

The Usefulness of the Humanities

Why Not Study Something Practical, Like Philosophy?

David A. Hoekema

Philosophy—so runs the familiar adage—bakes no bread. Have philosophers, in today's academic and business marketplace, been reduced to begging for theirs?

The study of the humanities as an undergraduate major or a graduate field has not altogether lost its esteem in our society. It is an admirable undertaking, most would agree, for young men and women of refinement and independent wealth. But for the rest of us, who must depend on a regular paycheck to put bread on the table, it really makes no sense to choose something as impractical as philosophy or history, unless as a challenging adjunct to a business or computer science major.

A sentence from the introductory Latin text I studied many years ago sums up the prevailing view of the proper place of philosophy: "When I grow old, I shall devote myself to philosophy." In the meantime, so runs the contemporary wisdom, we shall clip our souls' wings and remain within the realm of groceries and mortgage payments.

As a teacher of philosophy in liberal arts colleges and in a state university, I have long questioned this conventional view. Moreover, as the administrator of a major professional association in the humanities, I receive frequent requests for information about the practicality of studying philosophy. The requests come from many sources: from undergraduates who have chosen, or are considering, a philosophy major; from graduate students bracing themselves for their first foray into the job market; from senior members of the profession eager to give accurate and helpful advice to their students and their junior colleagues; from newspaper and magazine writers surveying the state of education and the economy.

In response to these requests I have compiled some relevant facts and figures, drawn from published and unpublished

studies of education and employment in the United States, which challenge the view that the study of the humanities is impractical. Although there are doubtless many other studies that could provide a more complete picture, the surveys that I cite here provide strong support for several conclusions, some of which run quite contrary to the conventional wisdom:

•The number of undergraduate humanities majors is small, but even so it is several times the number who planned on majoring in the humanities when they enrolled in college.

•Humanities majors, especially philosophy majors, perform extraordinarily well on the most widely used standardized tests for admission to graduate and professional schools, outperforming nearly all of the more "practical" majors.

•A substantial and growing number of humanities Ph.D.s are finding employment outside their disciplines or outside the humanities, but the average salary of those who remain in academic employment is higher.

•The unemployment rate of Ph.D.s in the humanities is less than 2 percent, only a small fraction of the national unemployment rate and less than one percentage point more than the unemployment rate for Ph.D.s in science and engineering.

What follows is a brief account of the statistical evidence for these conclusions. I have sought out the relatively few studies that identify philosophy as a separate field, but whenever possible, in the descriptions and tables below, I include information on the humanities as a whole and on several other humanities disciplines.

Undergraduate patterns: Why major in the humanities? Humanities majors are a small and diminishing minority on most campuses. A 1984 profile of undergraduates in the nation's colleges and universities conducted by the Carnegie Foundation showed that 0.5 percent are

majoring or will probably major in philosophy, 2.7 percent in English, 2.5 percent in history, 1.4 percent in foreign languages, and 0.3 percent in religion or theology. There are more than thirty times as many business and management majors as philosophy majors (15.1 percent), and there are more students majoring in biology (2.9 percent) than in any humanities field. The same study showed that the number who plan to do graduate study in the humanities is far smaller still. Only 0.1 percent plan on graduate study in philosophy, 0.4 percent in history, 0.5 percent in English, 0.7 percent in foreign languages, and 0.4 percent in religion or theology.¹

A survey of 192,000 freshmen who entered college in 1985 showed that only 0.1 percent planned to major in philosophy, 1.0 percent in English, 0.7 percent in history, 0.5 percent in foreign languages, and 0.2 percent in religion. More of the entering freshman plan to major in marketing (2.5 percent) than in all of these humanities disciplines combined, and this group composes only a quarter of all of the prospective business majors.² No doubt the percentage of humanities majors in this entering class will increase, since many students know very little of the humanities when they enter college. All the same, it is evident that these figures represent a substantial decline in recent decades.

