

embrace rhetoric (or embrace it again might be a better way to put it) as a touchstone for organizing the work and the curriculum, if they wish to spare themselves the fate of most classics programs. He writes, "The question is, how can we begin, in the midst of our difficulties and squabbles, to reconstruct our field as a discipline. My answer, to put it in grossly oversimplified form, is to replace the canon of texts with the canon of methods—to put a modern equivalent of the medieval trivium at the center of an English education" (145). Scholes's trivium, "like its ancestor, would be organized around a canon of concepts, precepts, and practices rather than a canon of texts" (120). He imagines in place of the medieval grammar course two contemporary courses called Language and Human Subjectivity and Representation and Objectivity. For dialectic, he would help students "learn both how to use and how to criticize discourse that takes reason, system, and logical coherence as its principles of articulation" (125). For rhetoric, he would give a modern course in persuasion and mediation.

I introduce Scholes's ideas as one provocative example of the sort of changes that seem to be in store for the arts and humanities in the next generation. There are other models out there, some of which take the historical periodization of literary study as the red giant I have come to believe it already is—reluctantly in large part because of the very thorough but not very metaphysical training as a graduate student that I encountered in the 1980s. Preparing this paper, I dreamed up a list of courses that I might propose in lieu of the canon of English courses centered on the historical periodization of literary study. Here's the list, in no particular order: we could give courses on authorship, the history of reading, literacy, representation, genre, the sacred, canonicity, humanism, poetics, narrative, the history of the book, nationalism and geography, style and its friend decorum, the beautiful, bodies in texts, anxieties of influence, research methods and the uses of archives, gendered reading and writing, the history of how people have been taught to write, incunabula and the printing press and the publishing industry, cyberliteracy, and historicizing literature. But before a department could adopt such a different set of requirements, it would need to have very clear notions about what it wants students to know and do, far beyond the levels of clarity I have seen in my own departments. Few of us, as members of a discipline, really want to achieve that clarity, for fear that it will shut out the shades of gray we so value in literature and in our work.

No matter which curricular revisions any but the most retrograde humanities programs come to embrace, eventually these will need to include more humanities technology. The next generation of students will be far more visual learners than most of us. My proof here—my young nieces and nephews, who learned to use computers before they could read—is admittedly unscientific.

So, to bring things full circle: to make the English major greater than the sum of its parts,

We must be visible, articulate advocates of the best reasons for studying with us. In a simpler era, of course, all we needed to say was the one magic word—"Shakespeare." But now a department must know and explain the internal logic of its curriculum and the best outcomes of that curriculum.

Keep in mind that the curriculum exists first to serve students' needs.

Think back to a mediocre meal you've had at a restaurant whose menu ran to 101 entrees and resolve to resist the faux-Dionysian impulse to proliferate new courses and new concentrations and new tracks with abandon. There is a point of diminishing returns when the choices become so numerous that nothing seems to be of particular value.

Listen to your students talk about your curriculum; the choices it creates for them; and its effects, problems, and successes.

Invest the collective energy and brains to put in writing the logic of your curriculum, drawing on local strengths; and don't wiggle out with pat answers that you may be wont to give, so as to be able to get back to your research or that stack of papers to be graded or the next memo.

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## What English Majors Do Out There, How They Feel about It, and What We Do about It

PETER G. BEIDLER

I READ with interest not long ago in the pages of this *Bulletin* Katie Conboy's article "What Can You Do with an English Major?" I found it engaging and useful but general. She reports what we all kind of know intuitively: that English majors can do anything they want to do and that they work in all sorts of professional fields, from banking to engineering to teaching to librarianship to manufacturing to editing to whatever. I decided that it was time to try to find more specific data on what English majors who graduated from the Lehigh University English department in the past two decades are doing to make a living and how they feel about having majored in English. Others in the profession may be interested in the methods we used, the results that we found, and the issues we now face.

