

U. Miami survey is a case study in how individuals and society value humanities and sciences differently.

(Survey results complementing WE1S big-data research)

Our survey at the University of Miami asked students and others to “define the value or purpose” of the humanities, the social sciences, and STEM in college education. Almost one quarter of undergraduate respondents selected as their answer “makes you a good person” for humanities and social sciences, while only 14% chose that value for STEM science and technology fields. However, undergrad responses to whether a field “prepares you to contribute something positive to society and to the world” put the humanities and STEM roughly on a par, with STEM edging the humanities at 60% vs. 52%. This suggests that undergrads perceive the humanities and sciences both to have ethical value, but in somewhat different ways. The humanities enable *individual* moral development while

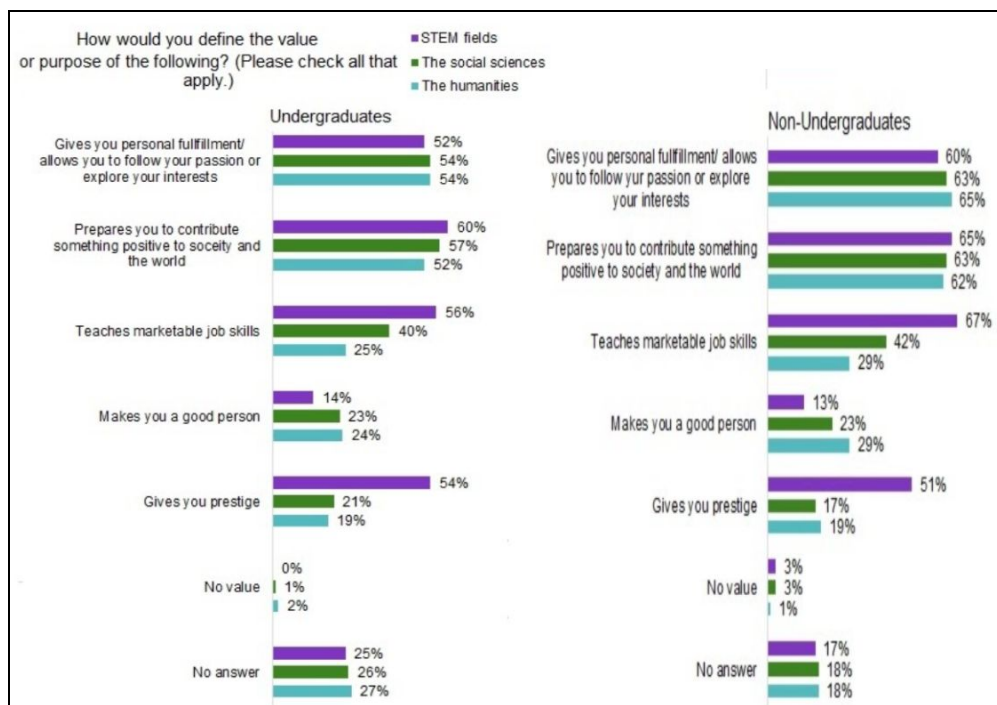
simultaneously contributing to the good of society, while the value of the sciences is preponderantly the public good.

For the individual, according to undergrads, the worth of the sciences is of a different kind. The response that STEM “gives you prestige” received over twice as many votes as for other fields; and STEM along with the social sciences were both thought to be more capable of “teach[ing] you marketable job skills” (56% and 40%, respectively) than the humanities (25%).¹ In students’ minds, that is, STEM benefits the individual in the coin of higher-paying and more impressive jobs rather than of self-improvement

¹ This is despite the fact that social sciences are seen as less “prestigious.”

as a human being.

Non-undergrad respondents to our survey (grad students, faculty, staff, and others at U. Miami) gave similar answers, indicating that opinions about the values associated with the humanities and sciences remain stable across ages and stages of life. However, the percentage of non-undergrads who think the humanities both “makes you a good person” and “teaches marketable job skills” improves somewhat from the undergraduate scores to 29%. Further, non-undergrads associated “gives you personal fulfillment” with the humanities more often than the undergrads (65% vs, 54%). Despite that, only 19% of both non-undergrads and undergrads considered the humanities prestigious.



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