Has the undergraduate study of philosophy indeed declined across the board, or has the decline in humanities *majors* been accompanied by an increase in humanities *enrollments*? At my own institution, the University of Delaware, the number of philosophy majors is typically only a few dozen in an undergraduate student body of nearly 14,000, and students need not take any philosophy to fulfill humanities distribution requirements. Nevertheless, a survey of 1,984 graduates showed that nearly 75 percent had taken a philosophy course—50 percent more than in 1980.³

Humanities

Though these figures reflect only the efforts of one department at one institution to build undergraduate enrollment, I am sure that many other humanities departments have succeeded in attracting growing numbers of students even while the number of majors has remained constant or declined.

Philosophy and some other humanities fields are better represented on college and university faculties than in numbers of undergraduate majors. The Carnegie profile cited above found that members of philosophy departments compose 1.5 percent of college faculties, compared with 2.8 percent in history, 0.6 percent in religion and theology, and 8.4 percent in English language and literature. The disproportion between faculty and majors in the humanities reflects the increasing share of humanities faculty teaching loads devoted to teaching classes populated primarily by non-majors. Interestingly, a substantially larger number of the faculty members surveyed (2.5 percent) were undergraduate philosophy majors. In only a few other disciplines, including French and history, is the ratio of undergraduate majors in a field to faculty affiliation in the same field so high.

But the question that both students and parents raise most urgently today is not *who* is studying humanities but *why*, and what benefits they obtain thereby. I am sure that all of my colleagues on humanities faculties begin to answer such questions, as I do, with a brief speech in praise of the pure joys of learning and of the life of reason. (Such rhetoric has fallen out of fashion at scholarly conferences, but it seems more to the purpose than a quick survey of recent work in deconstructive criticism or the ontological status of mental entities.) But this does not always completely satisfy the inquirer.

A recent study issued by the National Institute of Education provides concrete evidence of the value of studying the humanities. The study is a comprehensive review of *The Standardized Test Scores of College Graduates, 1964-1982*, written by Clifford Adelman.⁴ Adelman summarizes published data and some unpublished material provided to him by testing agencies for twenty-three standardized tests used in selecting among the applicants to graduate and professional schools. The data he summarizes include scores on the test most often considered in admission to graduate programs in the humanities—the verbal and quantitative sections of the Graduate Record Examination—as well as the two most widely known tests for admission to professional programs—the Law School Admissions Test and the Graduate Management Admissions Test.

The author of the study professes himself puzzled by many of the correlations which

emerge from close study of the data: "Most of the relationships between numbers of test-takers and trends in scores," he observes, "are counter-intuitive." None of the basic demographic variables of age, race, or gender is sufficient to explain the observed patterns in test performance. Neither did the increasing number of foreign students and of test-takers with limited fluency in English influence the results significantly.

Only one variable stood out in Adelman's study as correlating significantly and consistently with test scores: *the undergraduate major of the test-takers*. Adelman draws three conclusions from the data concerning the relationship between test performance and disciplinary major.

First, with the exception of only engineering majors, "undergraduates who major in professional and occupational fields consistently *underperform* those who major in traditional arts and science fields on these examinations." Second, students who major in natural science, mathematics, and engineering generally outperform others, but there are two significant exceptions: majors in economics and philosophy do particularly well on several tests. Accordingly, Adelman narrows his second conclusion to state that "Students who major in a field characterized by formal thought, structural relationships, abstract models, symbolic languages, and deductive reasoning consistently outperform others on these examinations."

