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Why English Majors are the Hot New Hires

After years of emphasis being put on math and engineering degrees, here's why majors may be in high demand.

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JULY 11, 2013

Years ago while interviewing an English major, I mentioned that—for many reasons hiring individuals who have a degree in the humanities. When I finished speaking, the applicant was slightly choked up. He said, "You are the only person who has anything good about my degree." It's not uncommon for English majors—or anyone majoring in the humanities for that matter—to get a bad rap. Even [Marc Andreessen](#), founder of LinkedIn, not too long ago said that people should get math-oriented degrees; otherwise, they'd be working in shoe stores.



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We place a great value on a STEM education (degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). But are the tables turning? Are hiring managers beginning to see that a liberal arts education—and an English major in particular—brings to the workplace? Recently, some high-profile businesspeople came out in favor of hiring English majors. Bestselling author and small-business expert [Steve Strauss](#), for example, has admitted: "English majors are my employee of choice." And [Bracken Darrell](#), CEO of Logitech, says: "When I look at where our business is going, I think, boy, you do need to have some technical understanding somewhere in there, to be relevant. But you're really difficult to hire if you don't understand humanities."

The Popularity of English Majors

Employers are looking to hire English majors because these applicants bring a set of skills that businesses need:

Communication skills: In a recent [Job Outlook Survey](#), employers rated the "ability to communicate with persons inside and outside the organization" as the most important candidate skill. Communication is at the heart of any business. Everything that happens in an organization requires communication. This is one of the areas in which English majors excel. They have learned to speak well; they are well-read and have an extensive vocabulary; they spend years learning how to present a thesis coherently, and how to construct an argument; and they are trained to debate and defend their point of view logically. Bringing an English major to the fold is a much needed salve for organizations today, where poor communication skills are the norm rather than the exception.

Writing skills: A [Metlife survey](#) found that 97 percent of business executives rate writing as very important. English majors—perhaps more than any other major—are trained to write well. A major part of what business owners do to gain clients has to do with writing. It's writing an advertisement or a marketing brochure, a good sales letter or an email for a campaign. Businesses also need people who can create powerful content for the company blog, develop a strong social media presence and craft a compelling description of products and services for the company website. Even companies that conduct their sales through telemarketers need to start with a good script. The ROI of writing is invaluable for any business.

Researching skills: All business owners need to stay current on changes and developments in their field. They also need to have absolute accuracy in any communications with

Having someone on staff who excels in conducting research is a very viable asset majors are drilled in conducting in-depth research.

Critical thinking skills: The ability to analyze an issue and question assumptions a kinds of information in a business setting. English majors are taught to deconstru analyze a problem, and package their conclusion so others can understand their l thought. These are highly transferable skills that are vital for the success of a bus

Empathy: More and more, businesses are recognizing the importance of empathy workplace. In *The 'Soft Skill' That Pays \$100,000+*, author George Anders discov 1,000 listings for highly paid jobs where employers list empathy as a necessary q And these were not just jobs in traditionally compassionate sectors, such as healt nonprofits; they included companies in technology, finance, consulting and aeros name a few. Think Microsoft, Dell, Raytheon, Symantec, Pfizer and McKinsey.

There are numerous **studies** that correlate empathy with increased sales, with the performing managers of product development teams and with greater efficiency increasingly diverse workforce. Empathy is indeed the oil that keeps relationships smoothly. Dan Pink, in *A Whole Mind: Why Right Brainers Will Rule The Future*, lis that are vital for success in the new economy market—one of these is empathy. A you can't outsource empathy, or automate it. You need to have empathic people i organization.

How does this relate to English majors? A University of Toronto **study** on the effec literature on empathy shows that those who read fiction frequently have higher le cognitive empathy; i.e., the ability to understand how another person feels. **Keith** the researchers, said the reason fiction improves empathy is because it helps us t "understand characters' actions from their interior point of view, by entering into situations and minds, rather than the more exterior view of them that we usually l improves interpersonal understanding and enhances relationships with customer business associates. When you hire an English major, you're likely hiring someone cognitive empathy to the table.

The Beginning of a Trend

So is a wider range of employers recognizing the value of a liberal arts education? pattern," says **Dr. Jane Robbins** of the University of Arizona, "of employers asking liberal-arts training for all kinds of professions—engineering, medicine, the law, ai

management." She adds, "Many people may not know that philosophy and English biology, are common undergraduate majors for physicians."

David Boyes, CEO of Sine Nomine, a technology consulting company, says, "We do not hire mono-focused people. We need well-rounded people." His company puts all new hires through a one-year training program that covers the basics—like how to write an effective resume and document—and includes some philosophy and history.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities conducted a recent survey of employers to find out what they want from new hires. Its survey report, **It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success**, shows that more than half of executives want college graduates to have not only field-specific knowledge and skills but also a broad range of skills and knowledge. They place less value on the undergraduate major and more on a capacity to think critically, communicate clearly and solve complex problems. In an interview, **Debra Humphreys**, vice president at The AACU, said that the economic downturn has "put a premium on college graduates who are really multifaceted ... people with a broad range of knowledge and skills, as well as field-specific skills." According to Humphreys, this concern has intensified over the years.

