

California's Humanities Majors at Work: What They Earn, What They Do

In the first study of its kind, the Humanities Indicators developed a series of [profiles](#) about the career outcomes of humanities majors residing in California and the other 49 states, drawing on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

Among the key findings:

- The 688,887 humanities graduates residing in California and working full-time account for 5% of the state's full-time workforce (looking across all the states, the average share is 4%). Bear in mind that only 41% of the state's full-time workers have a bachelor's degree, so humanities graduates account for approximately 13% of that share.
- The median earnings of humanities majors in the state's full-time workforce (\$84,250 per year) are 97% higher than the median earnings of workers with just a high school degree (\$42,820). Even those at the bottom quartile of earnings for graduates from the humanities (\$55,882) are earning \$13,061 more than the median for those in the workforce with just a high school diploma. One in four humanities graduates in the state earns more than \$127,892.
- The median earnings for humanities majors in California are similar to or higher than the earnings of graduates from the behavioral and social sciences, business, arts, and education. Their earnings are lower than those of graduates from the natural sciences (by 18%). Engineering graduates earn substantially more than college graduates from every other field, both nationally and in California.
- The unemployment rate for humanities majors is similar to other college graduates in California at 4%, and considerably lower than the rate for those in the labor force with just a high school degree (7%).
- Humanities graduates in California are most likely to be found in education occupations, with 21% employed in that category.
- Older humanities graduates make considerably more than their younger counterparts. Full-time workers aged 22–26 have median earnings of \$46,347, but that rises to \$90,634 for those aged 30–59.

- Humanities graduates in California with an advanced degree have a 29% boost in median earnings (rising from \$76,006 for full-time workers with just a bachelor's degree to \$98,378 for workers with a higher degree).
- Areas of employment with substantial shares of humanities graduates are the legal profession (where humanities graduates account for 28% of bachelor's degree holders employed in those jobs) and museum/library professions (where they are 39% of college graduates in those occupations). Approximately 17% of college graduates working in the not-for-profit sector majored in the humanities.

Note that unless otherwise specified, earnings and unemployment estimates are for workers aged 25–59.

Earnings and occupation are not the only measure of success in one's career or life. See the recent [Workforce and Beyond](#) report from the Indicators for measures of job and life satisfaction for humanities graduates.

These profiles are being released for the National Humanities Conference, which starts in Indianapolis on October 26, 2023. See the project [home page](#) for additional details about our methodology, as well as supplemental information later in the fall, including earnings estimates by gender, race/ethnicity, and humanities discipline.

Finally, if you have any questions about this profile, the larger project, or the Humanities Indicators, please contact Robert Townsend (the Director of Humanities, Arts, and Culture Programs at the Academy) at rtownsend@amacad.org.