

U.Miami Focus Groups: Experiences of Public/Private/Liberal Arts/R1 and High School

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In this report, we have collected quotes from our focus group transcripts which center around their experiences in different types of institutions at the higher and secondary educational level. Focus Group 1 and 2 respondents comprise non-undergraduates including faculty members. 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: Higher Education Experiences**Focus Group 1**

S: I just believe that liberal arts is the best education you can have.

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.

E: I had the opportunity to engage in a lot of these disciplines, while also selecting a major within that, so to me liberal arts is a lot of what's already on this board but in addition to the social sciences, really getting at like....really ...teaching students how to really think, and like that thought process and just being a critical thinker through all these different disciplines...I was a science major.

S: I went to a liberal arts college as well. It's a way of thinking, it's curiosity. It's...learning respect for all of this, different disciplines and what they have to offer, and it's a way of looking at them. Inquisitive questioning. And also respecting all of the things that we have gone before and their ideas.

Focus Group 2

D: Under President Shalala, she used to say, you know, it's okay to to be undecided, coming in, not knowing exactly what you want to do. I, and I thought that was amazing ...she would just, I think, kinda calm the anxiety of some people, that, they weren't sure...So when you have a president come down and says, hey, it's, it's all right, you know, to, to not know, it's all right to change your mind and think about, think this out, 'cause it's important. It's important that you have a good experience but also that you learn what you think you wanna learn.

Focus Group 3

N: I usually think of people who go to liberal arts schools, I think of really rich, like really wealthy people who are probably going to become like a lawyer or something in the day, and I think someone said foundation, and like they have their liberal arts degree as a foundation to go to law school. That's like the picture in my head.

N: The people that I've met in the past two years are like huge resources...So one of the things for me in terms of going to college and staying the whole time was those experiences and those resources and those people I wouldn't get if I was just like...get this degree and go.

L: Our Dean of Education and senior vice provost, Dr. Green, he's the biggest champion of interdisciplinary studies like I remember at orientation, he went on he was like be the kid who double majors in physics and classics, be the kid who takes classes just for fun, so I think we're lucky that we have someone who's the voice for our curriculum, it encourages us ...to, you know, choose a major in something totally different...and people who decide to explore an interdisciplinary path are made into heroes.”

M: When I went to the 'Canes kickoff, President Frenk was talking about how a lot of students start here with one major and what they graduate is something completely different. And they really like encourage you to just go crazy, which I really like that about that here, like they encourage you, like oh you like this, let's take more classes here to see if you really like that, okay you want to do this, let's add a bit—it's like very welcoming.

M: When you mention like the humanities or a liberal arts based major, people always try to push you to dual, because they're like, yeah that's cool, kind of like they say, oh that's your hobby, or you need to have a more realistic degree to guarantee you a job, so that's kind of like...they always push you because like a lot of schools, speaking from my set, when you do a film major, you have to minor or you have to double major, because they're saying, basically, your chances of getting a job outside are not that great, right off the bat, so here why don't you do this, why don't you do something else?

II: High School Experience:

Focus Group 1

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...you know there is so little money through the government so they only take this many students and even with my job...

E: I really enjoyed science through my high school years, and I was pretty like, dedicated to pursuing the pre-med route and going to medical school, but I also wanted a liberal arts education.

Focus Group 2

R: We have to choose...to be a science student or humanities student in the fresh(man) year of high school...but I don't think we really can know what we really want at that age...there's a tendency, I think it's, it's not good tendency, like some science students despise humanities students because they think that you're not smart, you're not good, math...that's why you choose humanities major.

R: I used to want to be a science student, but in the freshman year of my high school I found myself not interested in chemistry or biology at all. So, I chose humanities. But after that, um, I feel the students I met, like, my classmates, they are more, like, they care- care more about this world, and also the social relationships rather than- I feel like science students - usually - care more about their, like, their science concepts. ...after I became a humanities student, I- I feel that- I learned a lot more from my...classmates.

A: I ...did...a program in high school where I did my senior year at a community college so I could take, like, other biology classes. ...I'm so thankful for that every day because I know there are so many other people who, who are still kind of, like, struggling to figure out what they want to do.

A: In our high school district there was always, like, at least one, like, high school suicide related to, like, being stressed, and, like, it was, it was really intense.

G: I picked the major that ended up being my career field based on my experiences in high school. I had really fantas- I went to a high school that I felt like prepared me really well for college

Focus Group 3

N: So in high school I did an internship at a science museum and I was like I don't really like this, and we did like computer work, we like built an app or whatever and I was like, this is meh, I'm not sure how I feel about this, and so then I was able to cross that off the list.

N: I graduated high school um, I did, like, dual-enrollment courses all my courses and I got an AA when I graduated high school. And I'm staying the whole four years here, I'm in my second year, but I had the option if I wanted to just do two years and get a degree and go, ...I chose to do the four-year route. Um, and part of that is because I see college as not like you're getting a degree but the experiences,

U: They were kind of like so what are you doing, what are you doing with your life? And when I first started talking about how I wanted to do — because I did IB in high school, and I was like I don't want to go that route, I don't want to be forced. So that's how I got into the film major, and as I kept telling people that I wanted to do the film major,

P: I also graduated with my AA, so I kind of fell into my degree because my senior year of high school, I was going to graduate and come here as a junior, I already had to know what I was going to do, so I decided policy, poli sci so I could do policy and then I would possibly do a double major in business.

P: my high school was weeding out the arts and humanities and putting in their place STEM programs because that's what would get them the recognition in the county and it would get them the good funding and all of that.

T: when I was in high school I also did IB and because IB is so — they have a push on being interdisciplinary but at least in my high school program there was a really big push on um, the hard sciences and math and different levels of um, those things, so, a lot of people from my high school — I was one of two people who majored in music. Um, out of like, out of our entire senior graduating class.

III: Observations

All the comments on a research university experience are UM students/affiliates, which only provide insights on UM, a private research university, and thus are not representative of the experience of students at every such institution. Participants characterize UM as encouraging interdisciplinary studies, different academic interests, and networking. Participants also emphasize, however, that liberal arts colleges offer an ability to gain a deeper analytical understanding of the world and provide opportunities to explore different academic and professional options.

Participants' characterizations of high school demonstrates that conceptions about the humanities and sciences are often established at that level, rather than at the post-secondary level.