

Smart Cities Need Liberal Arts Graduates ... They Just Don't Know It.

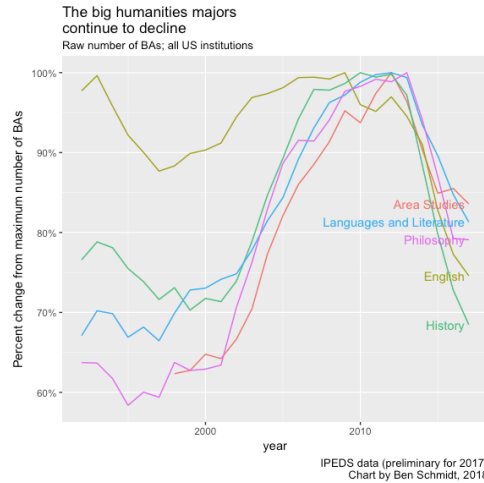
The easy research says that smart cities and our global economy need more scientists, engineers, health workers, coders, cybersecurity specialists and big data people. Once we look past the obvious, the research shows demand for what looks to be the liberal arts and humanities graduate. Despite declining numbers of liberal arts graduates, and maybe this is a market correction of some sorts, our new economy will require these special people.

With all of the scientists and technology people running around, who will help manage them? Who will help them their blind spots? Who will help them work together? Who help them communicate their findings? Who will help them communicate with a global workforce? With Generation Z young Millennials owning the entry level worker segment of new economy, who will help retiring-resistant Baby Boomers communicate with these twenty-somethings? will help Gen Z and young Millennials tap into the rich knowledge of the Boomers and Generation X?

The answer is standing right in front of us ... the critical thinking, the communication, and the creativity of the liberal arts graduate. MindEdge has developed a critical-thinking assessment and its findings show that liberal arts graduates are excellent critical thinkers, outpacing degree holders nursing, math/science, business and others.

UPCEA's Center for Research and Strategy interviewed 21 smart city and innovation leaders eight Millennial CEOs in the U.S. They told us that critical thinkers and individuals with good people communications skills will be essential in the new economy. They stated the need for problem solvers, managers, coaches, leaders and communicators. These individuals need to be able to relate to very diverse audiences as the future workforce could ages from 16 to 80+. Not only will diversity be defined by age, race or ethnicity, it will also include sexual orientation, socio-economic status, physical abilities and other criteria. A scientist or technology professional turned into a manager, director or leader of people can't be taught the full spectrum of these skills in a one-week seminar or through a few Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). This is best left for liberal arts degree-earning professionals who will build their trade over time and experience.

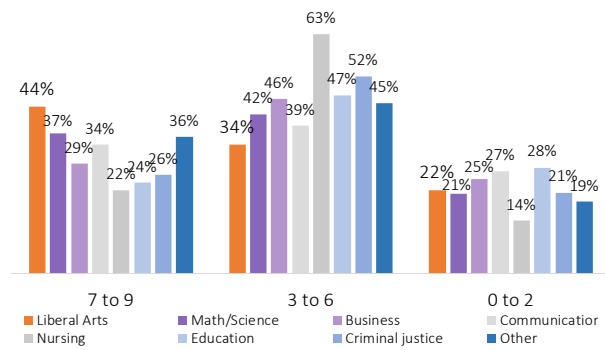
Figure 1 – The Humanities Are in Decline



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Figure 2 – Liberal Arts Degree Holders Have Strong Critical Thinking Skills