Table 1: TEST PERFORMANCE BY UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR, 1981-82
(Total Number of Respondents: 398,768)

Table lists percentages by which majors in each field scored above or below the mean scores of all test-takers in 1981-82

Undergraduate major	LSAT	GMAT	GRE		Size of Sample
			Verbal	Quant.	
Humanities					
Philosophy	8.7%	11.0%	17.6%	4.6%	3,410
English	5.6%	4.1%	14.5%	-5.7%	17,757
History	2.9%	4.6%	10.8%	-5.5%	15,123
Foreign languages	5.7%	3.3%	7.9%	-4.2%	7,068
Arts and Music	-0.5%	-1.2%	1.7%	-8.4%	9,670
Other humanities	4.7%	1.8%	7.3%	-5.0%	8,341
Social Sciences					
Economics	9.6%	7.3%	0.8%	12.4%	17,562
Government	3.3%	4.6%	(Included Below)		
Political Science	-1.6%	0.6%	3.5%	-5.0%	27,337
Psychology	0.9%	0.8%	3.1%	-4.0%	24,885
Sociology	-0.7%	-0.5%	-0.7%	-1.5%	8,693
Anthropology	4.0%	--	16.4%	-1.7%	1,863
Natural Science					
Biology and bioscience	4.0%	3.3%	5.4%	8.0%	22,820
Chemistry	7.6%	7.5%	2.1%	18.3%	6,867
Mathematics	12.8%	13.3%	2.7%	26.3%	6,564
Physics	--	--	6.6%	29.5%	3,183
Other science	2.8%	0.8%	3.5%	14.5%	9,154
Business					
Accounting	3.4%	-1.5%			
Finance	3.4%	-0.8%			
Marketing	--	-8.1%			
Business administration	-4.5%	--	-9.1%	-2.3%	All business majors: 77,679
Management	-5.4%	-7.7%			
Other business	-0.9%	-5.0%			
Other Majors					
Computer science	--	5.4%	-1.5%	22.9%	5,035
Engineering	8.0%	10.0%	-7.3%	25.1%	29,718
Journalism	0.7%	--	5.7%	-8.6%	2,767
Social work	-10.1%	--	-9.1%	-20.8%	2,999
Speech	-2.7%	--	-6.0%	-14.3%	2,159
Education	-8.7%	-4.2%	-10.4%	-15.8%	22,978
Summary of Comparative Data for Philosophy Majors, 1977-1982					
Academic year 1977-78	8.9%	11.2%	18.4%	5.4%	
Academic year 1978-79	8.6%	9.9%	19.4%	5.2%	
Academic year 1979-80	7.2%	10.8%	19.5%	5.0%	
Academic year 1980-81	8.8%	11.4%	17.9%	3.3%	
Academic year 1981-82	8.7%	11.0%	17.6%	4.6%	

Source: Clifford Adelman, *Standardized Test Scores*

Table 1 summarizes test performances for the most recent period included in Adelman's study. It reveals the strong correlation between undergraduate major and performance on standardized tests and how well philosophy and other humanities majors have performed. Included at the bottom of the table are comparative data for the eight years preceding for philosophy majors only. The variation between years is small, and the pattern of philosophy majors' performance is remarkably consistent; in none of the two-year periods did philosophy majors perform worse than average on any of the tests included in the survey, and in each year the percentage by which they exceeded the average was within 2 percent of the figures for 1981-82. In other disciplines, too, the year-to-year variation in comparative results was small.

Let me add to Adelman's general conclusions, cited above, some more specific patterns that emerge from these results:

•Philosophy majors performed substantially better than the average (5 percent better or more) on each of the tests surveyed. Not one other group of majors shows this consistent pattern—not even economics or the physical sciences, whose majors did exceptionally well in three of the four areas but only marginally better than average on the verbal portion of the GRE. (Biology majors performed better than average on all tests, but the margins were consistently smaller than those of philosophy majors.)

•On the LSAT and GMAT, tests which few students would think to prepare for by studying Socrates and Kant, philosophy majors performed substantially better than majors in any other humanities field, better

than all social science majors except economics, better than all natural science majors except mathematics, and better than all business and applied fields, including engineering. Other humanities majors, with the exception of art and music majors, scored better than average on both of these tests—and better, in each case, than political science, sociology, or psychology majors, who might appear to have received more relevant preparation.

