

Closing Gaps in our Knowledge of PhD Career Pathways: How Well Did a Humanities PhD Prepare Them?

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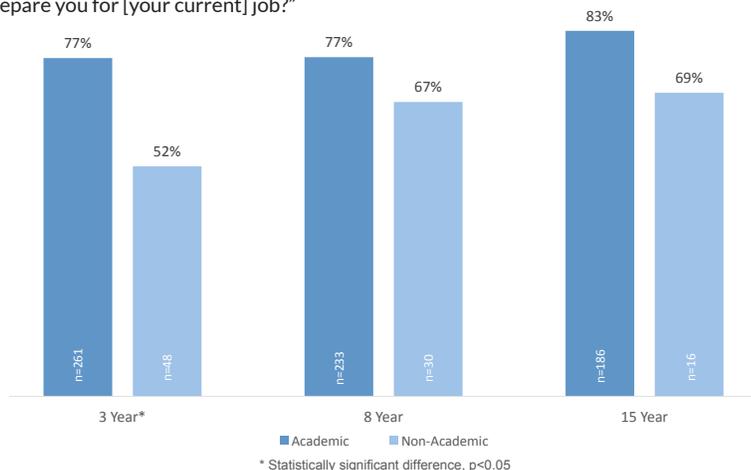
The vast majority of humanities PhDs still work in fields related to their doctoral education and are satisfied with their jobs. According to the National Survey of College Graduates by the National Science Foundation (NSF), 92% of humanities PhDs working in 2015 held jobs that are closely or somewhat related to their PhDs. Furthermore, 85% of humanities PhDs who are employed are satisfied or very satisfied with their current work. This percentage is consistent for the 92% who work in related fields as well as the 8% who work in fields unrelated to their humanities PhD degrees (NSF, *n.d.*). Though these national data tell us about humanities PhDs in the workforce and their satisfaction with their current jobs, little is known about their views on their PhD training. Using survey data from the Council of Graduate Schools' (CGS) *PhD Career Pathways* project, this brief provides new insight into how humanities PhDs apply their doctoral training in the workforce.

Key Findings:

- **A large majority of survey respondents believe that their humanities PhD education prepared them well for their jobs.** Although the differences were not statistically significant, humanities PhDs who were employed by colleges and universities generally felt that their doctoral studies had better prepared them for their current job than those who were employed elsewhere. The difference was statistically significant only among those who were three years post-graduation. (Figure 1)
- **A large majority of survey respondents said that they would pursue a PhD in general or in the same field, if they had to start over again.** Humanities PhDs three years post-graduation and working for employers other than colleges and universities were less likely than their academic counterparts to say that they “definitely would” or “probably would” pursue a PhD in general or in the same field. However, when comparing employees of academic institutions and those employed elsewhere, for those eight and fifteen years post-graduation, the differences were not statistically significant. (Figure 2)
- **Between humanities PhDs working in academia and elsewhere, there are more similarities than differences in key workforce skills and attributes.** While alumni in academic and non-academic sectors stressed different types of skills, there were no statistically significant differences for twelve skills and attributes—such as “leadership,” “adaptability and flexibility,” and “analytical thinking”—mentioned in the survey. (Figure 3)

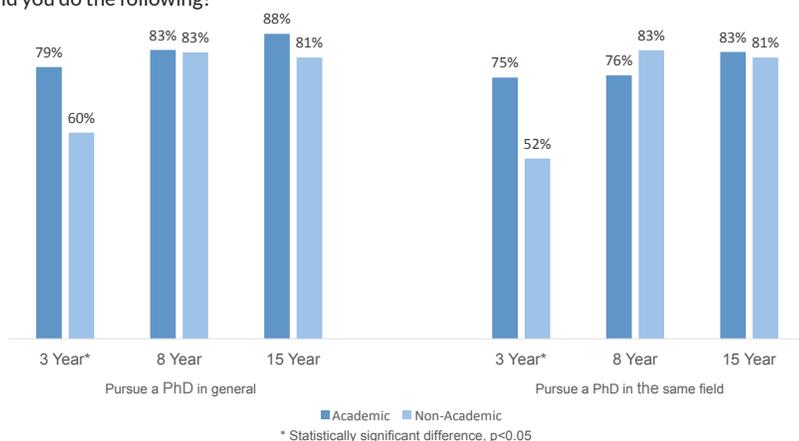


Figure 1: Percent responding “Extremely Well” or “Very Well” to survey item “How well did your PhD prepare you for [your current] job?”



