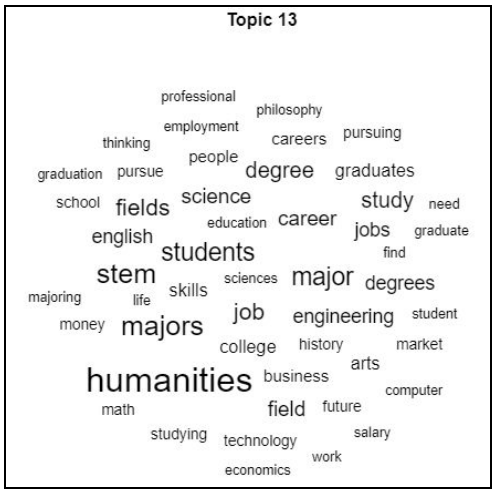
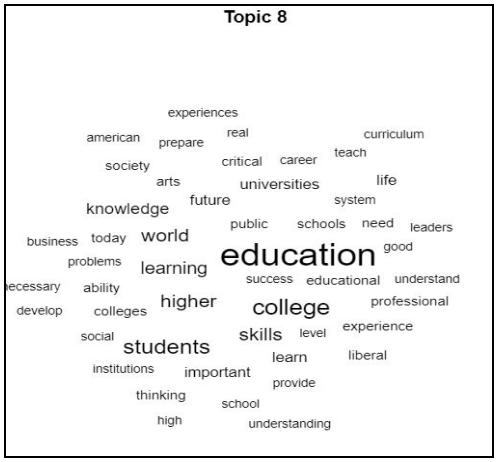
Students Writing about Education Value Cognitive Flexibility and "Soft Skills" Associated with the Humanities and Liberal Arts

While "common sense" public views of higher education tend to assume that majors such as engineering, biology, and economics automatically lead to certain jobs, student journalists writing in university newspapers complicate this narrative. Often, their articles explicitly recognize "soft skills" such as communication, leadership, emotional intelligence, teamwork, and critical thinking as crucial to student success. They associate these skills closely with a "well-rounded", liberal arts education rather than a narrowly career-focused one.

In a topic model[1] of Collection 14, topics #8 and #13 both have to do with jobs, careers, employability, skills, and majors. Top articles emphasize how to get ahead in the job market and the importance of liberal arts "soft skills" for that purpose. In topic 8, the articles seem split in their goals: some call for schools to do a better job instilling "marketable" skills; others identify the humanities as the source of these skills despite being undervalued in the current climate of university-as-investment. Articles associated with topic 8 do not make the case for majoring in certain subjects over others; rather, they question the idea that a major in a high-paying field, by itself, automatically means success.

Topic 13 is possibly the most illuminating topic because so many of the articles highly associated with it argue explicitly for the career/personal values of a humanities education and emphasize the radical versatility of humanities-associated skills sets. Significantly, the only top articles skeptical of a humanities education (though none were openly disparaging) measure its worth purely in economic terms, charting median incomes for different degrees over time. But this conflation of "value" with "income" is also explicitly criticized by those who argue that humanities majors also report more passion for their chosen fields.





Topics #13 and #8 viewed in TopicBubbles.

Document collection studied: Collection 14: US Humanities or Liberal Arts University Wire Model

Topic model of this collection: 100 topics

Interesting sample topics in the model: 8, 13

Representative articles: a , b

Evidentiary documentation for this key finding: WE1S report

[1] For a description of the model, see Model 14-100.