Number of Correct Answers by Discipline



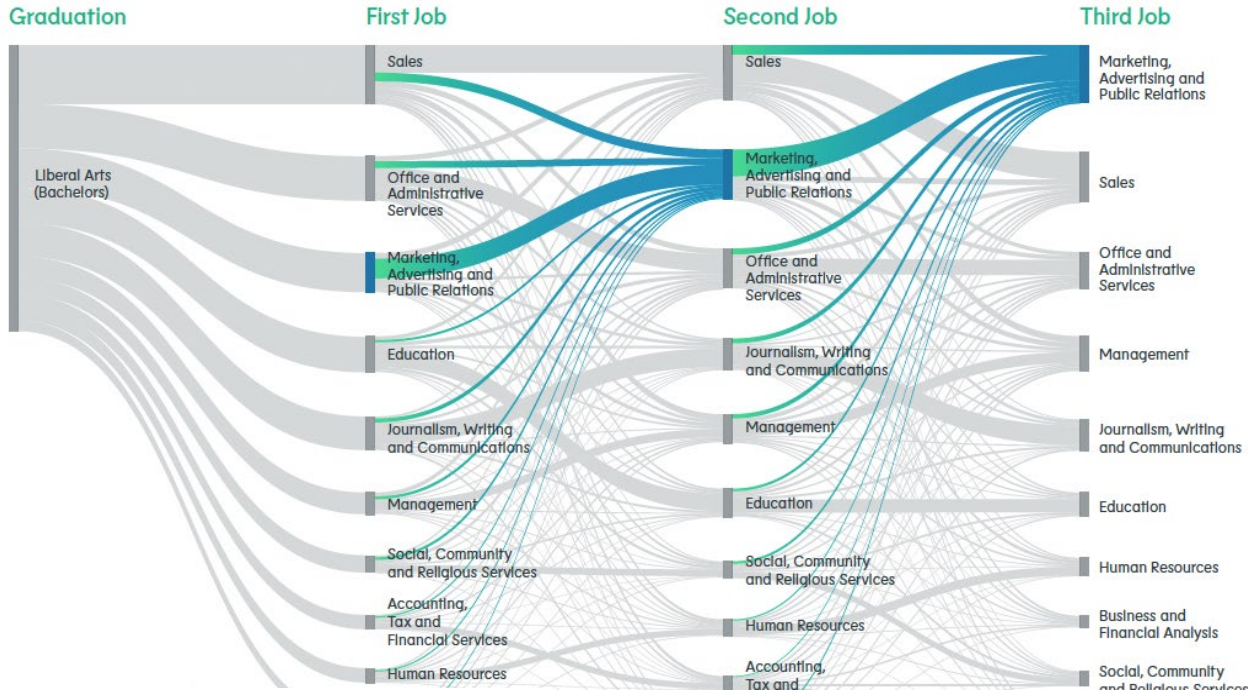
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Source: MindEdge Critical Thinking Study 2018

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EMSI and Strada, in their Future of Work initiative, show that those graduating with a bachelor’s degree in liberal arts may not hit stride in their dream job or profession of choice until the second or third job. This analysis can be seen in Figure 3, which leads us to a hypothesis that these graduates are either not advised in a manner that adequately connects them to the marketplace or that their credentials connect to jobs in the workplace. Employers may be unable to unravel or identify a liberal arts graduate’s competencies beyond the earned credential’s name.

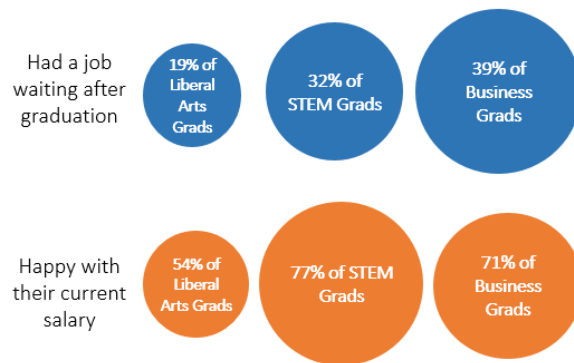
Figure 3 – Liberal Arts Graduates Start Hitting Stride in Their Second or Third Jobs



Source: EMSI, Strada, Future of Work

UPCEA research has shown that just 19% of liberal arts graduates had a job immediately after graduation and another 23% found employment within three months. Thirty-nine percent of business graduates had a job immediately after graduation and another 27% within three months. For STEM graduates, the percentages were 32% and 14% respectively. In addition, Figure 4 shows that liberal arts graduates who are employed experience lower satisfaction with their salaries. The study also shows lower satisfaction levels with career advising for liberal arts graduates and fewer internship opportunities.