•On the verbal portion of the GRE, philosophy majors outperformed all other humanities majors (only English majors came close) and individuals majoring in all other fields. Philosophy, English, and history majors outdistanced all others except anthropology majors by a large margin.

•The quantitative portion of the GRE was the *only* area in which humanities majors made a poor showing. Only philosophy majors, among the humanities, scored higher than average—indeed, their scores were higher than those of all social sciences except economics. Even the philosophy majors were outdistanced by natural science, economics, engineering, and computer science majors.

•Majors in every humanities field save art and music performed better on the GMAT than students in any of the business majors and better on the verbal GRE than journalism or speech majors.

These results no doubt reflect other factors besides the intellectual rigor which marks classes in the humanities. Students who choose a history or philosophy concentration may already possess some of the skills that enable them to perform well on graduate admissions tests, for example. And I hardly need add that the aims of

education in philosophy have far more to do with broad and deep intellectual development than with a finely honed ability to pick correct answers on standardized tests, darken the proper circle, and make no stray marks on the answer sheet.

All the same, these results may cast the humanities, which often seem to offer little immediate benefit to career-minded students, in a different light. Perhaps it will comfort some teachers, students, and parents alike to know that the pursuit of truth, justice, and beauty can not only improve students' souls but also help them get into law school.

Graduate education and beyond: What can a humanist do? The Adelman study makes it evident that undergraduate humanities majors are not handicapped in seeking admission to graduate and professional schools. Rather—since the tests studied strongly influence admissions decisions—they have a measurable advantage even at professional schools over fellow students who have majored in pre-professional areas or in the social sciences. But what about those who pursue graduate education in the humanities? Surely this is where the real pinch comes: in today's academic market, everyone knows that history and literature Ph.D.s vastly outnumber the jobs open to them. Everyone has a cousin who successfully completed a brilliant dissertation on Etruscan funerary practices and is now driving a cab or waiting tables to pay off her debts.

What everyone knows about humanities Ph.D.s, however, turns out, on close examination of relevant statistical studies, to be false. The popular impression to the contrary is not groundless, by any means: the past two decades have been times of

Table 2: GENDER, MINORITY STATUS, AND YEAR OF DEGREE OF 1940-1982 HUMANITIES AND SCIENCE PH.D.S

	Philosophy	History	English	Modern Lang.	Classics	Total Humanities	Math.	Biology	Engineering	Social Science	Total Sci./Eng.
Total population	6,500	20,400	22,800	15,100	1,700	85,200	19,600	69,500	57,500	60,000	387,300
Gender											
Male	85.4%	79.1%	66.2%	58.4%	70.7%	71.5%	91.2%	80.0%	98.7%	81.6%	86.4%
Female	14.6%	20.9%	33.8%	41.6%	29.3%	28.5%	8.8%	20.0%	1.3%	18.4%	13.6%
Minority Status											
Hispanic	1.6%	1.7%	1.1%	10.2%	0.5%	2.9%	1.4%	1.1%	1.5%	1.5%	1.4%
Black	0.6%	1.8%	1.5%	1.2%	0.9%	1.6%	0.9%	1.2%	0.6%	2.5%	1.3%
Asian	2.5%	1.6%	0.7%	1.9%	0.1%	1.6%	7.9%	6.6%	18.3%	5.4%	7.9%
American Indian	0.3%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.2%	0.1%
—Total minorities	5.0%	5.2%	3.4%	13.4%	3.0%	6.2%	10.3%	9.0%	20.5%	9.5%	10.8%
—White	93.3%	91.3%	95.1%	84.0%	95.5%	91.5%	87.9%	89.6%	78.2%	89.0%	87.9%
—Other/no report	1.7%	2.9%	1.5%	2.6%	3.0%	2.3%	1.8%	1.3%	12.0%	1.5%	1.3%
Year Ph.D. Received											
1940-49	3.7%	4.9%	4.2%	4.0%	8.5%	3.9%	5.0%	5.3%	26.0%	3.5%	4.5%
1950-59	12.3%	12.7%	10.8%	10.0%	12.5%	11.0%	10.2%	14.2%	10.4%	11.0%	13.1%
1960-69	24.5%	25.9%	26.6%	22.3%	29.7%	24.4%	32.1%	25.3%	32.0%	22.4%	26.7%
1970-79	50.3%	47.8%	49.3%	53.1%	40.8%	50.2%	44.4%	43.9%	44.7%	50.6%	44.5%
1980-June 1982	9.1%	8.7%	9.1%	10.6%	8.6%	10.5%	8.2%	11.3%	10.3%	12.5%	11.2%

