

What's an Arts Major to do? by Allan Manley

Believe it or not the end of the school year is fast approaching, and with it comes the inevitable question for a good portion of the student body: What can I do with my arts degree? Perhaps cynically, I believe the answer lies somewhere between the deep fryer and Bloor Street in Toronto. The sad reality is that university degrees are not equal and they have not been for quite some time. Times have changed from when a liberal arts degree was highly valued. Today, students with a science or a business degree usually have an easier time of finding employment. Arts degrees today, unlike in the "good old days," have a reputation for not being the most employable degree. The cliché "starving artist" may be closer to the truth today than ever before.

What does this mean for today's liberal arts student? Are you doomed to suffer simply because you enjoy literature, languages, philosophy, political students, or any of the other arts-related disciplines? Not quite. There is a lot of help out there for you, if you are willing to look for it that can make the transition from education and short-term jobs to a career which uses your degree. Recently, there have been a lot of letters to The Guardian concerning the problem of finding suitable work on PEI for recent BA graduates. In an effort to obtain a clearer picture of life after Arts school, I have scoured the best employment websites on the net to see how Arts students stack up and to see what is currently available in the market.

There are many sites that receive rave reviews from human resource personnel in the government and at the university career centre. The top three websites I found the most useful include monster.ca, theglobeandmail.com and the website for public service commission of Canada (link available through UPEI's career

website). Each of these sites has something unique to offer.

Monster.ca is great site for several reasons, the first being that it helps to get you a little more organized. Creative minds were not "traditionally" meant to be constrained by rules, but in this case these rules are helpful and should be followed. Monster will help set up a personal profile, give your resume direction and help with self assessment. Once that is all done, they post your resume for employers (although I have no proof this has been very successful). With your resume completed and aptitudes assessed, you can browse their lists of job openings. The search functions are pretty straightforward, and a lot of jobs do get posted frequently. So what did monster.ca have to offer the recent graduate with a liberal arts degree? Two positions, both of which were manager positions at insurance companies where a business degree would be better suited.

The Globe and Mail has a fantastic job hunt website. It links to current government market trends and all sorts of useful stuff from resume and cover letter guides to advice columns that are actually relevant to today's job market. This site has lots to offer, too much to list in this brief article, but I will mention one helpful link. The site has a section that will tell you what fields suit which individual degree. For instance, the site told me, a political studies student, that potential positions included: journalist, civil servant, lobbyist, survey poll analyst or teacher. The site also has articles updated regularly concerning such job-related aspects as interview etiquette.

The third site relates to gov-

ernment jobs. Upon first reflection, working for the government may not seem appealing but there are jobs that catch the eye of some. Not everyone would enjoy working in embassies abroad or designing public policy to help improve the country (or sink a politician), but to some, these positions seem both fascinating and ideal. Do not knock the government before you look at their post-secondary recruitment options. Check it out — you might be pleasantly surprised.

The next obstacle is to drop your current concept of the resume. Yes, I am sure the standard two pager has landed you more than one or two jobs, but let's be honest: if you want a job starting above minimum wage, you may have to rethink your approach. These days the right cover letter to the right person may very well land you big bucks and a desirable location. The most important step in composing an effective cover letter is research. For example, if you are

applying to the Ontario Museum of Art why not comment on one of their recent accomplishments or a section you particularly enjoy (make sure you do not lie! Naming an exhibit that hasn't been there for ten years that you dimly recall from a gradeschool trip will get you busted). It is also helpful to look at the corporate structure and send your letter to a few people other than just the president (which might annoy him).

Most feel that there are very few related professions to their degree, when in reality, the reverse is true. For example, an English graduate automatically may think of being an author/editor/playwright and so forth so about 6-10 professions lie in their scope. The truth is that an arts degree prepares you for more professions than any other - what better degree to be a speech writer, a columnist, historical researcher or many other careers. So fear not there are loads of sites and people available to keep the recent liberal arts graduate away from the deep fryer.

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