

U. Miami Undergraduate Survey: Would You Advise a Friend to Major in the Humanities?

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In this report, we examined undergraduate results for questions QU39 and QU39A, which asked students whether they would advise a friend to major in the humanities, and why.

I. Visualizations and Statistics

QU39: Would you advise a friend to major in the humanities?¹

Total Respondents: 240 out of 312

Yes: 21%

No: 11%

Depends: 46%

No Answer: 23%

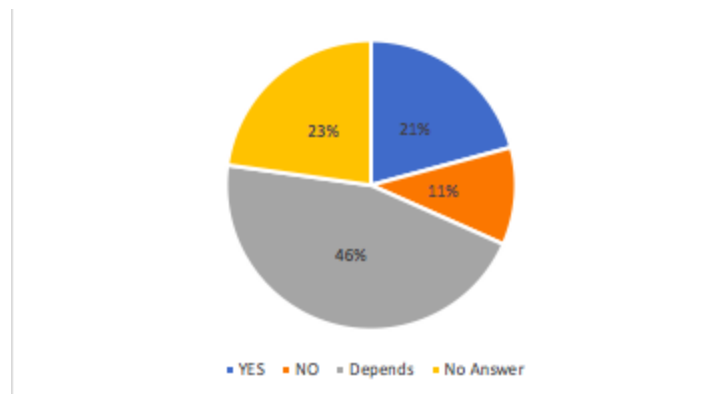


Fig. 1: QU39 results

¹ Due to approximations, percentages add to 101%.

QU39A: Why, or why not?

Total Respondents: 200 out of 312



Fig. 2: Word cloud of responses from QU39A

II. Discursive Response

The most striking factor about this set of questions is how starkly it varies from the responses to the question set about humanities activities. The figures are basically reversed: [While 57% of respondents said they would recommend that a friend take part in humanities activities only 21% of respondents said that they would recommend that a friend major in the humanities.](#) It is worth noting that a large portion of the respondents who did not answer “Yes” explained their choice by saying that it would just depend on where their friend’s interests and skills lay (as can be seen by some of the biggest words in the cloud above). Therefore, if this question was being asked verbally and the questioner had the opportunity to stipulate that the friend *is* interested and skilled at humanities-based fields, it is likely that the “Yes” percentage would get significantly higher.

However, after the “depends” reasons, the concern most often brought up in the discursive responses was job prospects/income. There was a notable variability in certainty in these statements, with some respondents saying things like, “There are no good-paying jobs in those majors” and others saying things like, “I’m not sure what the job prospects are for those majors.” Another interesting distinction lies between respondents who took for granted that the goal of

college is to find a good-paying job and the respondents who did not. For instance, some respondents said something like, “If my friend’s goal is to find a high-paying job, then I would not recommend it. But if their goal is to follow their passions, then I would.” Others, however, answered more along the lines of, “No I wouldn’t, because there are no good-paying jobs in those fields.”

A handful of respondents brought up compromise-driven paths for their hypothetical friend that would alleviate the perceived passion/job prospects dilemma, such as double majoring with humanities as one of the two majors, or cultivating humanities-based interests as hobbies rather than as careers. Only one respondent wrote a discursive response premised on the idea that their friend would have a relaxing, easy college experience if they chose a humanities major, which is interesting considering [the generally high rating of “easy”](#) in the set of questions that asked about connotations with the humanities.

Finally, there were very few people who gave a firm “Yes” or “No” discursive response - as opposed to a “depends” response - that did *not* have to do with job prospects/income.

A sampling of such answers includes:

- “It is important to be able to appreciate the world around you, either the historical context or being able to recognize the beauty in the way the world exists.”
- “[The humanities] provides you with a globalized worldview which is essential for all types of business and political interactions.”
- “If it weren’t for my English major, I would not understand why life MATTERS. My English major has given me the opportunity to enter into new worlds through literature, and with my Creative Writing focus, I was able to truly hone in on what matters to ME as an individual. I was able to learn about and explore important issues such as racism, injustice, autonomy, femininity, etc.”
- “[The humanities] has devolved to become the domain of radical feminism and liberal thought.”
- “Depends on the field. Humanities majors alone are often not employable, and I find their social utility questionable unless paired with an eye towards policy or educational development. A career in the milieu of humanities academics seems needlessly insular and theoretical, but studying arts and culture in historical and contemporary social and political context is valuable for constructive policy.”