalist in the field of entertainment and pop culture news working in online media, my Creative Writing and English education gave me tools to understand the both the creative side (the act and art of writing) and the critic side (the function and observation of finished writing). It gave me a first-hand conception of what it takes to make good narrative art, a framework to understand how such works can go wrong, and that even among the so called "low brow" there can, and should, be expectations of quality. It taught me how to craft and present an argument, whether about a text or how to approach that text—the meat and potatoes of online writing—and how to help other writers do the same in my role as an editor.



Jessica – New York, NY
Art History and European History major
Art book editor

Having a strong multidisciplinary base in the humanities has been incredibly rewarding for me. It provided me with strong critical thinking skills; it fostered a strong interest to feel a direct connection with and understanding of artists, writers, and all sorts of thinkers; and it continues to help create for me very human throughlines from past to present and future. One thing I learned a long time ago was that for most occupations/careers, a person will actually be trained for a job on the job (learn a company's process. Its practical (work) application has allowed me to communicate effectively with various people around me and instinctively resolve all kinds of work problems big and small. But I think its most important application is that it gave me the tools to adapt to and flourish in various different occupations, from the high-end restaurant service industry, to finance, to art galleries, and, finally, to a long career in publishing.



Peggy – Washington, D.C.
English major
Editor

Thanks to my degree, I can quickly analyze, summarize and refine lengthy documents. I am sensitive to nuance and context and am familiar with major literary references.

Becca – Illinois
English major, Linguistics minor
Editor

I edit a little of everything, and studying the different types of writing and the structures of languages helps me to edit a variety of writing styles, including English as a second language. Studying literature helps me to recognize stylistic differences between genres and periods, so I can maintain consistency.

Sean – Ann Arbor, MI
English major
Journals coordinator

As a result of my studies, I'm good with language, excellent at research, and great at impressing people by doing minor bureaucratic tasks like writing a competent report, summary, or proposal.



Becca – Brooklyn, NY

Creative Writing major
Reader at an independent publisher

I majored in Creative Writing, and graduated in 2014 with a resume full of unpaid publishing internships. A lot of it is knowing people and networking, but I think people who know literature or writing can always fall back on conversations about those things. It makes it easier to say “Oh, you know James Baldwin, so let’s have a chat about this one piece I read recently.” I think every interview I’ve had, I’ve come prepared with some little fun fact or snippet I learned in a college literature course to make someone like me. Now I read books for a living. I go to the office, make coffee, and read books. I’ve had eyes on over 450 books in the last 7 months. No, I haven’t read them all, but I’ve had my hands on them in some way. I’ve probably read about 80-100 of them. So, yes, it was pretty important for me to major in English. My whole job is reliant upon the things I learned, as are a lot of my relationships in the industry.



Lisa – Los Angeles, CA

Russian Literature major
Author and ghostwriter

When I got my BA in Russian Language and Literature, I feared I’d just earned myself the most useless degree on the planet. What “real” job could I possibly get with such an esoteric degree? But learning Russian helped me to become a better writer in English, as it made me think critically about the structures and rhythms of language. And being able to speak Russian led directly to my first writing job, when I moved to St. Petersburg in my mid-twenties to write freelance feature articles. I’ve been a ghostwriter and book collaborator for 20 years now, and although most of my work has nothing to do with Russia, the skills I learned while earning that degree have been invaluable. By studying the language, I learned how to communicate. By studying the literature—some of the greatest literature ever written—I learned the power of what great writing can do.



Mary – Cleveland, OH

Anthropology major
Writer and English teacher

I majored in anthropology because I thought it would explain everything - knowing the origins of humanity. But what I took from that - 2 things. One is this wonderful, levelling approach to understanding who we are cross-culturally, that what I do is comparable to what someone in China or Madagascar does, that we are linked (whether we like it or not). This is a good thing to know as a person or as a teacher. And second, I had always wanted to be a writer, from the time I was six or seven. Besides voracious reading, studying anthropology was the best training possible for that, because it gives you the outsider's viewpoint, something essential if you want to write fiction that looks honestly at the world and at yourself.