Figure 4 – Employment after Graduation



Source: UPCEA Liberal Arts Study, 2019

Employers may be seeing a liberal arts graduate’s degree and not fully understand the competencies that this person has. A bachelor’s of arts in English or history may indicate that the individual is good in areas directly associated to their degree, but may not show clear evidence of other competencies, such as being an effective communicator, presenter, problem-solver or team player. Some of these competencies may be assumed (correctly or incorrectly) for those with a degree in business or STEM-related field.

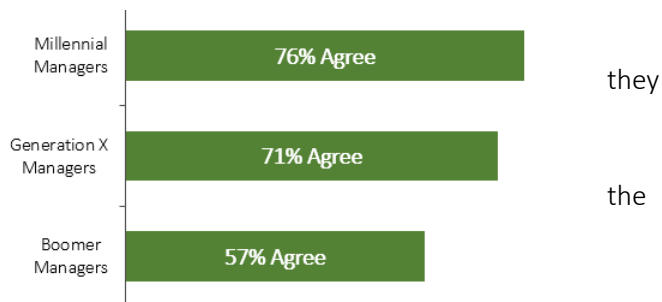
To assist in overcoming the uncertainties and competency mystery of a liberal arts graduate, we have concluded that the value of the degree has not been adequately communicated. In the UPCEA research (Figure 5), many employers have told us that value certificates and badges as a tool to better understanding a future employee’s abilities. On the other hand, liberal arts graduates are less likely to see value as can be seen in Figure 6.

So what needs to be done to help liberal arts students, graduates and colleges and institutions that lean heavily on liberal arts students?

- Align the curriculum to professions that liberal graduates want and will migrate to.
- Create competency badges throughout the degree-earning experience. Students can earn badges in key areas that will improve their employability without hurting the value of the full degree.
- On the way to the degree, institutions should consider awarding certificates to students when major badging or competency milestones are met.
- Liberal arts students need to be made aware of value of earning badges and certificates, as well as documenting competencies along the way.
- Liberal arts students need to get better advising earlier in their college experience and also to have access to more integrated career services.
- Employers need to be engaged in creating more value through alternative credentials within the liberal arts degree.

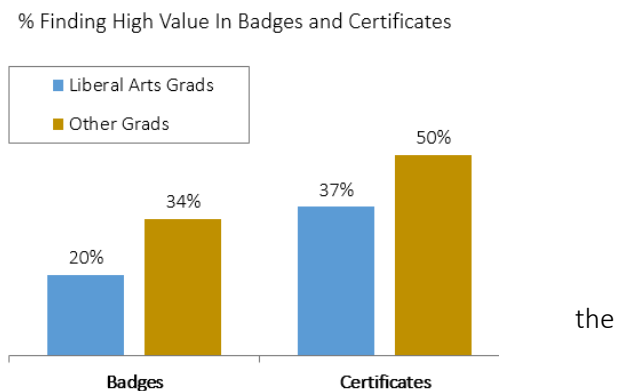
The new economy and the city of the future will rely heavily on true “people” people, strong communicators, problem solvers and critical thinkers. One should not give up hope on the liberal arts degree, but to retool it if needed, better communicate its value and supplement it if needed with courses that will strengthen it in the workplace.

Figure 5 – Millennials in Management Positions Are More Likely to Support Badges and Certificates



Source: UPCEA Manager Study 2018

Figure 6 – Liberal Arts Graduates Value Badges and Certificates Less



Source: UPCEA Liberal Arts Study 2019