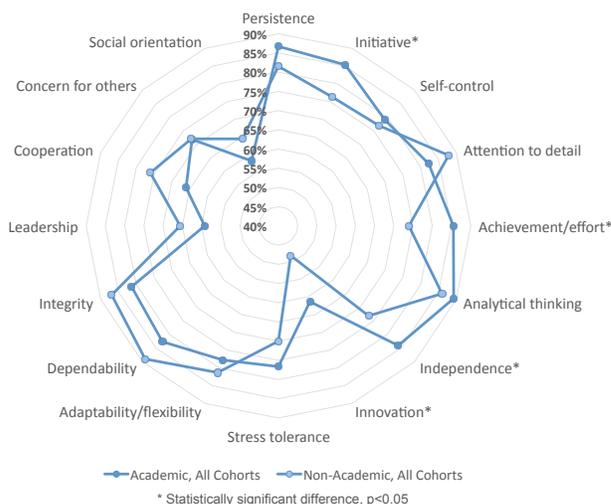
Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Understanding PhD Career Pathways for Program Improvement Project, Fall 2017 Alumni Survey

Figure 2: Percent responding “Definitely Would” or “Probably Would” to survey item “Given the perspective that you have gained since completing your PhD, if you had to start again, how likely would you do the following?”



Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Understanding PhD Career Pathways for Program Improvement Project, Fall 2017 Alumni Survey

Figure 3: Percent responding “Extremely Important” or “Very Important” to survey item “How important are each of the following attributes/skills in successfully performing your work in this job?”



Source: Council of Graduate Schools, Understanding PhD Career Pathways for Program Improvement Project, Fall 2017 Alumni Survey

Takeaway Points:

- Together, these results suggest that humanities PhD education offers relevant training that prepares graduates for jobs both inside and outside of the academy. Programs and graduate schools are encouraged to continue to offer curricular and co-curricular experiences that integrate training and professional development opportunities toward a variety of fulfilling career paths.
- For those employed in business, non-profit, government and other sectors, it may take longer to recognize the value and relevance of PhD training to careers. Recent graduates may also be reconciling their initial expectations for a first job and career (e.g., becoming a faculty member at a research university) with their actual employment (e.g., employed in another academic or non-academic context). Support for transitions into first jobs may be particularly helpful for recent graduates.
- The value of a humanities PhDs might not be immediately tangible to employers outside of the academy (Cumerma, 2017). It is important for universities to engage employers as partners, helping them to understand the skills and knowledge humanities PhDs offer to their sectors of employment (McCarthy, 2017).



Conversation Starters for PhD Program Improvement:

We encourage graduate schools to engage in campus conversations about humanities PhD careers to ensure that career diversity is seen and celebrated. Culture change happens incrementally and requires active participation of students, faculty, and employers. A good first step is understanding how your campus community communicates about career options for PhDs. Some of the questions that you may want to begin asking your campus colleagues (i.e., graduate school staff, college deans, graduate program directors, etc.) and others include:

- What kind of professional development opportunities does your institution provide PhD students in humanities for their career preparation and transition from graduate school?
- What kind of resources and guidance does your institution offer to humanities faculty members, so that they talk to their students about the diversity of humanities PhD careers?
- What is your institution and its humanities PhD programs doing to foster partnerships with current and prospective PhD employers?
- How effective are these approaches and resources in fostering PhD education that leads graduates to a variety of fulfilling career paths? How do you assess effectiveness?

Promising Practices:

In collaboration with the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), CGS established the *Next Generation Humanities PhD Consortium*, a collaborative learning community for 28 NEH Next Generation PhD grant awardees. Consortium participants sought to strengthen the career preparation of PhD students in the humanities. Promising Practices in Humanities PhD Professional Development: Lessons Learned from the 2016-2017 Next Generation Humanities PhD Consortium, can be found [here](#).

About the Data Source:

The CGS PhD Career Pathways Project Fall 2017 Alumni Survey was distributed to doctoral degree recipients that were three, eight, or fifteen years out of their PhD in selected programs at participating institutions. Each of the universities administered the survey individually and shared the resulting data with CGS. This brief is based upon this aggregated data set, which includes 882 doctoral degree recipients in humanities fields (Anthropology and Archeology, English Language and Literature, Foreign Language and Literature, History, Philosophy, Religion and Theology, and Arts and Humanities--Other) from 35 institutions. For this analysis, we focused on humanities PhD alumni who worked in jobs closely or somewhat related to their PhDs as of October 1, 2017. Those humanities PhDs employed in unrelated fields accounted for only 60 respondents.

