

## 'Working Your Degree'

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*English majors remain low-paid, but many defect into the business world*

By Staff Writer Shelly K. Schwartz

NEW YORK (CNNfn) - Sure, you can write a poem in iambic pentameter and recite the prose of 17<sup>th</sup> century literary greats.

But can you find a job?

It's the challenge that faces English majors each year, legions of whom enter the work force armed with the communication skills coveted most by corporate America - but little direction on where to turn next.

"The perception is definitely still there (that English grads have trouble settling into a career)," said Ann Carlson, who earned a bachelor's degree in English degree this year from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. "It's a very malleable field and it's not difficult to find a job. You just have to really work to get your foot in the door."

The 22-year-old with a minor in art history landed a job three weeks out of school as an editor for one of MWC/Allied Health Care Group's medical trade publications.

"Originally, I wanted to pursue fiction writing and I still do in the back of my mind, but I also like to eat," Carlson joked. "With my education in English and art history I told everyone that I was equally useless everywhere. But I still got a job in my field."

### **To be or not to be ... an English major**

English majors, like many of their liberal arts counterparts, have hundreds of career opportunities to choose from. The versatility of the degree, in fact, is what makes the post-graduation job hunt so hard.

Traditional fields of work include writing and editing for newspapers and publishing firms, public relations and broadcasting, where many end up producing and writing scripts or on the airwaves themselves.

Assuming they've earned their state certifications and completed an approved education program, English grads with a bachelor's degree also can teach on the elementary and secondary school levels. Anything higher, including academic and research posts at colleges and universities, generally requires a higher degree.

According to *The College Majors Handbook*, published by JIST Works Inc., nearly 30 percent of English grads work in the education sector.

Many, too, use the major as a proving ground of sorts for law school, which requires strong writing and analytical skills. And still others simply defect from the field altogether once they toss their cap and gown, lured away by higher paying posts in the insurance, real estate and securities industries.

But increasingly, insiders say, one of the fastest growing career choices for English majors is broadly defined as "business." The verbal and written communication skills that English majors possess remain in top demand at nearly every company in America.

**Top 10 Occupations that Employ Persons with only a Bachelor's Degree in English**

Percent of employed	
1.) Artists, broadcasters, writers, editors, entertainers, public relations specialists	10.7
2.) Top- and mid-level managers, executives, administrators	10.6
3.) Teachers, secondary school	10.6
4.) Insurance, securities, real estate, business services	5.9
5.) Secretaries, receptionists, typists	5.1
6.) Sales occupations, including retail	4.9
7.) Other management-related occupations	4.8
8.) Other administrative (record clerks, telephone operators)	4.8
9.) Teachers, elementary school	3.5
10.) Other service occupations, except health	3.2

→ Sourced: The College Majors Handbook

Specific jobs can include contract and grant writing or editing, sales and marketing, technical writing for high-tech industries, management training and administrative tasks such as record keeping and office management.

"A lot of our students have hooked up with private businesses," said Ernest Suarez, a professor at The Catholic University of America in Washington and chairman of the English department. "Businesses tell us they like to hire English majors because they feel that they can think. They've got the writing and analytical skills they need. The rest they can be trained to learn. "

**Looking ahead**

As for job prospects, competition in the traditional fields of work remains fierce.

Those pursuing a career in journalism will find less competition for lower paying, entry-level jobs at small newspapers, trade publications and broadcasting stations, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports. And those who fail to find better paying jobs or earn enough as independent writers "usually are able to transfer readily to communications-related jobs in other occupations," the agency adds in its latest Occupational Outlook report.

Writing and editing jobs, including technical writing positions, are projected to grow 21 percent to 35 percent through 2008, according to Labor Department statistics. That's slightly faster than the average for all occupations.

The same level of job growth is projected for public relations specialists and the BLS notes "opportunities will be best for individuals who combine a college degree in journalism, public relations, advertising, or another communications-related field with relevant work experience."

(PR representatives help organizations tell their story to the media, community, consumers, investors and the government.)

And lastly, the Bureau notes jobs in the radio and television broadcasting field are on the downswing as consolidation in the industry continues and the number of jobs available shrinks.

"Announcers who are knowledgeable in business, consumer and health news may have an advantage over others," the agency writes. "While specialization is more common at large stations and the networks, many small stations also encourage it."

**Paycheck check-up**

The overall strength of today's job market isn't just paying off for computer science grads. English majors, who have long lamented low salaries in the field, are enjoying fatter paychecks as well.

The National Association of Colleges and Employers reports the average offer to English language and literature graduates this summer was up nearly 11 percent over July 1999 for an average of \$29,845, with a third of those offers for teaching positions and writing or editing jobs.

"We're seeing substantial increases in starting salary offers for all types of students," Camille Luckenbaugh, NACE employment information manager, said in a statement. "Not only are engineering and computer science grads getting big offers, but students in the business disciplines are doing exceptionally well, and liberal arts graduates are also seeing significant jumps in their average offers."

There's still a long way to go, though.

*The College Majors Handbook* points out the average annual salary of all English graduates in the workforce with only a bachelor's degree is \$43,600 - that's 10 percent lower than the national average for all employed college grads. Those working for private, for-profit companies earned \$50,100, while those in the government earned \$39,200.

Here's a more detailed breakdown of average salaries for some of the most common occupations for English majors, provided by the *Handbook*:

- **Business services, insurance, securities and real estate:** \$68,000.
- **Top- and mid-level managerial, executive and administrative:** \$63,100.
- **Broadcasters, writers, editors and other entertainment and public relations fields:** \$52,300.
- **Teachers:** \$38,000 at the elementary level and \$34,500 on the secondary level.

So who's best suited for an English degree?

"Those who are intellectually curious," said Suarez, of Catholic University. "Those who want to learn how to think independently. And those who want to heighten their analytic skills with precision. That's what all that writing forces you to do, analyze a body of material. Your thoughts can't be fuzzy. They have to be exact and work together."