

# The Value of a Degree

Students from Arts & Science programs frequently graduate from university without a solid grasp of what their degree can do for them in the world of work. Understanding the value of your degree can help you successfully market your skills to future employers, and guide you in supplementing your education with additional experience when necessary.

## Open Options

Many students take an Arts & Science degree out of interest in a particular subject area, often without a specific career in mind. Understandable. Even commendable. During your education you get the chance to learn about your strengths, weaknesses, interests, values and goals, as well as develop an awareness of what opportunities are out there. By taking a general degree you are actually keeping your options open!

## Diversity of Skills & Knowledge

In today's *rapidly* changing economy, a diverse range of skills will be the best insurance you have to protect yourself from hard times. Workers with very narrow, specialized skill sets can find themselves going from being a hot commodity to being left out in the cold.

Still you might have lingering doubts about the value of your degree. Why? The problem stems from thinking that your degree will connect you directly in an obvious way to employment. Comparing yourself to others who are working towards professional degrees such as nursing, engineering, or accounting can cause anxiety; the connection to a career seems clear to them because their options are so focused. The real difficulty with an Arts & Science degree is that you have **SO MANY** options! Canada divides the world of work into over 30,000 different occupational titles. Of all the work opportunities out there, roughly half require a specific degree. Half **DO NOT**.

## Importance of Paid, Volunteer & Extra-Curricular Experiences

All this talk of options and choices might seem a bit strange to you. If you are doing yourself such a big favour by getting an Arts & Science degree, why does it seem so tough for you to find a job right away? Why isn't your degree enough to land you a job? Truthfully – no degree will be enough to ensure you a job. Employers are looking for well-rounded graduates – even Engineering and Computer Science grads are expected to balance their technical courses with a variety of extracurricular experiences and volunteer activities. So why should an Arts & Science graduate be any different?

You need to **add experience** to your degree.

You can do this by becoming involved and following up on your interests: join clubs, volunteer, get a part-time job.

**PARTICIPATE** in life beyond the classroom! These other activities will not only help to develop your skills, but will also contribute to your understanding of your abilities – a key component of being able to market yourself to employers. Having these skills is not enough – you need to be able to articulate them to land the job you want.

## The School-to-Work Transition

Is all this preparation necessary? YES! Arts & Science graduates can have significant difficulty with the school-to-work transition. Many students with professional degrees find jobs more easily upon graduation, maybe even at higher starting salaries, but this is a very short-term view of the situation. It is not as bad as it seems for Arts & Science graduates – according to the Ontario University Graduate Survey, 92 percent are employed within 6 months of graduation and 97 percent find employment within 2 years.

When stepping out in to the work world, Arts & Science grads often need to start in an entry-level position as a stepping-stone to future advancement. If employers can have you audition your talents in a position of less responsibility, they will be more confident about your long-term suitability.

Over time Arts & Science graduates catch up and often surpass those with other degrees. In fact, the CEOs of the Bank of Montreal and Altamira, as well as the President of General Motors are all Arts & Science graduates! According to a recent survey from Fortune Magazine, 38 percent of today's CEOs majored in liberal arts. So keep the big picture in mind – short-term pain for long-term gain is true in this case!

### What Do Employers Want?

Need more proof that employers **DO** value your degree?

In recent surveys of the most important factors considered by employers when making hiring decisions, **INTERPERSONAL SKILLS** ranked ahead of experience, accomplishments, and technical knowledge. Outside of technical occupations, employers are often less concerned with specific technical skills than with **TRANSFERABLE SKILLS** – skills such as research, problem solving, presentation skills, literacy, computer literacy and decision making. Technical skills are constantly becoming dated while transferable skills will get stronger the more they are used.

### How do I Learn About all these Career Options?

So if employers do value arts & science graduates and you have SO many options – why do many graduates feel trapped by their degrees? Does a history degree really mean all you can be is a historian or a history teacher? While these are definitely viable options that may be fulfilling to some History grads – there are a host of other options related to their degree. Find some possible matches by using resources in the Academic Advising & Career Centre (AA&CC) such as *Great Jobs for History Majors* from the *Great Jobs* series. In addition you may want to consult one of the AA&CC's degree-specific tip sheets which highlight potential occupations for people in your field of study.

### Still Looking for More Options?

Many graduates enter fields unrelated to their degree in an obvious way. According to the recent Ontario University Graduate Survey, 49% don't work in fields directly related to their program of study. Most Arts & Science graduates are recruited for their trained mind and not for their specialist knowledge. Their abilities to think critically and learn outside of their subject area provide an adaptability that allows them to consider opportunities in a large variety of fields such as: government, not-for-profit, uniformed services, management, human resources, finance, advertising, sales, libraries, information systems and even starting a new business. Keep in mind that some of these options will require further training. Knowing this in advance can help you meet any program requirements.

You might be putting pressure on yourself to make the perfect choice – don't feel like this is an all or nothing decision. Most workers can expect to hold at least 5 different **CAREERS** during their lifetime – often in *very* different functions and industries! If you do your research and take the plunge into the workforce you will be learning more about yourself while there – you can always move around within the organization you are with or move on to fresh opportunities as they arise. At each position there will be things that appeal to you and things you will wish you could change. But there is only one way to find out. *So what are you waiting for?* Take charge of your career! Get out there, have fun and start exploring!

### Need More Information?

The AA&CC (AC213) has a variety of print and electronic resources spanning all areas of career development and the job search. Research career options, educational programs, organizations, and industries as well as résumé, interview, and networking strategies. A Resource Officer is always available to assist you in finding the best resources to meet your specific needs. The AA&CC also offers useful seminars such as: Discover Your Skills & Career Options and Choosing a Program. Check out dates and times and sign up for workshops on the intranet.

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