unprecedented disruption in the academic world, as large numbers of Ph.D.s have competed for a diminishing pool of openings. The horror stories of promising philosophers and historians who find themselves unemployed, employed part-time at the wages of an academic migrant worker, or unceremoniously shown the door at tenure time are far too numerous. (We ought not to lay the blame for all such stories on "the job market," however, when the fault for such situations often lies rather with the short-sighted and self-serving employment policies of departments and universities.)

Yet in spite of highly unfavorable conditions, by far the majority of Ph.D. recipients in all humanities fields are employed in academic work. A substantial minority have chosen nonacademic careers, either temporarily or permanently, but only a very small number are unemployed or are employed part-time and seeking full-time work. This picture emerges from a survey of doctoral recipients in the humanities, the sciences, and engineering: *Science, Engineering, and Humanities Doctorates in the United States: 1983 Profile*, written by Betty D. Maxfield and Mary Belisle and published by the National Research

Council.⁵ (The data that provide the basis for the report were gathered in February 1983, and all of the figures cited in the accompanying tables are therefore accurate as of approximately four years ago.) In Table 2, I have extracted from several tables in the published report some relevant facts about the overall number of Ph.D.s and their distribution by gender, minority status, and year of degree. (The total Ph.D. population in the humanities and in the sciences includes fields not listed in separate columns, and the population therefor exceeds the sum of the fields listed. In the humanities I have included separate columns for all disciplines listed in the study except three—art, music, and speech/theater—in which the numbers are relatively small; in the sciences I have included only four representative disciplines from the eleven included in the published study.)

Several patterns emerge from these comparative data. The humanities fields remain male-dominated, but far less so than any of the major science and engineering fields. In no discipline does the representation of Blacks approach that in the general population, but some minorities have done unusually well in some fields—Hispanic-

Americans in foreign languages, for example, and Asian-Americans in mathematics and engineering.

The total number of Ph.D.s granted in the United States climbed from 9,733 in 1960 to a peak of 33,755 in 1974. After 1974 the total number declined gradually to less than 31,000 in 1978, and from 1978 to 1984 the number remained within a few hundred of that figure.⁶ The decline in humanities Ph.D.s has been both sharper and more extended: from 5,170 in 1974 to 4,139 in 1979, to 3,528 in 1984, an overall decline of 32 percent. Significantly, the number of humanities doctorates awarded to women has remained almost constant (between 1,500 and 1,700 per year) since 1974, while the number granted to men has dropped by nearly half (from 3,594 in 1974 to 1,942 in 1984).

Despite this steady decline in doctoral degrees—a decline which is mirrored, with minor exceptions, in each of the humanities disciplines—a surprising fact stands out from the data in Table 2: more than half the Ph.D.s in the United States, in every discipline, have received the degree since 1970. The relative youth of the Ph.D. population would be even more striking if the data were current for 1986.

