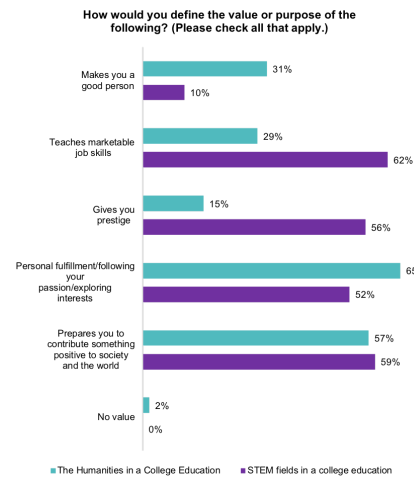


Students more often associate the humanities with personal fulfillment and positive social impact than with prestige and marketability.

Students value the humanities as a source of personal fulfillment and good citizenship, but do not as often see the humanities as a provider of social or financial capital. A survey of 124 undergraduates at UC Santa Barbara (UCSB) conducted as part of WE1S [human subjects research](#) in spring 2019, asked students to define the value or purpose of the humanities in college by choosing from a list of options.¹ Over half the respondents chose “*personal fulfillment/ following your passion/ exploring interests*” and “*prepares you to contribute something positive to society and the world*” as their answers. Just under a third answer that college humanities “*makes you a good person*” and “*teaches marketable job skills.*” Only 15% thought the humanities “*gives you prestige*” (see graphs [a](#) and [b](#) of our survey results).

Student evaluations of the arts in college, as well as of the humanities in high school and the arts in high school show similar patterns. *Personal fulfillment* and *prepares you to contribute something positive to society* always rank highest, with *job skills*, *good person*, and *prestige* following in various order at a considerable distance. The social sciences in college fare similarly, though here *job skills* and *prestige* were slightly more frequent answers, compared with the arts and humanities. In contrast, when we asked students to define the value or purpose of STEM fields in college education, *teaches marketable job skills*, *prepares you to contribute something positive*,

gives you prestige, and *personal fulfillment* are all chosen by more than 50% of respondents. Only 10% of students thought STEM education *makes you a good person*.



Comparison of values that college students associate with Humanities and STEM. See further graphs [a](#), [b](#), and [c](#)

Students thus feel that *both* the humanities and STEM provide fulfillment and prepare them to make positive contributions to the world. The crucial difference is that students also perceive STEM as teaching marketable job skills and giving prestige, whereas they do not as readily associate these traits with the humanities. In the student view, a college education should serve multiple purposes. Fulfillment and societal impact rank slightly higher than job skills and prestige, but all four make a strong showing. These survey results can be put in interesting conversation with our [findings](#) on student journalists writing about job skills and majors.

Resources

Population Studied: UCSB undergrads ([C-HS-1](#))

Evidentiary Documentation: [To come]

Related Materials:

* [WE1S Human Subjects page](#); [KF-8-1](#); [KF-4-5](#); [Cards to come]

¹ Students could check as many answers as applied. Not all responded. Another question allowed students to explain their answers and add nuance. Some commented on societal perceptions, the variability of personal experience, the impact of teaching style, the value of multiple forms of education, and problems with concepts like “good person,” “skills,” or “prestige.” Others suggested ways to improve the survey.