What Does This Trend Mean for You?

The trend of employers looking for both field-specific skills and broad skills indicates that employees who combine a liberal arts major—especially an English major—with a degree, such as business, science or technology, will have a competitive advantage. As businesses continue to look for and hire such individuals, they will no doubt have a significant impact on the workplace by creating more diversity in an organization.

All companies can benefit from having a mix of left-brained and right-brained individuals on their team. Take IDEO, one of the most innovative companies in the world: One of the keys to success for innovation at IDEO is having extremely diversified teams solve problems that are traditionally handled by monolithic groups, such as just engineers or just designers. **IDEO's** innovation teams include 10 different types. One of these is The Caregiver, who uses empathy to understand each individual customer and create a relationship; another is the Storyteller, who captures the imagination with compelling narratives in whatever format fits the message: video, animation, even comic strips.

As a business owner, you could gain an edge in the global marketplace and be better positioned for success with such multifaceted individuals in your camp. Have you

English major yet?

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Bruna Martinuzzi is the founder of [Clarion Enterprises Ltd.](#), and the author of two [Presenting with Credibility: Practical Tools and Techniques for Effective Presenta](#) [Leader as a Mensch: Become the Kind of Person Others Want to Follow](#).

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Joseph L. Rosenberg CPA-Owner, *Joseph L. Rosenberg CPA*

My son is studying engineering in grad school while also making presentations to the faculty and his peers so needed experience in both areas.

Fla

Ryan Barley *Research Assistant, American Institute of Physics*

I have a BA in English, and a BS in physics (from a liberal arts college, at that), but have still found myself ess working at a shoe store. What companies/job titles should I be looking for to be able to leverage me dual exp

Fla

 **David Pennington** *Managing Editor, Category Manager, Denver Off The Wagon*

Came by this link via Tumblr and I thought it was the perfect allegory. STEM degrees might make the infrastr Tumblr, but the humanities degrees make all the content ON Tumblr that makes it a billion dollar product.

Fla

 **Bernice Kao** *Creator, Myjobtalk.org*

I remember in the eighties, major banks prefer hieing English majors to train and groom them to be leaders. English Major from National Taiwan University, I had to switch my major to library science to have any prosp offer. Both my daughters and my husband are engineers. They never had any employment problems. Fortun daughters are gainfully employed with good jobs. Their communication skills in writing and presentation wer by being engineering majors.. I believe it's the person, not the major that'll determine one's success. I am a r coach librarian. My passions stay in Toastmaster and writing memoirs. I continue to use the writing/present my job search class

Fla

 **Rajeev Gupta** *Business Development, Wilderness Media & Entertainment*

feedback

While I appreciate humanities, I also appreciate science and mathematics. I refuse to believe that situation is

Fla

 **Bruna Martinuzzi** *Presentation Skills Training, Clarion Enterprises Ltd.*

Craig, thank you for your comment. I couldn't agree more about the importance of writing and public speaki to communicate appears at the top of lists of what employers are looking for today. With the addition of tech how, how can you lose? Your son is well positioned for success. :-)

2K
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 **Craig McBreen** *Principal, McBreen Design, Inc.*

Hi Brunna, My youngest son and I were talking about this the other day. He loves to write and I keep telling hin one practice that will help him more than anything else ... the art of communication. The other thing I like is t

focusing more on presentation skills much earlier in school. I only wish I had learned public speaking at an ea combined with effective written communication is golden. Oh, and learning a little code wouldn't be a bad ide

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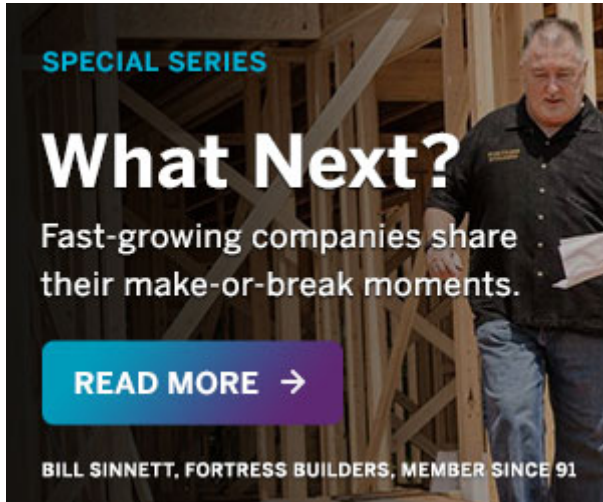
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