In March 2002 we sent questionnaires to all 477 of Lehigh's English major alumni who had graduated between 1980 and 2000. The questionnaire was phrased similarly to one reported in 1985 in *College English* that we sent out to the 151 English majors who had graduated between 1960 and 1980. Our goal then as now was to learn what kinds of jobs our graduates were actually doing in the real world, how they felt about having majored in English, and what benefits they saw from their degree. Those questions led to more difficult ones: Given the jobs that our majors are actually doing, should we attempt to restructure the English major or our teaching of specific courses in ways that might better prepare them for those jobs? And should we change the way we advise the students who choose to major with us?

This article is a report of what we found out from our 2002 survey. The results are no doubt skewed in some ways by the particular kind of university that Lehigh University is: a small, private, selective eastern university. Still, our majors are surely not entirely unlike English majors across the country, and our statistics may in any case provide faculty mem-

bers in other colleges and universities with a basis for comparison with what has happened to their own graduates, should they seek to conduct a survey similar to ours.

### Getting Started

After securing a commitment from the English department to cover the costs of stationery and postage, I paid a visit to the director of career services at Lehigh and requested that the office join forces with the English department and the alumni association to conduct a career survey of our English alums. The director said she would love to know what our majors were doing and would help in any way she could. The biggest help was the off-peak services of a wonderful office coordinator, who made an initial tabulation of the results when the questionnaires finally started to come in. Then I called my best contact at the Lehigh University Alumni Association—Jill Anderson, an English major, class of 1991, who works as director of alumni clubs. She was able to provide me a list of all our English major alums who had graduated between 1980 and 2000. "We can send the list electronically right up to printing services," she said. "Do you want the list separated by sex?" I thought for a moment and replied, "That would be wonderful." Knowing that most of our English majors in the past quarter century

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were women, I thought it might be interesting to find out whether the responses of women alums were substantially different from those of men. Not long after that I took to printing services a cover letter, the two-page questionnaire, and a set of instructions about printing the questionnaires, addressing the 477 business-size envelopes, and printing return addresses on 477 smaller (9-inch) return envelopes. For a remarkably small fee, the good folks at printing took it from there, copying and folding the cover letter and the questionnaire, affixing stamps, stuffing and sealing the envelopes that had magically been addressed from the list sent up by the alumni association, and mailing the whole tray of letters. We had had them print the questionnaires for the women on yellow and the questionnaires for the men on green, to make it easier to separate them after they came in. We did not attempt to individualize the cover letters.

Most of the 218 responses came back in the first two weeks, but they dribbled in for the next two months. The response rate of 45.7% seems reasonable enough, particularly when we recall that the alumni association does not have up-to-date addresses for all our nomadic alums and that for many the most recent address on file is their parents' address. Although there were some small differences in the responses of the women and the men alums, the biggest difference was in the response rate. The response rate for women was significantly higher than for men; 147 of the 285 women we sent letters to returned the questionnaires, or 51.6%. Only 71 of the 192 men returned them, or 37.0%. Anyone analyzing the results of the survey, then, should remember that we have more women English major alums than men and that the women had a better response rate than the men. Because of those two facts, of the actual re-

sponses reported below, those by women outnumber those by men two to one.

### The Responses

At Lehigh we have tended over the years to build our English major on the assumption that our best students will someday want to go to graduate school, probably in English or secondary education. In fact, as table 1 shows, few graduates do continue in English. Less than 6% obtain the MA in English—only a few more than go on to get an MBA—while 10% study education. Only 5 of the 218 respondees got a PhD in English, in sharp contrast to the 39 who became doctors of jurisprudence—that is, lawyers. Lehigh English, it turns out, is far more a feeder major for law school than for graduate school in English or education. Our women alums are more likely to go on to study English or education than men, who in a greater percentage study law.