Cathy – Indiana

English major, Sociology minor
Writer, professor, English department chair

The most important thing I learned in college was how to think, how to teach myself the things I need to know. Around 2008, my life as a writer changed when my publisher informed me that I also needed to be my own publicist. I didn’t study marketing in college, but I do it now—every day—both for my own “writing business” and as the department chair of an English department. When students and parents ask me “What can I do with an English major?” I tell them “Anything.” My department has been collecting our student career outcomes, and you are welcome to use this info. Here are their stories: <http://bsuenglish.com/blog/category/regula-r-features/stars-to-steer-by/> and here is a list of the types of careers they’ve found: <http://cms.bsu.edu/academics/collegesanddepartments/english/lifeafterbsu>



Brad – Cleveland, OH

English major
Writer, lecturer, stay-at-home dad

My Ph.D. in English absolutely helped me to learn research and discipline for my own writing, but did not teach me writing itself. The degree makes my teaching career possible and is absolutely necessary for it.

Paul – New York, NY

English major
Writer, former university administrator

I worked in administration at Columbia University for twelve years, where I rose to chief of staff for my department of about 60 employees. Because I was a skilled writer and adept at critical analysis, I became the final approver for reports and collateral from my department and others, wrote speeches and op-eds for deans, produced content for websites, gave presentations, and was trusted to handle Board-related matters on behalf of my dean. I was also involved with the effort to build the new Columbia campus in Manhattanville, perhaps most importantly in preparing the materials needed for Trustee approval of the project. Frequently, I relied on my humanities background to craft persuasive arguments in everything from emails to reports to webpages, and to write and edit

materials that were read by thousands of people. I'm now on a sabbatical to focus on my passion—writing a novel (where my English major skills are essential).



Fredrik – Brooklyn, NY

Rhetoric major
Writer and academic

It taught me how to think.

Jeanne – Springfield, VA

History of Ideas minor, English electives
Writer and editor

You can place a specific event, occurrence, or idea in context, culturally, philosophically, etc. You have a broader view of where it fits, what led to that current event or idea.

Julie – New York

History and Literature major
Teacher and writer

I teach fifth grade in a humanities block that includes interdisciplinary units built around social studies and English Language Arts. Humanities is at the core of what I do as an educator and also plays a part in my work as a speculative fiction writer. You have to know the world to imagine new worlds.



Jason – Pittsburgh, PA

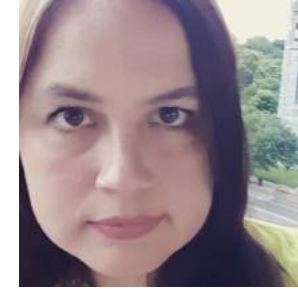
English and Architecture major
Architect

Aside from making me a better reader and thinker, my courses in literature helped me develop writing skills that have served me well throughout my career, from writing compelling proposals to preparing community and master planning documents that express vision and the outcomes of public processes. Furthermore, these writing skills helped lead to a long-running restaurant review position with a local paper. Other than my core architecture courses, my literature classes were the best thing I did in college.

Alyssa – Vancouver, Canada

Philosophy electives
Landscape architect

Learning how to think in a structured and intentional way has been very helpful for my professional career. I use what I learned in my philosophy classes on a daily basis for communication, doing things like crafting responses to urban design panel comments and staff reviews of my work. It has also been central to building a solid, well thought out foundation to my design philosophy.



Emily – Albany, NY

History and English major
Artist Studio Manager/Museum Educator

It helps that I studied the 19th century when I teach museum visitors about the Hudson River School on weekends. Reading novels helped me understand storytelling, which helps in designing my tours. In my artist studio work, it helps to be able to think critically, write clearly, and compare evidence and investigate information in order to solve problems.

Marissa – Philadelphia, PA

History and Art History majors
Museum educator

When I develop programs, I use my research skills to learn what other museums and cultural institutions are doing. Also, I read a lot of articles about museum education theory and I'm able to zoom in on the important sections and analyze the author's thinking to incorporate in programs.



Lesley – Grinnell, IA

Art History major
Museum director

Through art history, I have learned about cultures around the world, myth and religion, the representation of science, and the power of abstraction. As a curator, I've traveled to China, Brazil, and Portugal and all around the U.S. A wider education in Humanities helps me every day with excellent writing and speaking skills, with the ability to analyze information and develop an argument, and with the capacity to learn new things, because I have knowledge and experience on which to build. Art history and English are the two hinges upon which everything else I do hangs. Finally, the Humanities have taught me that to be myself, I must lead my life with an ongoing regard for and curiosity about others. To this day, the Humanities open up such a range of what it means to be human, and challenge me to find a way to balance the joy and despair of life.

