

WANT A GREAT JOB? THEN, SAY “YES” TO A SOCIAL SCIENCES DEGREE!

With the cost of education increasing, students and their parents want to know: Does it still make sense to get a bachelor’s degree? And, in an era in which STEM degrees (science, technology, engineering and math) are so heavily promoted by society, will graduates with a *social sciences* degree ever get a job?

The answer to both questions is a resounding YES!

The focus of social sciences fields is to understand the relationship between people and the world around them and to learn how we can constructively shape that world. At San José State University (SJSU), the College of Social Sciences offers a wide range of degrees in our 12 departments—from degrees in psychology and sociology to urban planning and global studies (see <http://www.sjsu.edu/socialsciences/departments/>).



Graduates with social sciences degrees contribute significantly to making our society a better place. Social sciences graduates are “indispensable to the vitality of our democracy and to the future of global understanding, engagement, and community” (1). This engagement is of tremendous value to society and to social sciences graduates, themselves.

These values are important, but students seeking a degree typically want to know if it makes economic sense to get a bachelor’s degree—*any* bachelor’s degree. Despite public anxiety about this question, recent data show that having a bachelor’s degree will produce, on average, \$500,000 more in career earnings than having only a high school education! (2) And, bachelor’s graduates are more likely to be employed during economic down-turns. For example, in 2013, the US unemployment rate for bachelor’s graduates was 4.0%, while that rate was nearly double that for those with only a high school diploma (3). Now, more than ever, getting a bachelor’s degree is a highly profitable decision.



Once on campus, students face the question of whether their specific choice of major will translate into a career. The hidden assumption in this question is that specific majors link with particular jobs and careers. But, this is not an accurate way to view the power of a bachelor’s degree. Rather than tracking closely to a career, bachelor’s degrees prepare graduates for *occupational flexibility* and *upward mobility*. Job flexibility is essential given that Americans can expect to hold an average of 11 different jobs in their lifetime (4).

In fact, most employers do not believe the “correct major” is necessarily the key to success. A recent survey in the US found that, “the vast majority of the employers surveyed (93%) agreed that ‘a candidate’s demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is *more important* than their undergraduate major’ ” (5). Students with

both breadth and depth were in greatest demand. Degrees in the social sciences are ideal for meeting these employer needs; our degrees provide a broad range of social and real-world skills supplemented with depth in a particular discipline.

The bottom-line is that for students to secure a degree, they must be able to succeed in their majors. While some institutions may promote STEM degrees, especially degrees in engineering, “not all students are interested in or prepared to pursue an engineering degree” (6). The College of Social Sciences at SJSU offers a wide range of degree choices that provide flexibility in course choices helping students succeed and graduate in a timely manner. Students need to know that high-paying STEM positions are not off-limits to social science majors. Of 4.7 million skilled US workers in STEM fields in 2010, approximately 30% were from non-STEM fields, including the social sciences (7). The National Science Foundation reported that at least 11% of social science graduates were employed in science and engineering fields (8).

Job prospects in the San Francisco Bay Area for SJSU students are bright. We are fortunate to live in one of the most robust centers of job growth in California, and the US. In 2010, there were approximately three million jobs in the Bay Area in 2010, and at least 43% of these required a bachelor's degree or better (9).

An estimated 53,000 jobs will be available for bachelor's graduates *per year* for the 10-year period from 2010-2020 (9). While 17% of these positions are in computer and math-related fields, other job sectors show equally strong demand, including management fields (17% of jobs), business and finance (16%), healthcare/support (15%) and education (12%). Another 13% of positions are in the arts, community and social service and legal professions. Management, education, community/social service and legal are all obvious career sectors for social sciences graduates. Jobs in state and local government have also grown over this period--an employment sector well-suited to many social sciences graduates.



The evidence is clear: getting a bachelor's degree is a smart economic decision! And, if that degree is in the social sciences, graduates will have the breadth and depth of skills that are highly valued by employers. Students who want to help build a just and sustainable society will find great careers in the social science fields they love.

1 Schneider, C.G. and P. Ewell. 2014. Forward to How liberal arts and science majors fare in employment. <https://secure2.aacu.org/AACU/pubExcerpts/LASCIEMPL.html>

2 Autor, D. H. 2014. Skills, education, and the rise of earnings inequality among the “other 99 percent”. *Science* 344:843-851.

3 US Bureau of Labor Statistics at http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/print.pl/emp/ep_chart_001.htm

4 US Bureau of Labor Statistics at <http://www.bls.gov/nls/nlsfaqs.htm#anch41>

5 Hart Research Associates. 2013. It takes more than a major: Employer priorities for college learning and student success. *Liberal Education* 99(2):22-29.

6 Humphries, D. and P. Kelly. 2014. How liberal arts and science majors fare in employment. Association of American Colleges and Universities, Washington, DC.

7 Langdon, D., G. McKittrich, B. Beede, B. Khan, and M. Doms. 2011. STEM: Good jobs now and for the future. Economics and Statistics Administration, US Department of Commerce. URL: http://www.esa.doc.gov/sites/default/files/reports/documents/stemfinaljuly14_1.pdf. Accessed March 22, 2014.

8 National Science Foundation (NSF). 2013. Table 1. Education and employment status and median salary of recent graduates with bachelor's degrees in science, engineering, or health, by major field of degree: October, 2008 (corrected July 2013). URL: http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/nsf12328/content.cfm?pub_id=4169&id=2. Accessed March 22, 2014.

9 California Employment Development Department (CEDD). 2010. Projections of employment by industry and occupation. URL: http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/LMID/Projections_of_Employment_by_Industry_and_Occupation.html. Accessed February 22, 2014.