Perhaps the most important information is conveyed in table 2. The responses of our English alums show that they are engaged in a wide variety of occupations, some in more than one occupation. Less than half (though more than half of the women) are involved in some sort of educational enterprise or in one of what I have termed the words-delivery professions like writing, publishing, television, and librarianship. More than a quarter are involved in law or public-service fields, which include health care, social work, and military service. But more than 40%—and more than 60% of the men—are involved in some sort of business or industry. I should note that the numbers add up to more than the 218 responses because we invited respondents to give more than one response to the ques-

tions about their current job or employment status. Some indicated, for example, that they were involved in both librarianship and home schooling their children; others indicated that they were teaching and pursuing a master's degree at the same time.

When I compared these results with those of twenty years ago (the 1960–80 group), I found that there was remarkable continuity in the forty-year period, even though most of the responses to the earlier questionnaire were made by men (Lehigh did not become coeducational until 1972). The percentages of the two groups going into education were almost exactly the same, as were the percentages of those going into business and industry. Of the other categories, words-delivery and public-service professionals both gained a little in the second twenty-year period, while law fell off a bit, but the changes were not drastic. Our English department, then, for the past four decades has prepared students for more jobs in business and industry than in any other profession.

One question we asked alums was what, now that they had graduated and were involved in the worka-

day world, they thought the two main benefits of majoring in English were. We gave them eight choices, in no particular order. Table 3 shows these eight choices rearranged according to the rank our alums, collectively, gave them. No doubt some of us in the department thought that our primary function was to give our majors an understanding of the history of literature, but almost none of our alums—a minuscule 3 of the 218—mentioned that as one of the top two benefits. By far the two most beneficial aspects of majoring in English mentioned by alums were the writing skills and the critical-thinking skills they developed.

On the questionnaire we asked whether our alums would recommend that other Lehigh students major in English. It is gratifying to note that a whopping 200 of the 218, or 91.7%, said they would. Only 8, or 3.7%, said they would not. (Ten respondents left the question blank.) We also asked them to write in why they would (or would not) make that recommendation. Some of the positive responses are worth quoting. Alums said that they would recommend that others major in English because:

Table 1  
English Majors Who Did or Did Not Receive Postgraduate Degrees

Degree	Men		Women		Men and Women	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
No postgraduate degree	44	62.0	85	57.8	129	59.2
Doctor of Laws	15	21.1	24	16.3	39	17.9
MA in education	5	7.0	17	11.6	22	10.1
MA in English	2	2.8	10	6.8	12	5.5
MBA	4	5.6	6	4.1	10	4.6
Doctorate in English	1	1.4	4	2.7	5	2.3
Doctorate in education	0	0.0	1	0.7	1	0.5
Total	71	100.0	147	100.0	218	100.0

Table 2  
Current Employment Status of English Majors

Employment	Men		Women		Men and Women	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Business and industry	45	63.4	50	34.0	95	43.6
Words delivery	11	15.5	45	30.6	56	25.7
Education	9	12.7	35	23.8	44	20.2
Public service	13	18.3	20	13.6	33	15.1
Law	9	12.7	20	13.6	29	13.3
Other	6	8.5	24	16.3	30	13.8
Total number of responses	93		194		287	
Total respondents (basis for percentage)	71		147		218	

Note: Respondents were able to give answers for more than one employment category. Percentages can thus exceed 100.

Table 3  
Benefits of Majoring in English

Benefit	Men		Women		Men and Women	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Writing skills	48	67.6	104	70.7	152	69.7
Critical thinking skills	41	57.7	88	59.9	129	59.2
Literary appreciation and analysis	13	18.3	35	23.8	48	22.0
Personal growth	13	18.3	20	13.6	33	15.1
Understanding human nature	7	9.9	23	15.6	30	13.8
Public speaking skills	5	7.0	11	7.5	16	7.3
Social skills	4	5.6	4	2.7	8	3.7
Understanding the history of literature	2	2.8	1	0.7	3	1.4
Total number of responses	133		286		419	
Total respondents (basis for percentage)	71		147		218	

- Mastery in language gives you so much pleasure in life, along with success in business.
- What better way is there to learn about life?
- It helps in all areas of any career path you may choose—writing, speaking, listening, creating, thinking.
- It gives students an opportunity to explore who they really are.
- As an English major leaving Lehigh, you are already striding ahead of the majority of people in the working world in that you have the ability to communicate ideas clearly, think on your feet, and read Middle English in the original language. Okay, that last one I haven't had the chance to use yet, but I'm ready!
- I would not have enjoyed studying anything else as much—there is just so much to embrace in English.

