

U. Miami Focus Groups: Path Narrative

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In this report, we have collected quotes from our focus group transcripts which center around the narrative highlighted in [MR-9-17](#)—that certain majors lead to specific, guaranteed jobs while other majors do not. Focus Group 1 and 2 respondents comprise non-undergraduates. Focus Group 3 comprises all undergraduate participants.

Focus Group	Name	Field	Status
1	H	Marine Biology	PhD Candidate
1	E	Developmental Psychology	PhD Candidate
1	B	Meteorology	Professor
1	S	English	Lecturer
2	D	Academic Services	Associate Dean
2	A	Oceanography	PhD Student
2	G	English	PhD Candidate
2	C	Sustainable Business	MA Student
2	R	Accounting	MA Student
3	N	English	Sophomore
3	P	Political Science	Senior
3	L	Public Health	Freshman
3	U	Motion Pictures	Junior
3	T	Music Business	Freshman

I: QuotationsFocus Group 1

E: I want to go into finance after college I need to major in economics, I need to do business, that's what's gonna` provide me with the best skills after college and the best career opportunities

E: I did go to a liberal arts college, but I also feel I was part of the group that came into a liberal arts education kind with like a set path in mind and actually my liberal arts experience changed my path...It doesn't necessarily mean like if I major in this then I will be ... pursuing that career afterward, but that experience will help me get there.

H: I almost didn't get into grad school, and that was with starting when I was in high school, getting really good grades in undergrad, doing well on the GRE.

H: Yeah my dad couldn't see the path ...'cause like my brother does software engineering, like, you know he's not a doctor but, you know, my dad completely understood that, oh people will pay programmers. He didn't—I graduated early from my undergrad and my dad said, my dad was willing to pay for another semester of college, he was like, you should get a minor in accounting just in case. You should do accounting. I was graduating, I was helping—'cause I was very lucky my parents paid for me to go to college and my dad was willing to shell out more money so I could do what accounting—getting useful—which blew my mind. I didn't do that. But that's how much he didn't understand what I do. He gets it more now but he is still I think is like, you'd make more money if you did that. Even now I'm gonna work for the state. "You should work for a private company, you would make more money." I don't care about making money, I care about being happy. Like as you said it's about doing something you love. Not everybody...he did...I think he would have understood because he did something he loved but...it was okay for him to do that. Not for me.

Focus Group 3

L: Nobody cares at the end of the day what you major in.

M: So I'm a film major, my job is like, me personally, it's like harder to get one, like your industry is open, you've got to like go in there and search yourself...It's like, broad.

M: But then people get this stereotype, like yeah okay you want to be a film major, are you trying to be the next Shonda Rhimes, the next this or that, so they compare your path to their path and they're saying basically if your path isn't like that, you're going to be a fail. So there's one thing that's kind of now that we're being more accepting we have to kind of make sure that people aren't just keeping those like those idols in their head because then people compare

your path to the idol's path and because you're not on the idol's path they're like, oh, you're not going to be successful.

N: It's like [my family and friends] really don't know, like, the possibilities with an English major so I feel definitely like me taking that step is like opening up this whole new world of possibilities in terms of like what one can study.

The Focus Group Three whiteboard discussion, in which we asked participants to call out the words they associated with the humanities (see [MR-9-42](#)), also yielded the finding that the humanities are a "less defined career path," and the liberal arts are "not a necessary career path."

II: Focus Group Findings and Complementary Survey Data

It is unsurprising that undergraduates believe that their majors will lead to a specific career in a field related to their degree. An interesting and important addition to this conversation, however, is the survey results, which seem to reveal that it is not a bad thing when one's career does not align with one's degree.

A high number of non-undergraduates reported that they did not wind up with the career they thought they would, and yet a very small number say that they regret their choice of major. This seems to indicate that unexpected careers are not always a bad thing; not getting the job one expected, in other words, doesn't have to mean getting a "bad" job.

Somewhere around 62% of undergraduates think their major will lead to a profitable career, and 66% think their major will lead to a specific career ([MR-9-3](#)). Statistically, this is probably unlikely. If undergraduates, and their parents, could somehow be convinced not just that a college degree doesn't *have* to have one singular career trajectory but also that *a lot of them often don't and are instead broadly applicable to a variety of jobs*, it seems that interest in humanities majors/minors could noticeably increase.

The primary perception that the humanities suffers from, if our survey is any indication, is that the humanities are not tied to specific jobs that offer livable wages. The problem here is not just that people don't realize it's not a bad thing to have a degree that isn't solely tied to one particular career, but also that people may not realize lots of other majors have this same feature. There does not, for instance, seem to be a strong conception in popular culture that lots of people with law degrees do not work as lawyers even though current numbers of law graduates outstrip the number of law jobs available in the U.S.

During the 2018-2019 school year, University of Miami's Department of History tried to counter this narrative, placing signs alongside major pathways on campus which showed famous people in a variety of fields with the words "History Major" displayed in large letters, demonstrating that History majors end up in all kinds of jobs. The vast majority of students might be able to

recognize that this is true, but they may not understand *how* it happens, or think that those are fantastical outliers; in other words, there's virtually no one talking to them about how they can get a job that isn't the exact thing they majored in. In general, both students themselves and those advocating for the humanities would benefit greatly if students were spoken to more explicitly about this, and perhaps not just with famous people as examples.

It seems, in other words, like the most beneficial thing is to de-link the idea of "major" from "specific, singular career trajectory," but this is an extremely tall order. How to reverse decades of neoliberalization of the university that have trained our entire society to see higher education purely as a job factory?