Cathleen – New York State

Art History minor
Curator

I majored in another discipline, but because of my minor in Art History and love of that subject, I pursued a museum internship as

an undergraduate, and what I learned there led me to change the focus of my work into the future. I did not pursue a major in the humanities because I sought something that seemed more "realistic," but the courses I took for my minor helped expand my mind and gave me concrete tools with which to question my world. The coursework I took for my humanities minor had a concrete and very positive impact on my personal and professional life. I later completed a doctorate in Art History and am currently a museum curator working in Modern and Contemporary Art. The tools I learned in my minor humanities coursework helped lay the groundwork for the field that became my passion. It helped enable my later research, writing, travel, teaching, and relationships with artists and scholars.

Olivia – New York, NY

English major, Global and Cultural Studies minor
Non-profit arts development

I truly believe studying the Humanities makes you a more curious and empathetic individual! These are traits that help you in any path your life takes. Specifically, I am part of a non-profit arts organization's development team, and while the underlying goal is to raise money, more importantly it's about creating and strengthening relationships with people around you and being understanding of how each individual fits into the great story we try to tell! And I like to think I have a greater appreciation for the fine and performing arts, which suits our mission.



Elana – Brooklyn, NY

Studied film, anthropology, and literature
Non-profit program director

I know how to analyze culture and media and explain it to others. These are essential skills in the political world. Writing skills I developed in college help me to write clear and compelling copy that I use on social media. And yes, social media skills are vital to a great many careers today in politics, advocacy and communications. Attending small seminar classes and presenting papers helped me refine the public speaking skills I began to learn while on the high school debate team as well as in my theater classes and electives. I use those skills when I teach workshops or appear on panels—something I do countless times a year.

Samuel – Brazil

Social Communications major
Actor

It has helped me understand how people are different and respect them not by their differences, but as human beings as we all are.



Geovanni – San Francisco, CA

English major
Non-profit urban design community outreach and elementary education

In my work, I understand how to interpret complex street design schematics and explain them in layman's terms. I cut to the chase in group meetings thanks to four long years of discussion-based classes. I am consistently communicating across the gap between organizational goals and outreach work. The Humanities enriched my understanding of myself and the world. I hold conversations with friends about the way capital works in a global hegemony and correct other friends whose politics are misaligned. I can recognize discursive patterns in the way people around me communicate and their perhaps unacknowledged ideological biases. I still read fiction novels. I have a greater appreciation for differences in lifestyle, religious, gender, and other choices.



Mackenzie – Stevens Point, MN

Art History major
Artist

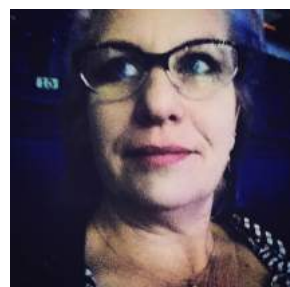
I am currently a double major in 2D studio and art history. Art history supplements my studio degree, because we critically analyze other artists and artistic styles. Without that knowledge, my studio degree wouldn't feel so fulfilling. I wouldn't be able to make so many connections with the world around me. We need courses like art history, because they teach us about other cultures and even our own culture. The humanities teach us how we are all interconnected, and how important that is in life. The reason we have so many unsatisfactory world leaders, is that we are cutting the humanities world-wide. How can we be led to improve ourselves from the past if there is no understanding of our past?

Jessica – Kansas

Literature major
Assistant professor, former grant writer

Studying literature helped me as a grant writer because developing themes, or values that your organization and the funder share, was so important for writing a grant. As a literature major, I was trained to read a text carefully, and as a grant writer you need to read the instructions for

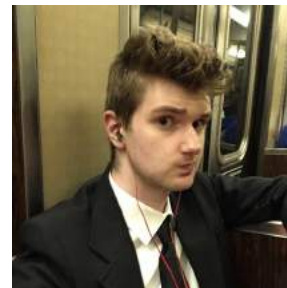
a grant carefully. My literature degree also helped me think about philosophy and theory, and all these helped to while I was in graduate school. The humanities are incredibly valuable. I also learned that a lot of employers liked people with English degrees because we can write, synthesize, and share information concisely.



Christina – Rhode Island

Art and Art History major
Costumer

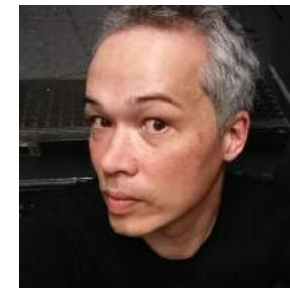
Having studied Art and Art History continues to help me understand the eras and fashions of the past and resources available when recreating costumes for various Shakespeare Festivals. Understanding the political climates of the past also helps when interpreting plays. Class systems depicted by artists in Art History gives me a visual resource to use for elements in costuming. Fashion plays a large part in history as far as depicting what a character does as a vocation, textiles available and what is occurring in the world at that time. It doesn't always have to be ancient or Renaissance as contemporary attempts at the classics are very successful.