The survey was designed primarily to tell whether our students thought that their having majored in English had practical benefits for them. At least at Lehigh, where historically there are lots of business, science, engineering, and social science majors, students who major in English sometimes feel put down for selecting an impractical, pie-in-the-sky, lazy-bones, artsy-fartsy major. In the questionnaire we asked two questions to ascertain the practicality of a degree in English. The questions are reported in tables 4a and 4b. The responses to the first question were encouraging. When asked whether having majored in English helped our alums to land their current job, three-quarters, or 152 of the 205 who answered this question, said that it had. The response to the second question, whether having majored in English helps alums do their current job,

**Table 4A**  
Did Majoring in English Help You Get Your Current Job?

Answer	Men		Women		Men and Women	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Yes	51	75.0	101	73.7	152	74.1
No	17	25.0	36	26.3	53	25.9
Total	68	100.0	137	100.0	205	100.0

Note: Thirteen respondents left this question blank.

**Table 4B**  
Does Having Majored in English Help You Do Your Current Job?

	Men		Women		Men and Women	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Yes	69	100.0	129	96.3	198	97.5
No	0	0.0	5	3.7	5	2.5
Total	69	100.0	134	100.0	203	100.0

Note: Fifteen respondents left this question blank.

was even more encouraging. More than nine-tenths, or 198 of the respondents, said that it did. Curiously, of the men responding, not one said that having majored in English did not help him do his current job.

#### Curricular Matters

We also asked a few questions that related to the broader English curriculum we teach at Lehigh. The responses, we thought, might help us redesign or tinker with the structure of the major and advise our students.

The English faculty has pondered for decades the extent to which we should offer a basic major with relatively few requirements and by so doing encourage students to do two majors, one in English and one in some other field. That makes a certain kind of sense, but it risks short-changing students who might want to do graduate work in English. We have traditionally resolved this tension by offering two tracks in the major, one regular one with minimal requirements and one honors track for students with a high GPA and more apparent ambition to pursue English at the graduate level. Those on the honors track take more courses and write a thesis. One of the questions we asked our alums was whether they thought it a good idea to structure the major in such a way that students could do double majors. The response was a loud and clear yes! As table 5A shows, almost 80% of our alums thought it better to keep the double major an option; fewer than a quarter indicated that a "single major in English" is "just fine." Seven ambivalent

students checked both, apparently wanting to communicate that either way is a good idea.

Table 5B shows the second major completed by the 74 graduates among our 218 respondents (34%) who had actually completed a double major. Most were in the social sciences, particularly psychology and political science, but a number were in other humanities subjects, in business, in science, or in engineering.

Another question we asked was what different decisions our alums might have made, after having had some experience in the real world, about majors, minors, collateral courses, foreign languages, whatever.

**Table 5A**  
Is It a Good Idea for the Department to Structure the Major So That Students Can Easily Do a Double Major, or a Single Major in English Just Fine?

Answer	Men		Women		Men and Women	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Make double major a realistic option	61	85.9	112	76.2	173	79.0
Single major in English is fine	14	19.7	38	25.9	52	23.0
Total	75		150		225	
Total respondents (basis for percentage)	71		147		218	

Note: Seven respondents selected both answers.

