

# When Your Major Isn't a Roadmap to

## THE LIBERAL ARTS JOB SEARCH

### YOUR CAREER INBOX

Sometimes finding a job might seem harder for you than for your friends graduating with a degree in business or engineering. Some degrees are more profession-driven than others, and that's OK. As a liberal arts grad, you've got a lot to offer an employer — and there are a lot of directions you can go. You need to know what you're looking for so you can figure out where to find it.

### IT HELPS TO PUT YOUR DEGREE IN PERSPECTIVE FIRST.

Just because the curriculum hasn't steered you along a particular career path, that doesn't mean your degree is worthless or that no one wants to hire you. You probably chose your major not because of the job it was (or wasn't) going to get you, but because of your passion for and interest in the subject matter.

While not having a major that provides a roadmap to a given career might make figuring out what you want to do next more challenging, it also gives you many directions in which to turn. Your degree isn't automatically pre-defining what you can do — you can do just about anything you want.

Before you start on your job search, you'll need to lay some groundwork for yourself. Ask yourself questions about what's important to you when it comes to work and life in general:

- ▶ How will your choice of career complement other aspects of yourself?
- ▶ What role will your career play in your life?
- ▶ What kinds of things would you like to have the chance to do?
- ▶ What strengths do you want to use?
- ▶ What do you know you don't want to do?

### DECIDE HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO YOU TO WORK IN AN AREA DIRECTLY RELATED TO YOUR FIELD.

One of the hard personal choices that you'll need to make is deciding how important it is to you to work in a career that is directly related to your field. This is a question only you can answer. For many students, one of the best things to do is to forget about your field and focus instead on your interests.

What are you passionate about? You might find that your interests are very diverse, or maybe very specific and limited. Focusing on your interests is a good way to grow your career opportunities and help ensure that you find a career that feels right.

If it's really important to you to work in your field, and you need help finding resources for where to look and what to look for, you should see your Field Career Consultant for field-specific assistance.

### WHAT IF EMPLOYERS I'M INTERESTED IN AREN'T LOOKING FOR SOMEONE WITH MY DEGREE?

You may have to explicitly make the case to an employer that you're a qualified candidate. The trick here is to get beyond job titles and preferred majors. Instead, focus on the qualifications

### CAREER SERVICES POST

With the extra level of flexibility from a liberal arts degree comes an extra responsibility to take initiative to explore career options that would be a good fit. You'll likely need to do lots of in-depth soul-searching regarding your personal goals, interests and values as they apply to the world of work. If you haven't already, **spend some time answering important questions** about what you want to get out of work, where you want to be in five years, what kind of life you want to live and who you want to be — do this **before you start your job search**. Take time to put the answers together for yourself and you might just find they help you later when employers ask you to articulate answers to other hard questions like “Why do you want to work for us?”

— COURTNEY CHAPIN • COLLEGE OF ARTS & LETTERS

section of the job listing. Look for positions that seem interesting, regardless of what the title is, or the preferred degree. You may in fact possess many of the qualities they're looking for:

- ▶ **COMMUNICATION SKILLS**, both written and oral (*remember the countless papers and presentations?*),
- ▶ the **ABILITY TO WORK COLLABORATIVELY** (*how about all those group projects and community service projects?*),
- ▶ and **LEADERSHIP SKILLS** (*ever held a leadership role in a student organization or been responsible for training or supervising others at work?*).

These skills are all often part of the desired qualifications section of entry-level positions.

If you can demonstrate in your cover letter and resume that you're as qualified as someone from the employer's preferred major, you have just as good a shot at landing the job! It's all about how you put the whole package together.

### **THERE ARE SOME LIBERAL ARTS-FRIENDLY CAREER PATHS OUT THERE YOU MAY NOT HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT.**

Nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies (both local and fed-

eral) tend to be a little more flexible about what field your degree is in and offer opportunities to do work in an area that's of interest to you. Nonprofit and government employment (also known as the public sector) can also give you the opportunity to change your world.

Read more about conducting a government and nonprofit job search on pages 32–33.

### **WHEN YOU SAY I CAN DO ANYTHING, WHAT DOES THAT REALLY MEAN?**

You might be wondering what other liberal arts grads, or more specifically, what other students from your major, have done with their degrees. The possibilities are pretty much endless, but to give you an idea . . . Liberal arts graduates have become actors, musicians, CEOs, marketing directors, Hollywood producers, legislative aides, advertising copywriters and creative directors, communications managers, writers, police officers, editors, translators, filmmakers, artists, designers, counselors, lobbyists, teachers, professors, elected government officials, social workers, computer programmers, managers, curators, agents, promoters, entrepreneurs — and yes, even lawyers, judges, and doctors!

### **CAREER SERVICES POST**

Have you considered federal employment? If not, perhaps you should start. **The good news for MSU graduates is that the federal government is hiring!** In fact, the federal government projects that more than 550,000 employees (over one-third of the permanent, full-time workforce) will leave the government in the next five years. Talk about job openings! Even better news for liberal arts students is that the federal government currently employs more than 425,000 individuals from arts, humanities, and social science backgrounds.

— KRISTI COLEMAN • COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