Doug – Bronx, NY

Studio Art major, English electives
Artist

I believe the Humanities' value is not teaching trade skills, but frames of mind. My English class was like being granted the ability to see through the Matrix: realizing the connective tissue between literature, history, philosophy, psychology and other subjects bleeding into each other. Some fellow graduates I know are only able to "stay in their lane," applying for jobs that most fit their literal major. I credit my humanities education for my flexibility and ability to compromise. I got my current job by chatting with my to-be boss in an art museum. While interviewing, I was not suited for the existing positions but fabricated my own with the company. Humanities have allowed me to solve problems by sidestepping existing structures and thinking creatively.



Cliff – New York, NY

English and Creative Writing major
Administrator, film production coordinator

Having studied Humanities helps me every day. It keeps me ever-curious and passionate to learn new things. It taught me empathy and open-mindedness towards others. My Humanities education wasn't comprised of a laser-focus on one specialty or for purely vocational, mercenary purposes. It was built on a foundation of many subjects and it taught me learning for its own sake and for my own pleasure—as well as learning *how* to learn. With my Humanities background, I draw from it to seek connections across various spheres and with people of all types in a manner that is often described as "being creative," "thinking outside the box," or even "having ESP"—which as it turns out is a highly-sought after job skill in all fields. To be able to communicate with others effectively by writing, speaking, reading and understanding with curiosity and passion for a subject is thanks to my Humanities education.



Robert – Germany
Music major, Classics minor
Opera singer

We are, after all, all humans, so studying humanities can hardly be seen as being irrelevant, except by people who are only interested in money. Learning about different people and how they experience the world can help us to see our own world with a little more objectivity, a little more detachment—rather than just parroting what we see and hear around us. And the liberal arts cultivates your mind. What do accountants think about on their free days?



Catherine – Mobile, AL
English major, Communications minor
Stay-at-home mom, crafter, freelance writer

I loved almost everything about studying English and Communications. I worked hard

towards graduation, after a few deviations—change of schools, majors, cities, pregnancy—from the “normal” four-year degree plan. I love being able to read, write and express myself every day. I’ve written articles for newspapers, worked with radio stations, and interviewed prestigious people. Along with writing a book (because what English major doesn’t want to write a book?), I’m looking forward to future career endeavors that hopefully need my humanities skills.



Kristin – Schaumburg, IL
English and History major
Writer and stay-at-home mom

Every day I see patterns and connections of human behavior that I may never have perceived if I hadn't been trained to look for evidence or clues as to what the truth of the matter in any given story was. I can glean what a sigh means, what omission of details in a report suggests, why the type of shoes someone wears telegraphs something essential about who they are. I understand the power of narratives, the way stories shape how my children feel about themselves, how those in power keep themselves there using coded language, how tone policing and erasure are forms of violence we see every day. I am a better parent, a better writer, (at one point a

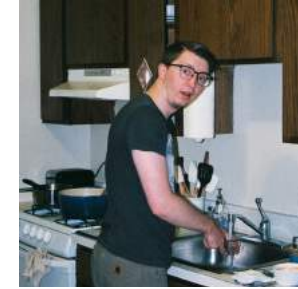
better teacher) and a better citizen because I studied, in different disciplines, how people tell stories. And I get to have the best times of my life sharing stories with my two sons, from *Harry Potter* to *National Geographic* and everything in-between.

Tom – Lee’s Summit, MO
English major
Self-employed writer and editor

Studying literature helped me to understand communication and interpersonal relations, which apply to every aspect of life. As I learned to monitor and examine my communication, better outcomes in personal and professional spheres followed. Being self-employed, I interact with current and potential clients daily, so skillful use of language helps me to get jobs. Being a professional writer/editor, I use these skills daily in the actual execution of my work as well. It turns out that people can make a living in the humanities—provided they are skilled and persistent.

Jen – Washington, DC metro area
Creative Writing major
Director of an environmental non-profit

The Humanities helped me understand how to form an argument, how to write, how to speak in public, and how to deal with difficult people who think they are right all the time! I got a great foundation for my career which includes a fair dose of storytelling in the form of grant writing and fundraising.