**Table 5B**  
Second Major of Respondents Who Completed a Double Major

Degree	Men		Women		Men and Women	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Political science, history, international relations	9	36.0	12	24.5	21	28.0
Psychology or sociology	1	4.0	14	28.6	15	20.0
Sciences, engineering, or math	7	28.0	4	8.2	11	14.0
Business or economics	5	20.0	4	8.2	9	12.0
Languages	1	4.0	6	12.2	7	9.0
Theater or music	2	8.0	3	6.1	5	6.0
Journalism or public relations	0	0.0	5	10.2	5	6.0
Philosophy	0	0.0	1	2.0	1	1.0
Total completing double major	25	100.0	49	100.0	74	100.0
No double major or no answer	46	64.8	98	66.7	144	66.1
Total respondents	71		147		218	

**Table 6**  
If You Were Back at the Sophomore Crossroads Again, Knowing What You Know Now, What Different Decisions Would You Make about Your Major, Minor, Collateral Courses, Foreign Language Courses, Whatever?

What graduates most frequently mentioned they would do differently	Men		Women		Men and Women	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Take foreign language courses	9	34.6	40	39.2	49	38.3
Take courses in business, economics, or finance	8	30.8	31	30.4	39	30.5
Take study abroad	5	19.2	10	9.8	15	11.7
Take social science courses	1	3.8	12	11.8	13	10.2
Take more humanities courses	3	11.5	9	8.8	12	9.4
Total	26	100.0	102	100.0	128	100.0

The responses were all write-in, so no two graduates used the same language. I tabulated the answers the best I could, and show the results in table 6. Two responses stand out. First, our graduates wished they had studied a foreign language (Spanish was mentioned most frequently as being particularly useful for their careers); second, they wished they had taken at least a course or two in business, economics, marketing, or basic finance. A lesser number wished they had availed themselves of the chance to travel and study abroad or had taken more social science or humanities courses. I sensed from the responses that some al

wistfully realized that the college years are an opportunity to learn all sorts of things and that it is difficult to take the time or find the teachers with whom to learn later. As one alum wrote, "I guess I blew my chance, huh?"

Readers of the *ADE Bulletin* will perhaps be less interested in the specific results of the survey we did here at Lehigh than in its implications for their own alums. They may be encouraged by this example to conduct surveys of their own English major alums (see app.). Will they discover, as we did, that their alums out there are by and large delighted that they majored in English and would strongly recommend that others do so as well? Will they discover, as we did, that their alums are doing all sorts of interesting and rewarding work out there and are certain that having majored in English helps them both to get and to do their jobs? Will they discover, as we did, that their alums feel particularly fortunate that as English majors they developed both their writing and their critical-thinking skills?

Whatever the results, they will probably find that the real work begins after the surveys are tabulated and summarized. Will they conclude that since their English major alums are so pleased with their majors and doing such richly diversified work out there, they should make no changes in their program? Will they conclude that they should worry less about things like period coverage and theoretical sophistication in the major and try to redesign the curriculum or the individual courses in it to emphasize even more the development of writing and critical-thinking skills and to advise their majors to find a meaningful second major in addition to English? Will they conclude . . . well, what will they conclude?

Let the debate begin.

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### Appendix

Others who are contemplating surveying their own English majors may want to see the two documents below. The first is my

cover letter to our graduates. The second is the survey itself, which was originally printed on both sides of a single sheet of paper.

If I were doing the survey over, I would consider shortening the questionnaire by eliminating several of the questions on the second side of the sheet. Clearly our majors are busy, and answering questions takes time and thought. I feel sure that our response rate would have been even higher if we asked fewer questions, and of course analyzing the results would have been easier and cheaper as well. A multiple-choice test is easier to administer and to grade than an essay test, and the second page started to feel like an essay test, both to the alums and to the "graders" back on the campus.

I have no other advice except that the return nine-inch envelope should be addressed to a professor in the English department rather than to a secretary or someone in career services. And I am certain that it helped that we put a real stamp, not a printed postage-meter label or a bulk-mail label, on the envelope.

### Memo to Students

March 1, 2002

To: Lehigh English majors, 1980-2000  
 From: Pete Beidler  
 Subject: Career survey

As some of you know, I have been teaching at Lehigh for several decades and have been running out Career Night for English Majors for almost as long. The purpose of this letter is to ask you to let me know what sort of career you—one of our English graduates—are engaged in at the present time. And while I am at it, I want to ask you a few more questions about your experience as an English major at Lehigh and your life out there in the "real world."

