



## University Faculty Members Respond to Daily Nexus' 'Least Useful Majors' Report

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May 13, 2012

To the editors of the Daily Nexus:

We would like to take a minute and respond to the May 9 article entitled “UCSB’s Least Useful Majors.” The title of this article, as well as its reliance on poorly researched data (drawn from a Newsweek Tumblr post), presents a skewed picture of the value of a liberal arts education today, despite the authors’ attempt to interview faculty and students affiliated with each department mentioned.

The University of California system is well respected throughout the world for the quality of its humanities and fine arts programs — programs which offer degrees that are not, as your article implies, “useless,” but which provide students with a broad education leading to exciting careers not only in the arts fields, but also to careers in a spectrum of other fields. Large and small companies in all industries report that the qualities they look for most in new employees are creativity, problem-solving, collaboration and risk-taking. These are all skills fostered by study in these “useless” fields.

According to a recent National Endowment for the Arts study entitled “Artist Employment Projections through 2018,” artist occupations are also forecast to increase by 11 percent in this timeframe, compared with an overall increase in the labor force of 10 percent. Arts workers are twice as likely as other U.S. workers to have college degrees, a trend that may provide some advantage to artists in the U.S. economy, which increasingly requires workers to have at least some college-level education. Artist occupations with some of the highest projected growth rates, according to the study, are museum technicians and conservators (26 percent), curators (23 percent) and multimedia artists and animators (14 percent).

UCSB recently participated in a national survey of college arts and humanities graduates (SNAAP, the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project), which measures the following:

- satisfaction with curricular and extracurricular experiences
- current and past education and employment
- relevance of arts training to work and further education

- types of art practiced and how often
- support and resource needs following graduation
- experiences as teachers
- income and support, student debt and other financial issues

According to SNAAP results, arts graduates experience relatively low rates of unemployment — only 6 percent — and people who work in the arts report some of the highest levels of job satisfaction among all occupations. The study also found that arts graduates gained employment quickly upon graduation, with 83 percent of graduates finding work within the first year of obtaining their degree, while another 12 percent went on to pursue additional higher education.

Income levels in arts majors are also very competitive: the median annual income in 2010 for UC arts grads was \$30,000 immediately upon graduation; \$50,000 within 10 years of graduation, with that number steadily increasing as students moved away from their college years and into the mid-point of their careers. Students who had graduated with arts majors in the 1995 cohort reported a median household income of \$100,000.

We hope that by providing this information we can generate some real dialogue about the value of education at UCSB, and encourage you to explore the statistics and testimonies gathered in both the SNAAP survey and by the National Endowment for the Arts — all of which clearly belie the myth of the arts being “useless” at UCSB.

Sincerely,

- Ellen Anderson, Director, Isla Vista Arts
- Professor Paul Berkowitz, Chair, Music Department, UCSB
- Professor Ann Bermingham, Director, Interdisciplinary Humanities Center
- Professor Laurie Monahan, Director, Arts Research Initiative, Department of History of Art and Architecture
- Professor Jane Mulfinger, Chair, Art Department
- Professor Marko Peljhan, co-Director, University of California Institute for Research in the Arts, Vice Chair Media Arts and Technology
- Holly Unruh, Associate Director, UC Institute for Research in the Arts
- Professor Cristina Venegas, Chair, Film and Media Studies

- Professor Kim Yasuda, co-Director, University of California Institute for Research in the Arts,  
Department of Art

- Emily Zinn, Associate Director, Interdisciplinary Humanities Center

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