Connor – Woodbridge, VA
Government and English major
Data scientist

At the time, as an undergraduate, studying literature represented an academic indulgence, immaterial and impractical to my career path, but something I could not resist. Now I see that without this pursuit, I would not have been true to myself. I am 26 years old, married and with a young child, performing analytic work on behalf of the federal government. I write code, run reports, take meeting notes, and maintain a rich inner life. I make the healthcare people receive a little bit better, and I support my family. Without an education in the humanities, I would not be able to invent creative new code, or write non-bland proposals. More importantly, without those studies, I may not have found myself as early as I did, known what to want, and known how to live.

Gordon – Oakland, CA
English major
Municipal transportation planner

It gave me an appreciation of context and for how things came to be, the ability to build persuasive narrative arguments, empathy for multiple perspectives, and the skill to write with style.



Robert – Washington, D.C.

Political Science major, English and History minors
Public diplomacy office director

Ultimately, the most important courses for me were in English, particularly composition. If you can write well, you have an entrée into just about any enterprise because so few people can communicate well. At one point I wrote speeches for a president because they needed to find someone quickly. A good working knowledge of history will give you lots of analogies when making presentations. (Take statistics, too, because your beautiful narratives should be significant and accurate.)

Courtney – Montevallo, AL

English and Sociology major
Government employee

Studying humanities helped me be a better human. Communication skills, an open mind, empathy, a thirst for new experiences, respect for different lifestyles and worldview, a focus on the bigger picture, and a desire to make the world a better place all stem from my studies.



Greg – Oakland, CA

Russian Literature major
Social worker

I didn't pick Russian with any practical eye toward the future, though at the time people told me: languages will get you jobs. For a while I thought my future would be teaching at a university, but academia wasn't my speed, and I left a PhD program to get a master's in social work. I've been a social worker for over a dozen years now, and though I have only used my languages sporadically in my career (and never once my ability to recite stanzas of Pushkin!) I'm always grateful for that time before I figured out what my career was going to be, when I studied things because I wanted to, and because they were interesting and enriching. It's not just that I learned broadly useful skills like critical thinking; sometimes, having Pushkin available in my head gets me through a day of work where nothing remotely literary happens.

Dena – Cleveland, OH

English major
Social worker

Studying English taught me to be a skilled writer, an adept analyst, and to always search for meaning below the surface.



Stephanie – Queens, NY

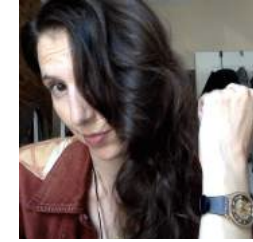
English major, Studio Arts minor
Art therapist

I utilize my understanding of literary criticism to help my clients flesh out their own personal narratives, which is particularly helpful as many of my clients suffer with a chronic or acute mental illness. They do not feel that they are accepted into modern society. But there are many great pieces of literature that they relate to, which can help ground them and help them feel more a part of the community. In my work as an art therapist, my clients tend to express a verbal narrative as they express themselves through art making. My background in English helps me better support them. My close study of Freud is especially beneficial as I can actually refer to his works in a knowledgeable manner, which is important in my field. This sets my assessments apart from many of my colleagues.

Lisa – Huntington, IN

English major
Behaviorist

I learned empathy for the individuals I serve, and the ability to communicate ideas well both orally and through the written word.



Ellen – New York, NY

Psychology major, English electives
Social worker

I use narrative and motivation in a clinical setting to help a client build their own story, their own priorities, and have power over what comes next. When you write or when you sit down with a client, you ask a lot of the same questions: What do you get out of this action? How does it affect the rest of your life? What do you want most? What are your obstacles? What do you need to succeed?



Kelsey – Princeton, NJ

English major
Medical social worker

English majors may be the punchline of jokes, but it was the best decision I made in my young adult life. Not only did I enjoy my classes, I use the learned analytical and critical thinking skills in my job on a daily basis. I am able to communicate efficiently

and effectively with other professionals from a variety of backgrounds. I may have chosen a different course of study in graduate school, but I had an invaluable foundation in the humanities to build upon.



Jalyn – Washington, D.C. metro
English major
Disability and Mental Health Advocate

The same person who wonders why anyone would major in English also probably wonders why anyone would work at a nonprofit. Studying the Humanities did not give me a "skill set" to excel in any one career; instead, it gave me the ethos (and pathos and logos) of holding myself responsible for affecting other people's lives. Studying the Humanities helped me learn to live deeply and learn to share myself. When I'm talking to my grandfather, a retired nuclear physicist who's proud of the fact that he can't spell, I tell him that being an English major and writing essays taught me how to process different perspectives and arguments to come to my own opinion. Practically, I apply this when I'm sifting through federal legislation, comparing it with state legislation, and campaigning for people to take action. Advocating is all about story telling.



