

Following different drummers:

Philosophy degree not marketable, but worthwhile

By Frank Shaw
Of the Emerald

In a time of poor economy when jobs are few and far between, many students go the safe route of getting a business degree, or a physics degree, something "marketable."

But not philosophy majors. "A philosophy degree is not particularly marketable," admits William Davie, acting head of the philosophy department, "but marketability ought not be the motivation of getting a degree."

Interest is the reason students should want a philosophy degree, he says. And a philosophy degree is more useful than it appears at first glance, Davie says.

It is excellent preparation

for law or political science a "great background study." Students learn to read difficult material closely and carefully and learn how to study and write about difficult material, he says.

"It (philosophy) can prepare you for a lot of activities," he says, citing an example of a student who received a high-paying job in the federal government after graduating with a philosophy degree.

Arnulf Zweig, a philosophy professor, agrees that interest should be the main justification for seeking a philosophy degree.

"I couldn't stop doing philosophy," Zweig says. He says there's nothing quite like teaching philosophy.

"It's a joy to introduce people to ideas."

But he says there's more to philosophy than just fun.

"Philosophy does help people learn how to reason, how to analyze a problem," he says. His best student last year is now working on computer languages.

Chris Anderson, a junior majoring in philosophy and economics, picked philosophy "because that's what I'm interested in."

Although Anderson agrees a philosophy degree is "impractical," he says that was not a factor in his decision.

"You can't go out and apply your philosophy degree like a business degree — you can't market it," he says, "but I'm not going to take something simply because I'm afraid I won't be able to get a job."

Many different areas are en-

compassed by philosophy, Anderson says, including law, economics, politics and religion.

"Philosophy teaches you how to think," he says.

During his 14 years of teaching philosophy Davie says the same "small but significant" number of students have been interested in philosophy. They "follow their nose" to find out what they're interested in.

Davie says the saddest thing he sees is students who take a philosophy class for the first time in the winter or spring of their senior year and then realize it is something they were really interested in.

"It's sad that someone only appreciates what their education could have been," he says.

English major offers a solid analytical background

By Linda Mutch
Of the Emerald

If the faucet drips once more, it may drive you insane. It's 3 a.m., and all that's missing is an introduction to your poetry paper. Only the faucet dripping, the clock ticking, your pen scratching punctuate the silence.

As you begin your introduction for the fifth time, suddenly you let your pen capture the sounds, and they flow into your paper. When you re-read the paper six hours later, you are amazed you were able to relate a dripping faucet and ticking clock to James Wright's poetry. And a week later, you are even more amazed to find that your professor loved it.

You are an English major, drawn to your studies by perhaps a simple love of words and an appreciation of good literature, a joy for writing and a desire to exercise your imagination.

"The number of career-oriented English majors is small," says George Wickes, head of the University English department. "Typically, students don't know what they want to do with an English major, especially in their first two years."

Since 1972 there has been a decline in the number of English majors at the University. In 1972, 612 students (5 percent of the total number of undergraduates) were enrolled as English majors. By 1978, the number dropped to a low of 360, and in the fall of 1982, English majors numbered 379, about 3 percent of the undergraduate student body.

"Students are more vocationally oriented now," Wickes says. "Today's economic squeeze has brought about this change in focus. In the 1970s the country was more prosperous, and students were more politically active, more involved in protest."

This vocational orientation is reflected in the continually growing number of students enrolled in computer science and business administration. In 1972, 1,582 undergraduates were enrolled in the business college, 2,290 were enrolled by 1977 and 2,793 — 23 percent of the student body — by 1982.

The number of computer majors has doubled twice in the past ten years. In 1972, 101 undergraduates were enrolled. By 1978 it had jumped to 250 and then 499 in 1982.

Mike Kroetch, a senior in creative writing, sees values in an English degree that outweighs the economic advantages of marketable majors such as business and computers.

"Marketable degrees offer a comparative advantage in the initial job market after graduation," Kroetch says. "Unfortunately, such fields and jobs tend to be packaged in a predictable manner which doesn't allow the flexibility possible with an English degree."

"I see the English degree as a long term investment which will accumulate value with time, one that requires the development of critical abilities. It gives you a perspective, a chance to for individual opinion. For me this is important."

Wickes says the value unique in disciplines such as English and history is that they teach people how to write properly, to construct and substantiate arguments and to read analytically.

Qualities such as these, Wickes says, are what make English majors attractive to law schools and upper management of business and industry.

"Med schools often show an interest as well. They like liberal arts majors, but there is a catch in that students must also fulfill pre-med requirements," Wickes says.

Bobbi Partney, an English major and peer adviser, says that real estate agencies, research companies and management training divisions often prefer liberal arts majors because the analytical skills they acquire give them more flexibility than what results from more specialized skills acquired by business majors.

"These businesses want problems evaluated qualitatively as well as quantitatively," Partney says.

She points out one problem for English majors is learning how to develop a resume that adequately reflects the skills acquired in English.

"It's difficult to respond to the 'career objective' portion of a resume. English majors often have no set career in mind and are more open to a range of possibilities. It's difficult to narrow creative and innovative qualities of a liberal arts background to one career objective."

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