

PRESS RELEASE

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In and Outside Academia, Humanists Say Their PhD Programs Prepared Them Well Alignment of Job with Career Preparation Appears to Improve over Time

Washington, DC – The Council of Graduate Schools today released a research brief that reports on humanities PhD holders' perceptions of the relevance of their doctoral programs to their current jobs. The brief, which draws on data from the CGS [PhD Career Pathways](#) project, indicates that the vast majority of humanists, regardless of employment sector, believe their doctoral education prepared them well for their current jobs.

Key Findings:

- Three years post-PhD, humanists working in non-academic jobs saw their training less aligned with their jobs than did those in academia; 52% of those in non-academic jobs reported that their PhD prepared them well for their current job, as compared to 77% of those in academia. For humanities PhDs eight- and 15-years post-graduation, however, there was no statistical difference in perception of preparation between those working in academia and those working elsewhere.
- Most humanities PhDs would pursue a PhD in general or in the same field, if they had to start over again.
- Between humanities PhDs working in academia and those working elsewhere, there are more similarities than differences in key skills and attributes important for successfully performing work. Attributes such as “leadership,” “adaptability and flexibility,” and “analytical thinking” were rated as almost identically important across both groups.

The findings are based on survey responses from 882 doctoral degree recipients from 35 institutions; fields included Anthropology and Archeology, English Language and Literature, Foreign Language and Literature, History, Philosophy, Religion and Theology, and Arts and Humanities. The data were collected as part of the project [Understanding PhD Career Pathways for Program Improvement](#) and represent a small subset of the data available.

“While these findings represent the first wave of our data, they provide a strong indication that humanities PhDs find their training relevant to diverse career contexts,” said CGS President Suzanne Ortega. “Perhaps the most intriguing finding is that people eight and 15 years out of their PhDs find their training more relevant to their jobs than the earlier cohort.”

It's not clear whether alumni views grow more positive over time because they have had the time to find a job that is a better fit for their skills, or whether those eight- and 15-years post-graduation come to have a different appreciation of their preparation. “Whatever the reason,” said Ortega, “this is good evidence that recent PhDs can use extra support in finding a job that's right for them.”

This phase of PhD Career Pathways builds upon a decade of CGS initiatives dedicated to illuminating PhD career pathways and encouraging universities to value diverse career options for graduate students. [Previous research](#) from

the Council of Graduate Schools conducted in partnership with the National Endowment for the Humanities indicates that humanities programs can successfully broaden options and opportunities for humanities PhDs by choosing vocabulary that supports the goals of PhD career diversity (e.g., using the term “flexible career paths” instead of “Plans A and B”); actively listening to and engaging important voices (such as students, alumni, and faculty); developing external partnerships; and removing administrative roadblocks.

CGS plans to release additional research briefs this fall that will include all fields of study, and in early 2019, the first results from a survey of PhD students in their second and fifth years of study.

About the Project:

CGS PhD Career Pathways is a coalition of 65 doctoral institutions working to better understand and support PhD careers across all broad fields of study. Universities collect data from current PhD students and alumni using surveys that were developed by CGS in consultation with senior university leaders, funding agencies, disciplinary societies, researchers, and PhD students and alumni. The resulting data allow universities to analyze PhD career preferences and outcomes at the program level and help faculty and university leaders strengthen career services, professional development opportunities, and mentoring. Additionally, participating universities are able to compare their data on PhD career preferences and outcomes with CGS’s national dataset.

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The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of approximately 500 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. The organization’s mission is to improve and advance graduate education, which it accomplishes through advocacy in the federal policy arena, research, and the development and dissemination of best practices.

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