Natalie – Philadelphia, PA
European History major
Companion care for the elderly

It improved me intellectually!

Martina – Oregon
English and Gender Studies major
Community health educator

Studying humanities taught me that the stories we tell create our world, which means that changing a story can change the world.

Elizabeth – New York, NY
Medieval Studies major (interdisciplinary)
Environmental litigator

I find that the same skills I learned to use in literary analysis, particularly of poetry, are very helpful working with statutes. Think about each word—why that word specifically, and what is it doing grammatically and in terms of its meaning? Do any phrases look familiar, where have I seen them before, and what did they mean there? How is the grammar of the sentence functioning, precisely? A statute isn't the same thing as a poem, but the technique of dissecting it is very similar.



Jina – New York, NY
English and Women's Studies major
Law student

There is no substitute for being able to read closely and have an understanding of the nuances present in text—whether that is a news article, piece of legislation, or a poem. Without having studied poetry and literature, my sense of language would not be nearly as sharp as it is today. I am a lawyer because I love words and that love stems directly from my education in the humanities.

Emily – Overland Park, KS
French and Political Science major
Corporate attorney

Knowing French has expanded my vocabulary and allowed me to better understand other languages. In my life, it helped me appreciate other cultures. I am an attorney for an international company, so knowing a foreign language has been useful in my work.



Silvana – Los Angeles, CA
English major
Public interest lawyer

I've worked as a civil rights lawyer, public defender, and now career advisor for law students who want to become public interest lawyers. Through each of these phases of my career, my primary responsibility has, as I've seen it, been storytelling. Whether it was on behalf of prisoners suffering under inhumane prison conditions, mentally ill clients trapped in psychiatric institutions, or my law students, my job has been to craft real-life facts into a compelling story that will persuade other people to act. I try to compel other people to act to free my clients, or to hire my students for difficult and demanding jobs. My stories, and the stories I help my students craft about themselves, have to be powerful, they have to be alive with sensory description and place, and they have to be true. The work I did as an English student, writing, reading, studying great literature, thinking about language, and exploring other worlds through stories, made me the storyteller I am today.



Kim – Naperville, IL

English and German Literature major
Appellate lawyer

In the law generally, but especially in the practice of appellate law, the ability to integrate knowledge across disciplines—a skill I consider at the core of a humanities education—has been invaluable. The usefulness of writing skills seems pretty obvious, at least for the appellate area of practice, but it’s really the integration of ideas across diverse areas of knowledge that stands out for me.

Elizabeth – Salt Lake City, UT

Philosophy major
Patent attorney

Studying philosophy gave me a passion for lifelong learning, which is necessary to be a good attorney. But it also taught me the basics of how to argue persuasively.



Kimberlyn – Houston, TX

History major
Law student

Studying the Humanities provided me with a huge advantage over many of my law school classmates: it taught me the world is tinted in a vast array of color and context instead of monochromatic shades. Of course it taught me all of the typical things the Humanities teaches—how to read dense materials, to write creatively, to think critically—but it namely taught me how to see the forest for the trees and flip conventions on their heads to more deeply understand how society works and how it needs to change. The Humanities taught me that there is no perfect answer to all the questions and ailments of society—and that maybe that’s okay; as a result, I don’t see the world as good/bad, or guilty/innocent. Instead, I can ask why, what, when, form a question, find an answer, make a change, or stop a change. Good law students understand that life brings more context than an either/or dichotomy, and good lawyers apply that understanding to most effectively advocate for their client.



Sean – New York, NY

Philosophy major
Film archivist

Through studying the Humanities I am better able to do many on-the-job tasks such as research, writing, and analyzing historical information and critical texts related to the materials I work with everyday. The area of film history I deal with can sometimes be very heady, so a background in various kinds of theory and criticism has been very helpful in understanding the films and filmmakers I encounter.

Savannah – Montevallo, AL

English major, French minor
Library director

As the primary purchaser for my county library system, I research and buy new books for 3 libraries once a month. I’m also in charge of removing old or worn copies of all kinds and genres of books, and deciding what needs to be replaced and what can be let go. Just as importantly, I spend a lot of each day researching and writing grants and funding requests. It’s basically like writing an average of 10 research papers a year. The skills I learned writing my English papers were essential for becoming an effective professional writer.