The enclosed questionnaire is designed to solicit from our 500 or so English majors in the past twenty years some information that may help current and future Lehigh students decide whether to major in English, what career paths are open to them if they do major in English, how literature and writing can help them live their lives, and so on. The information you give us will be tabulated and summarized, and will help the faculty to better advise current students. In tabulating and analyzing the results I will have some welcome help from our good friends in Career Services at Lehigh.

I have a question on there about whether you'd like to come back to Lehigh (at your own expense, alas) to talk with some of our majors about your own career path. I always have lots of volunteers, so say yes only if you would like an excuse to come "home" for an evening.

Please, could you fill the form out right away and return it to me in the enclosed stamped envelope? We will start tabulating the results immediately, so please do not delay your response. It will take just a minute to fill out the questionnaire—whatever parts of it you want to fill out. Do note that there are questions on both sides of the sheet. The longer you wait the less the chance that you will get to it. I'd really like to know what you are up to out there and whether you are happy about your having majored in English during your years at Lehigh. Putting your name and address on the form is optional.

Hey, we paid good money for that stamp, so don't let it go to waste! Thanks so much.

### Lehigh University, 2002: Survey of English Majors

1. Year you undergraduated \_\_\_\_\_
2. Other major you graduated with besides English \_\_\_\_\_
3. Highest degree you attained after you got your bachelor's at Lehigh  
 certificate in \_\_\_\_\_  
 master's in \_\_\_\_\_  
 doctorate in \_\_\_\_\_
4. Your job title, if you have one \_\_\_\_\_
5. Please check the option below that comes closest to describing your current job or employment status. Check more than one if you need to.  
 Teaching (indicate level)  
 Primary  
 Secondary  
 College  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Words delivery (specify)  
 Publishing  
 Radio or television  
 Theater  
 Writing  
 Librarianship  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Law  
 Medicine or pharmaceuticals  
 Homemaking or caring for family  
 Still in school  
 Seeking employment  
 Retired or disabled  
 Public service (specify)  
 Government  
 Health care  
 Social work  
 Military service  
 Museum work  
 Charity or philanthropy  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Business and industry  
 Banking  
 Manufacturing  
 Insurance  
 Management  
 Public relations  
 Human resources (personnel)  
 Advertising  
 Investments  
 Construction  
 Engineering  
 Consulting  
 Computing  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. In your experience, what are the two most important benefits of majoring in English?  
 Literary appreciation and analysis

- Understanding of human nature
  - Understanding history of literature
  - Personal growth as a human being
  - Critical thinking skills
  - Writing skills
  - Social skills
  - Public speaking skills
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. Would you recommend that current Lehigh students major in English?  
 No, because \_\_\_\_\_  
 Yes, because \_\_\_\_\_
  8. Is there some advice you wish someone had given you when you were a junior English major at Lehigh? If so, what?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  9. A number of our students double major, combining English with some other major. Do you think it is a good idea for us to structure the major in such a way as to make double majoring a realistic option, or is a single major in English just fine?  
 Double majoring is a great idea  
 English alone is just fine
  10. Students at Lehigh wonder what it is like in the "real world." Write down a phrase or sentence to describe it.  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  11. Did majoring in English help you get your current job?  
 No, because \_\_\_\_\_  
 Yes, because \_\_\_\_\_
  12. Does having majored in English help you do your present job?  
 No, because \_\_\_\_\_  
 Yes, because \_\_\_\_\_
  13. If you were back at the sophomore crossroads again knowing what you know now, what different decisions might you have made about majors, minors, collateral courses, foreign language courses, whatever? Please specify.  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  15. Are you interested in returning to campus to take part in a Career Night for English majors?  
 Yes  Maybe  No
- Name and address (optional, unless you want me to call you about helping with a Career Night)  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
 E-mail \_\_\_\_\_