Table 3: EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND MEDIAN SALARY OF 1940-1982 HUMANITIES AND SCIENCE PH.D.S

	Philosophy	History	English	Modern Lang.	Classics	Total Humanities	Math.	Biology	Engineering	Social Science	Total Sci./Eng.
EMPLOYMENT AND UNEMPLOYMENT:											
Employed full-time	91.5%	91.7%	90.0%	86.7%	88.0%	89.6%	96.1%	86.2%	96.2%	91.5%	91.7%
Not in hum./sci.	23.5%	22.9%	14.2%	13.0%	15.4%	17.8%	4.5%	3.2%	4.4%	15.9%	6.0%
Employed part-time	7.2%	5.8%	7.2%	9.0%	9.2%	7.3%	2.6%	3.8%	2.7%	5.5%	4.4%
Seeking full-time work	3.0%	1.9%	2.0%	4.7%	2.2%	2.7%	0.4%	0.9%	0.9%	1.4%	1.0%
Postdoctoral appt.	0.4%	1.3%	0.8%	2.0%	1.0%	1.4%	0.7%	8.5%	0.6%	1.5%	3.0%
Unemployed and seeking employment	1.1%	1.2%	2.0%	2.3%	1.8%	1.7%	0.6%	1.5%	0.5%	1.2%	1.0%
Males											
Employed full-time	93.2%	93.6%	92.6%	91.6%	93.1%	92.9%	96.8%	89.4%	96.3%	93.8%	93.7%
Employed part-time	5.5%	4.2%	5.6%	5.1%	5.2%	4.8%	1.9%	2.5%	2.7%	4.3%	3.1%
Unemployed	1.1%	0.8%	1.3%	1.7%	0.6%	1.1%	0.6%	1.0%	0.5%	0.6%	0.8%
Females											
Employed full-time	81.2%	80.8%	84.9%	79.3%	79.3%	81.0%	88.7%	73.0%	93.0%	83.1%	78.6%
Employed part-time	16.6%	14.9%	10.3%	14.9%	14.9%	16.8%	10.3%	8.9%	4.3%	10.9%	12.5%
Unemployed	1.2%	3.5%	3.4%	3.3%	3.3%	3.3%	0.4%	3.6%	2.0%	3.6%	2.6%
MEDIAN ANNUAL SALARIES, in thousands:*											
Employer	\$30.9	\$33.5	\$30.0	\$29.7	\$30.0	\$30.7	\$37.8	\$36.7	\$46.5	\$36.0	\$40.2
Educational inst.	\$31.2	\$34.4	\$30.5	\$29.8	\$30.5	\$31.0	\$36.2	\$35.1	\$42.2	\$34.5	\$36.2
Business/industry	\$30.7	\$24.5	\$28.7	\$27.9	\$27.4	\$27.8	\$44.2	\$42.6	\$50.0	\$40.9	\$47.2
Government	\$35.0	\$31.2	\$24.0	\$31.9	--	\$28.6	\$45.1	\$42.4	\$44.9	\$46.3	\$44.9
Gender											
Males	\$31.6	\$34.2	\$31.3	\$30.7	\$30.5	\$31.9	\$40.9	\$38.1	\$46.7	\$36.7	\$40.9
Females	\$27.2	\$28.9	\$26.5	\$26.9	\$26.2	\$26.8	\$31.8	\$30.7	\$39.7	\$31.0	\$31.8
Years since Ph.D.											
5 or less	\$24.5	\$23.8	\$22.8	\$22.3	\$21.6	\$23.3	\$27.8	\$26.7	\$37.6	\$27.5	\$30.9
11-15	\$31.0	\$34.7	\$31.4	\$31.1	\$30.4	\$32.7	\$37.5	\$37.2	\$48.6	\$37.8	\$41.1
21-25	\$40.7	\$45.2	\$40.7	\$39.6	\$39.2	\$40.1	\$48.0	\$45.9	\$55.1	\$45.8	\$48.5

*Academic year salaries multiplied by 11/9 to adjust for full-time scale.