Cindy – Pittsburgh, PA

English and Creative Writing major, Middle Eastern Languages minor
School and public librarian

As a librarian, my English major helps me with advising readers as well as understanding where other people are coming from. It also taught me to think through processes and arguments logically, and my work with languages helps me connect with patrons who are new to English. In addition, I write in my free time, and my work in the humanities transformed my writing.

Lyndsey – Gaithersburg, MD

English and Writing major
School library media specialist

Studying the Humanities taught me many valuable skills, including research skills and communication. Communicating clearly and properly, especially in a world where short, written responses are valued, is an incredibly valuable skill. Using research skills allows you to figure out what is real vs. what is fake and allows you to make educated, supported responses to what you see and hear in the real world.



Misty – Maine
English major
English professor

I teach in the Humanities, so there is a direct influence in subject matter, but more than that in how I work and communicate with people. Studying writing and literature cultivates empathy and understanding for people who are unlike you. It helps you think about where other people are coming from--physically and emotionally--and how I can interact with them to the best of my ability. Teaching English allows me to help others to develop this important life skill.

Dorothy – Minneapolis, MN
Music major
Digital collections librarian

The ability to gauge the importance and relevancy of different humanities sources is key to my work as an information professional. Working with a variety of curators and archivists, the sort of broad subject area familiarity that comes from a liberal arts education is key.



Jenna – Tampa, FL
English and Spanish major
Middle school ESOL teacher

I got to read Bartholomé de las Casas' account of Columbus in Hispaniola in its original text. Same with *El Reino de Este Mundo*, Alejo Carpentier's novel of the Haitian Revolution. Reading primary texts about these extremely important events, the reporting of which has been strongly subject to an adversarial political agenda, felt like hearing the ghosts of the dead whispering their secrets to me with no interference or interpretation except my own shortcomings as a language learner. Along with other texts I read (in original English and in translation) in my Drama and Empire class, which used primary and translated plays to show how people made art of their colonized experience, and music I listened to and analyzed in my History of Soul class, all these readings added up to a much more complete and complex picture of life in America than I had previously thought about. It prepared me to see all my students more deeply, and as people as American as me, in all the ways American-ness can be conceived.



Sarah – Boston, MA
English and Creative Writing major
Educator

I'm an English teacher at a school in an underfunded district, and with my background I am able to teach them not just content but also the kinds of critical thinking skills they need to work toward justice for their families and all people.

Daniel – Athens, GA
English major
High school English Language Arts teacher in special education

It is my content area as a teacher. I would be pretty lost without my English education.

Katharine – Houston, TX
English, Women's Studies major
Associate professor, poet, mother of three

I studied intensively and now teach the Humanities to undergraduates. The humanities helps me most in my role as mother to inquisitive, sharp, funny children; I work to see them as whole people, engaged and immersed in a complex world.



Ben – Brooklyn, NY
English major
Teacher

I'm lucky to teach English and writing, which isn't easy work for anyone to find. But studying humanities also helped me value literature (I couldn't have gotten as much out of *War and Peace*, *Ulysses* or *In Search of Lost Time* without excellent teachers), and has kept me curious years after I left college. It's unlikely I'd still be reading several books a month without studying humanities.



Catharine – Roselle, IL
Classics and English major
Priest, mother, counselor, and poet

Studying the Humanities broadens my perspective of the world.



Robert – San Marcos, TX
Philosophy major
Literature professor

Since graduating with a BA in philosophy (and later an MA and PhD in Lit) I worked in many jobs: research assistant to a Congressman, newspaper copy-editor, law clerk, editor of educational materials for the pharmaceutical industry, and teacher. The Humanities offer intellectual flexibility, language skills, and attention to detail that are valued in nearly all professions.



Raye – Austin, TX
English major
Teacher and graduate student

I came from a very small, isolated area, and studying the humanities opened up doors to knowledge I didn't know existed. I credit my study with becoming a kinder person and a better citizen of humanity.



Jasmine – Washington, D.C.
Women's and Gender Studies major
American Studies graduate student

Studying the humanities has helped me grapple with my identities within the context of the US and world. I love that, especially as a first-generation college student, I can share what I learn and connect with others.



James – Solgohachia, AR
Philosophy and English (Professional Writing) major
Associate Professor of Philosophy

Before graduate school, I worked in newspapers, publishing, and professional writing and editing. Studying humanities helped me understand the structure of language and the differences between argument and persuasion, and made me adept at working with syntax, semantics,

pragmatics. I engage with the history of ideas, analysis and synthesis, and worldviews. In my studies, I cultivated empathy, perspective-taking, and thinking about big questions in understanding what it means to be human.