References:

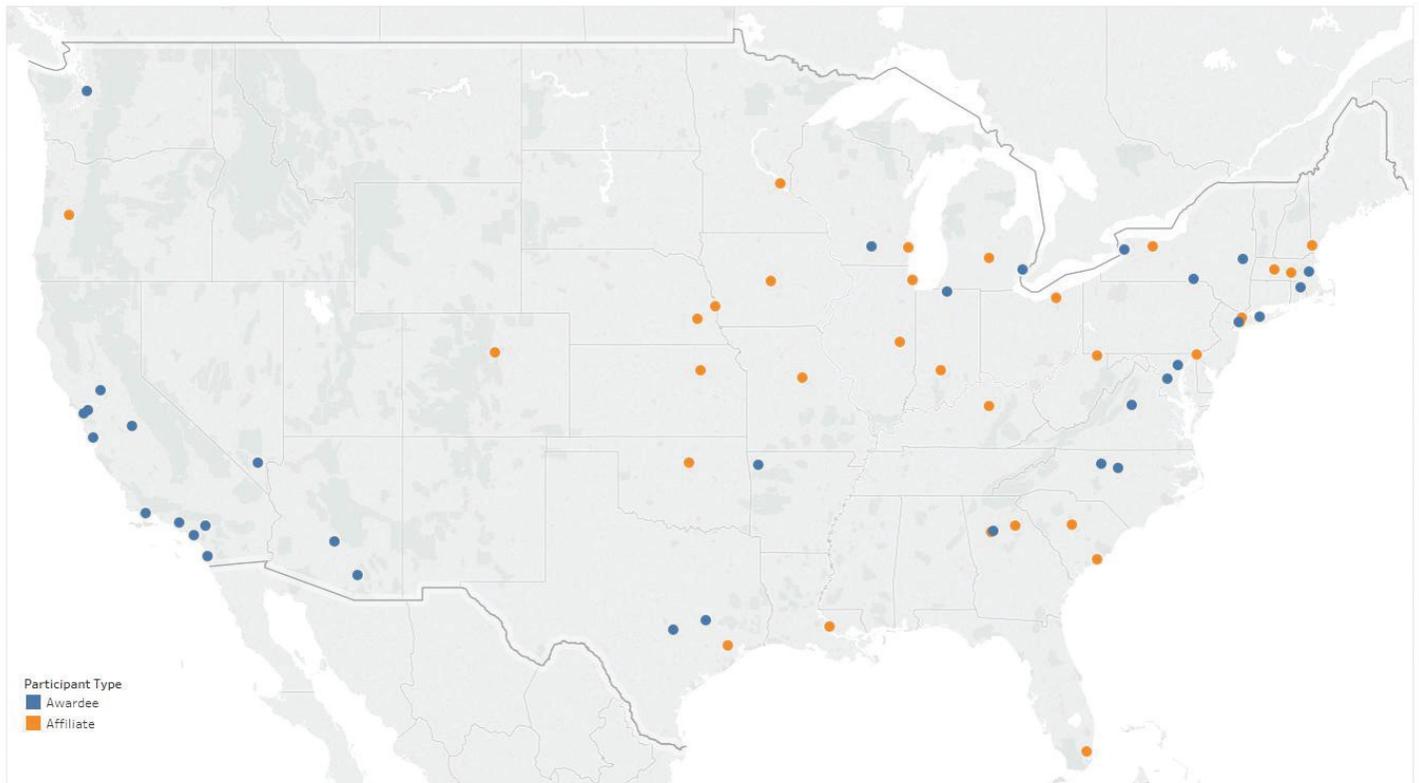
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The CGS PhD Career Pathways Coalition

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. Over the course of the project, universities will continue collecting 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 will 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.

About CGS

For over 50 years, the Council of Graduate Schools has been the only national organization dedicated solely to advancing master's and doctoral education and research. CGS members award 86.9% of all U.S. doctoral degrees and 59.8% of all U.S. master's degrees. CGS accomplishes its mission through advocacy, the development and dissemination of best practices, and innovative research.



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