Table 3, culled from the same source as Table 2, provides some hard facts to counter the too-common impression that a large proportion of the nation's humanities doctorates are lining up in breadlines. The rate of unemployment among humanities doctorates is in fact only 1.7 percent, and an additional 2.7 percent are employed part-time while seeking full-time employment. Individual disciplines vary somewhat: the unemployment rate of philosophers, for example, is lower than the average in the humanities and lower than the rate in biology or the social sciences, while the rate of both unemployment and "underemployment" is higher than average in foreign languages, where part-time temporary appointments are all too common. For comparison, the overall rate of unemployment in science and engineering fields is 1.0 percent, a figure that is within a percentage point of the humanities figure.

The employment picture is not all rosy, however, as the figures in Table 3 for part-time employment and for employment separated by gender reveal. The rate of part-time employment in humanities is substantially higher than in scientific fields, and the proportion of these who are seeking full-time work is much higher in the humanities. Furthermore, in nearly all humanities fields, the proportion of women who are unemployed or employed only part-time is much larger than that of men. (Philosophy is an exception in one way; it is the only field in which the unemployment rate is virtually the same for women and for men.) It is small comfort to note that the gap between women and men is even greater in scientific fields.

Table 3 also shows that far more humanities doctorates than science doctorates are employed outside their academic field. This result reflects the shortage of academic positions, to be sure, but it also provides concrete evidence of the relative facility with which humanities Ph.D.s can apply their analytic and verbal skills to new undertakings. This percentage has grown steadily in recent years and is considerably higher in philosophy and history than in any other field.

Are the salaries paid to philosophers really such as to require a diet of rice and beans—as our students may perceive and as we ourselves may sometimes believe? The salary figures included in Table 3—figures that are already four years old—suggest otherwise. The median salary received by humanities doctorates in 1983 was \$30,000. Historians received, on average, a few thousand dollars more than this figure, while those in other humanities fields fell very near the average. Humanities Ph.D.s employed in business or government work, surprisingly, had a lower median income than those in academia. Once again the difference between male and female doctorates was substantial, but it was not quite as large as in the sciences. Other figures

provided in the study, not included here, show that the difference between women's and men's salaries diminishes somewhat but does not disappear when women are compared with men of the same average age and rank.

An examination of selected median salaries at different ages (approximated in

"The difference between the average salary in the sciences and the average salary of philosophers is not so large as one might expect."

Table 3 by examining varying periods since the Ph.D.) shows that younger philosophers are paid, on average, somewhat better than their colleagues in other humanities disciplines, and the gap between them and their colleagues in biology, mathematics, and social science is \$3,000 or less. In other science fields, however, and in all science fields at later points, the salaries of humanities doctorates are considerably exceeded.

It would be foolish to select literature or philosophy as a doctoral field, in other words, if one's goal in graduate education is simply the maximization of future income. All the same, the difference between the average salary in the sciences, including engineering, and the average salary of philosophers is not so large as one might expect. Humanists' median salary is about 25 percent less than the median salary of scientists and engineers, it is true; but this figure reflects the large number of scientists and engineers holding highly paid positions in business and government. If one's hope is to carry on a career of teaching and research, the more relevant comparison is between academic positions in various fields. And here the common perception that humanities faculty are grossly underpaid proves to be an exaggeration, since humanities faculty members receive a median salary less than 14 percent below the median salary of scientists and engineers.

What lies ahead? The information I have summarized here provides a picture of what has happened to yesterday's humanities majors and doctorates. But there is a more urgent question: What are the prospects for today's and tomorrow's students? Difficult as it is to know the effect of anticipated shifts in academia and in the larger society, it is increasingly evident that the academic employment situation will improve in significant ways in the coming decades.

A study released this spring has called attention to the enormous need for profes-

sors to fill positions created by accelerating retirements and, after the mid-1990s, increasing college enrollments.⁷ As many as 500,000 positions, the authors estimate, will need to be filled in the next twenty-five years. Colleges and universities, they warn, must abandon hiring policies shaped by a buyers' market if they hope to maintain the strength of their faculties. Without aggressive recruitment efforts including the identification of promising future faculty members during their graduate study and more generous policies regarding salary, promotion, and tenure, many colleges will find it impossible to attract new faculty members from strong graduate programs.