Bethany – Atlanta, GA
American literature major
Professor

My literature education made me a better thinker, communicator, and human.



Stephanie – Cape Town, South Africa
History major
Historian

It hasn't just helped me; it is my life. I am a writer, a scholar, and a teacher. After working for two years as an Assistant Professor, I'm now teaching online courses and working as a freelance editor from my home in Cape Town. Being a humanist allows me to engage with the world around me in interesting and exciting ways. It has also made me a more adaptable and dynamic person who doesn't shy away from intellectually challenging situations, but one who tackles them head on.



Nicole – Columbus, OH
English and Theater major
Clergy, denominational executive

English literature gave me the ability to read, write and analyze language, which enables me to communicate well with the 360+ churches with the hundreds of clergy and thousands of members for which I give support, coaching and resources. Those basic skills (which have nothing directly to do with technology) have enabled me to adapt to all the new communications technologies that have developed since then. (As a side note, I started my career as a print journalist.) Studying theater gave me the ability to preach, teach, train and coach in a public setting. But, more importantly, it taught me how to pay attention to people and develop empathy for them, which helps me lead groups through tricky and difficult change. The Humanities taught me to spot the larger meaning and purpose in any situation, giving me the ability to frame any seemingly mundane challenge in bigger questions and higher purpose.



Tess – New Orleans, LA

English and Biology major
English PhD student

I can't imagine going through my life without my English education! It changes and informs the way I think and interact with the world every day. As an undergrad biology double major, studying English not only made me feel more well-rounded, but it also enriched how I interacted with scientific texts, making my readings more comprehensive and insightful than I would have been capable of otherwise. The humanities in general have enlivened my life. I feel like I can talk to people in any discipline because of the way that studying English enabled me to interact with a myriad of ideas in each text. Whether that text is a professional document, a book club book, or even just a casual conversation, the ideas and styles of thinking that I learned make me a better thinker. Also, it's a lot of fun! Though I am pursuing graduate English, I know that any career I choose would be made richer through the Humanities.



Danielle – Bronx, NY

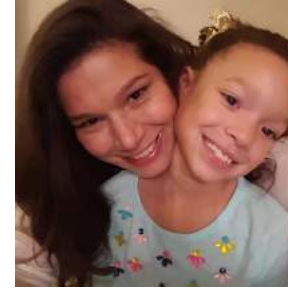
English major, History minor
College administrator

The critical writing skills I learned as an English major laid the foundation for the writing I have done as a doctoral candidate. I learned to master various styles of writing in different voices for myriad audiences. Empathizing with literary characters is not unlike what is expected of me as someone in a student-facing position. An education in Humanities is a robust education in the unspoken soft skills that every job requires: reading between the lines, inferring, taking the temperature of the room, anticipating outcomes, communicating effectively, thinking critically, persuading, empathizing.

Katy – New Hampshire

Creative Writing major
School counselor

It gave me the skills to pursue my Master's degree. I knew how to study, write a decent paper, and use resources and perform research. It helped me relate to people on different levels and understand the needs of others. It also brought me joy to study my passion during undergrad. I still write to this day, both in my personal and professional life.



Adrienne – Tucson, AZ

English, Psychology, and Anthropology major
College counselor and high school teacher

I went on to a Master's in K-8 Humanities education. I have taught every grade except first and second, and I am currently working as a College Counselor at the #4 school in the country. I also teach AP Psychology, and have taught AP Literature. All three majors allowed me to be extra flexible in my job. It's how I went from primarily a middle school teacher to an AP Lit teacher. Psych allowed me to tack that on as well, and all three have put me in a position to train other teachers and college counselors. Not to mention, every employer and every aspect of every job I have ever had has been buoyed by my ability to write a coherent sentence, which is sorely lacking in the workforce.



Stephanie – Philadelphia, PA

English and History major
Stay-at-home mom, formerly director of international student programs

A Geology professor once told me, "The best major is History and English. Not only do you know about the world but you can write about it too!" After graduation, I began teaching English in Japan. From there, I started a fifteen-year career working with international students and English Language Learners in two different countries and three different states. While my primary focus is on my infant son right now, my work with international students is a lifelong passion. Studying the humanities was instrumental in developing my curious mind, introducing me to diverse cultures and languages, and giving me the history background to better connect with my students. I'm excited to teach my child about the richness found in other cultures and give him a foundation for his own journey in life. I find myself often going back to my study of humanities to chart a path for my future and encourage anyone to study something that will give them an enduring passion for people and learning.