Negative Case: Career

Ask a students what they want to be as adults, and the answers will vary: doctor, astronaut, firefighter, rodeo clown, real-life Indiana Jones. As they learn more about the world, their preferences evolve. Some students graduate and then immediately use their degree to get started in a career they love. Others look around a few years after graduation and realize that they’re miserable—not because they’re worthless people, but because they’re not working in an area that suits their skills. In a world so diverse, we ought to reject the resolution: *In formal education, liberal arts ought NOT be valued over practical skills.*

## Resolutional Analysis: Preference is Non-Unique

I want to make sure that we don’t fixate on specific stories of people who were happy or unhappy in specific fields. We could be here for centuries telling such stories and not be any closer to understanding the resolution. Any career can be rewarding and profitable, and people have a vast range of unique talents and personalities to match them.

Let’s focus instead on what formal education can do to make a diverse student body as successful as possible. To do that, we need:

# Value: Career

American Heritage Dictionary defines Career as: “The general course or progression of one's working life or one's professional achievements.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

Here’s why this is a better way to measure the resolution.

## Reason to Prefer: Purpose of Education

Students are required to get a basic education starting at a young age. This is a reason they don’t get to choose to play outside all day: they must be employable later in life. As students age, classes become more and more focused on specific careers. In college, students pick majors indicating the career they want to pursue. In other words, every moment of formal education revolves around career. This makes it the only accurate way to measure the resolution.

# Contention 1: Liberal Arts Offer Few Careers

Liberal Arts were conceived to help students serve their country better. They teach things like critical thinking and history. While these can be interesting fields to learn about, the demand for these skills is very low.

For example, Art History – perhaps the most liberal-artsy liberal art possible – is considered the worst college major for 2015 graduates, according to business forecast publisher Kiplinger.[[2]](#footnote-3) Making a living in a field like anthropology and music is very difficult because the pay tends to be low and the competition for the small number of available jobs is stiff.

Of course, this doesn’t mean liberal arts should be removed from schools entirely. It just means we shouldn’t make them the top priority. Practical skills have far more to offer students as shown in:

# Contention 2: Practical Skills Offer Many Careers

Practical skills are conceived solely to help students build good careers, and they do a great job of it. A formal education system that is focused on practical skills gives the most students the biggest chance of success.

Career Profiles is one of the leading career and job search guides on the Internet. It offers an exhaustive list of careers available in the modern workforce, separated by fields. You don’t need to write this down, but I do want you to hear the list.

Here are the liberal arts fields: Education, Psychology.

Here are the practical skills fields: Business, Computers, Construction, Engineering, Farming & Fishing, Health, Hospitality, Law Enforcement, Management, Media, Military, Office Administration, Production, Professional (such as barbers and vets), Installation & Repair, Sales, Science, Transportation.[[3]](#footnote-4)

In each of those fields, there are many different jobs to pursue. So by a ratio of at least 9-to-1, practical skills jobs are vastly more plentiful than liberal arts jobs.

Remember, preference is non-unique. The career goals of each student are equally legitimate. It doesn’t make sense to value liberal arts over practical skills in the classroom when only about 10% of students will go on to get careers in liberal arts. It’s unfair to everyone else.

Sure, we should offer liberal arts to the small number of students who would benefit from pursuing it. But in a broader sense, we should value practical skills higher in education in order to reflect the 90% of the careers available to students after they graduate. In other words, we should reject this resolution. Let’s be fair to our students and maximize their chance at a great career. Thank you.

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*This case was written by Travis Herche.*

1. American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language 5th Edition “Career” <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=career> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Kiplinger, “2014-2015 Worst College Majors,” <http://www.kiplinger.com/slideshow/college/T012-S001-worst-college-majors-for-your-career-2015-2016/index.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Career Profiles, “Careers by Field,” <http://www.careerprofiles.info/careers.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)