The specific figures in the study just cited are disputed by others, but the need for greatly increased numbers in college faculties in the coming decades is by now beyond dispute. What is impossible to predict is exactly how these developments will affect the humanities disciplines. Will the expansion of higher education in the 1990s bring new opportunities and a continued flourishing of writing and teaching in the humanities? Or will shortsighted administrators allocate a disproportionate share of new faculty positions to other areas of education—business, finance, computer science—which appear more suited to present student interests? Will graduate departments of history and religious studies continue to admit only highly qualified and highly motivated applicants, expecting that their chances of academic employment will improve in the coming years? Or will we see—as some of my colleagues in other learned societies fear—a hasty and ill-considered expansion of graduate programs, motivated more by the self-interest of departmental faculty than by concern for the students themselves? These are questions that none of us can answer at present.

For two decades, responsible graduate departments have taken pains to provide their entering graduate students with a realistic picture of what awaits them after the Ph.D. Those who invest several years and tens of thousands of dollars in a graduate degree must realize that they may find themselves, either by choice or by necessity, working outside academia for some years, perhaps for their entire careers.

Whatever the future of academia, it remains vitally important that graduate students in European history or French literature devote some thought, and some serious preparation, to nonacademic channels in which they could apply many of their skills. Yet there is some reason to expect that those among the humanities majors of 1986 who end up working in law, government, and publishing will have done so by choice, not simply because of the scarcity of academic positions.

What advice, then, ought we to give to students who find themselves attracted to the study of the humanities but worried by its

impracticality and lack of vocational relevance? Such worries need to be taken seriously and not brushed aside: a student saddled with twenty or thirty thousand dollars of educational debts cannot afford to postpone all thoughts of employment until after graduation. But such students should be reminded of several facts that emerge from the surveys reviewed here. First, the analytic and interpretive skills fostered by the humanities disciplines help majors outshine most of their fellow students on graduate school admissions tests. Second, it is not true that large numbers of those who complete graduate study in the humanities are unable to find employment. A substantial number do find themselves working outside their field, but this state of affairs reflects not only the difficulties of finding academic work but also the flexibility and creativity that advanced work in the humanities instills. Third, there is reason to expect that the academic employment situation will be more hospitable to new Ph.D.s in a decade than it is today.

The primary attraction of the study of philosophy, literature, history, religion, and the arts will no doubt always be the inherent fascination of these endeavors themselves. Curiosity about human nature and society has crystallized into these disciplinary forms, and no one who has not been infected with a passionate attraction to what lies beyond her grasp can be expected to devote her life to the study and teaching of the humanities. All the same, the love of learning must be sustained by some means of putting bread on the table in the sublunary realm. It is therefore no denigration of the value of learning for its own sake to identify the more concrete rewards of studying the humanities.

Having done so, we can respond constructively to student worries about the market value of their college degree. "Why would you want to be a business or education major?" we may well ask. "Why not study something practical, like philosophy?"

Notes

1. Carnegie Survey of Undergraduates, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1986; summarized in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 5, 1986, pp. 27-30.

2. Alexander Astin, *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1985*, published by American Council on Education and University of California at Los Angeles; summarized in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 15, 1986, pp. 35-36.

3. Unpublished surveys provided by Frank Dilley, department chair.

4. Copies of the unpublished report may be obtained from the Educational Resources Information Center, an agency of the United States Department of Education, Washington, DC 20202.

5. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1985.

6. Susan L. Coyle and Peter Syverson, *Summary Report 1984: Doctoral Recipients from United States Universities*, National Academy Press, 1986.

7. Howard R. Bowen and Jack H. Schuster, *American Professors: A National Resource Imperiled*, Oxford University Press, 1986.

DAVID A. HOEKEMA is executive secretary of the American Philosophical Association and associate professor of philosophy at the University of Delaware.