

Major in Happiness:

Debunking the College
Major Fallacies



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Major in Happiness

Debunking the College Major Fallacies

Michael Edmondson

"Edmondson's theories are accompanied by practical exercises that will be of value to students and their parents as they navigate a pathway through the complex interactions of study and work. He also points to two critical skills: team work and listening skills we expect and rarely teach. This book adds significantly to the debate about education and is a must read for incoming and exiting graduates and their parents."—John Christian, President/CEO, CAPA, The Global Education Network

"As a career professional this is truly a thought provoking book. This book certainly puts majors in perspective and the importance of doing what you love. This is a must read for all parents of college bound students."—Cindy Szadokierski, Executive Director, The Edge Program, Randolph-Macon College

"Using strong research blended with a practical, clear writing style, Dr. Edmondson provides perspective and advice that the current generation of students (and parents) desperately needs to hear."—Jeremy Osborn, PhD., Associate Professor of Communication, Cornerstone University

This book examines a variety of assumptions prevalent in the mental models of undergraduates, parents, educators, higher education leaders, administrators, and policymakers that cause people to fall into a series of mental traps when selecting a major. Divided into three parts, this publication presents a situational analysis on choosing a college major, dissects the mental models and traps people rely on, and offers a variety of assessments that can help increase one's self-awareness prior to declaring a major.

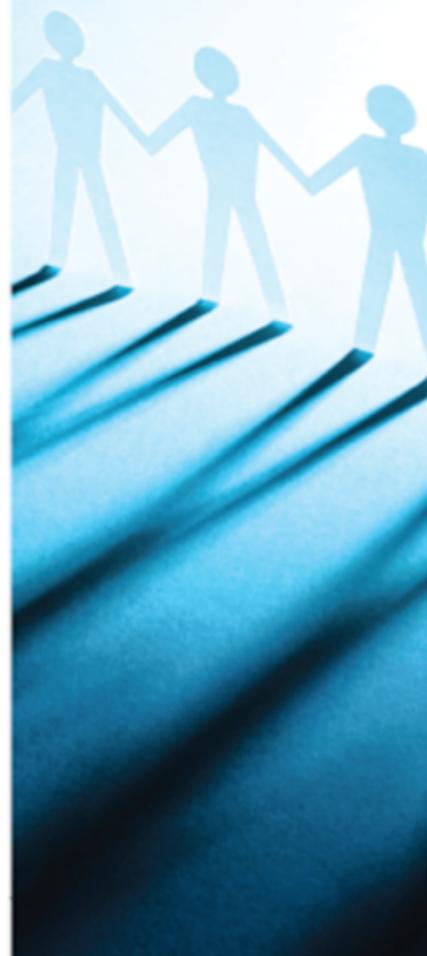
Michael Edmondson, PhD, is the associate vice president for career development at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. Business Experts Press published his previous publication, *Marketing Your Value: 9 Steps to Navigate Your Career*. He has a PhD in history from Temple University, an MA in history from Villanova University, and a BA in history from Cabrini College.

**HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND
ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR COLLECTION**

Stan Gully • Jean Phillips, Editors

EDMONDSON

MAJOR IN HAPPINESS



**HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND
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**Major in
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*Debunking the
College Major
Fallacies*

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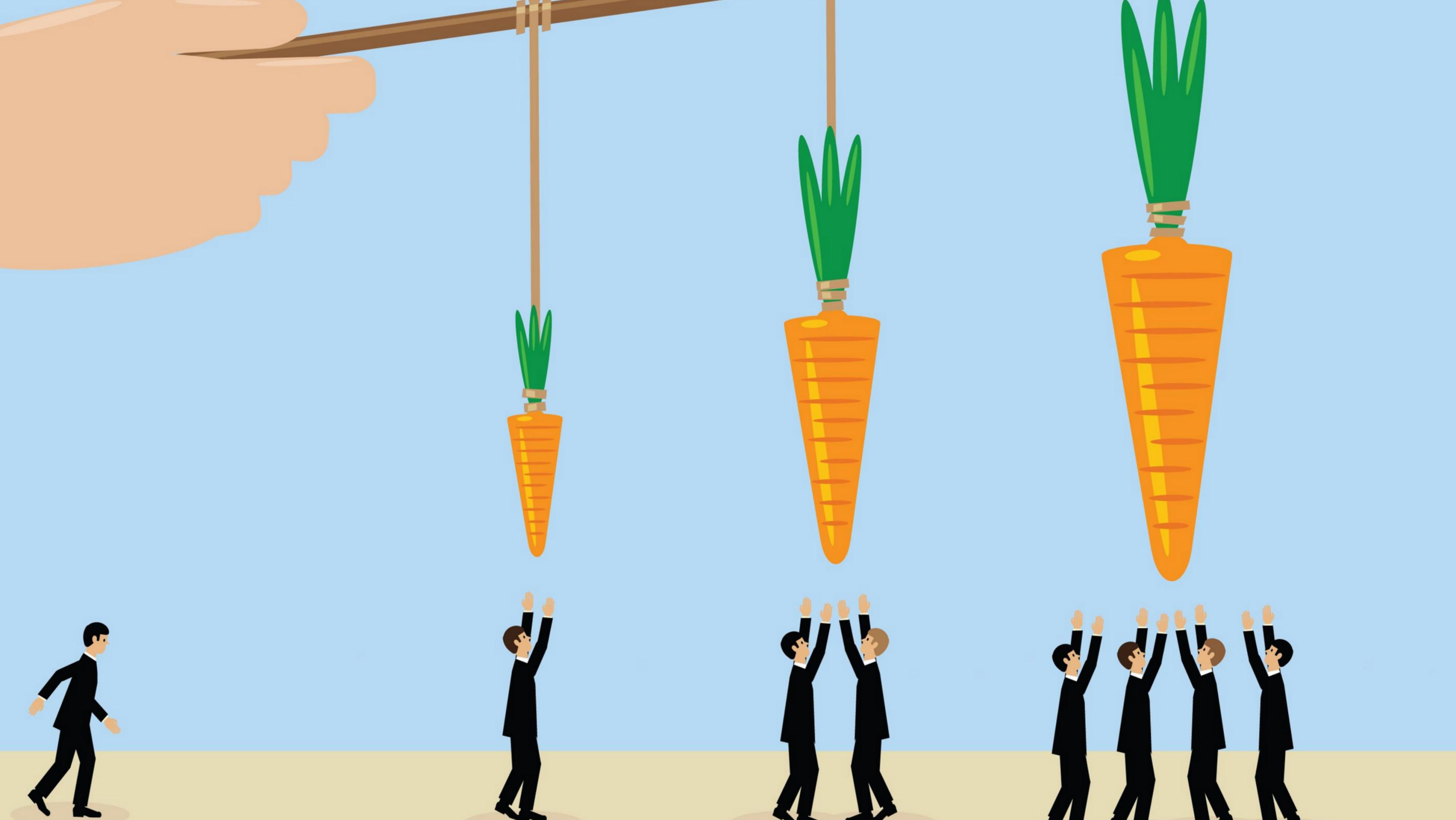
LET'S GET

STARTED



The portion of incoming freshmen who cited "to be able to get a better job" as a very important reason for attending college reached an all-time high of 87.9 percent in 2012, an increase from 85.9 percent in 2011 and considerably higher than the low of 67.8 percent in 1976. In the minds of today's college students, *getting a better job continues to be the most prevalent reason to go to college.*







Results

20

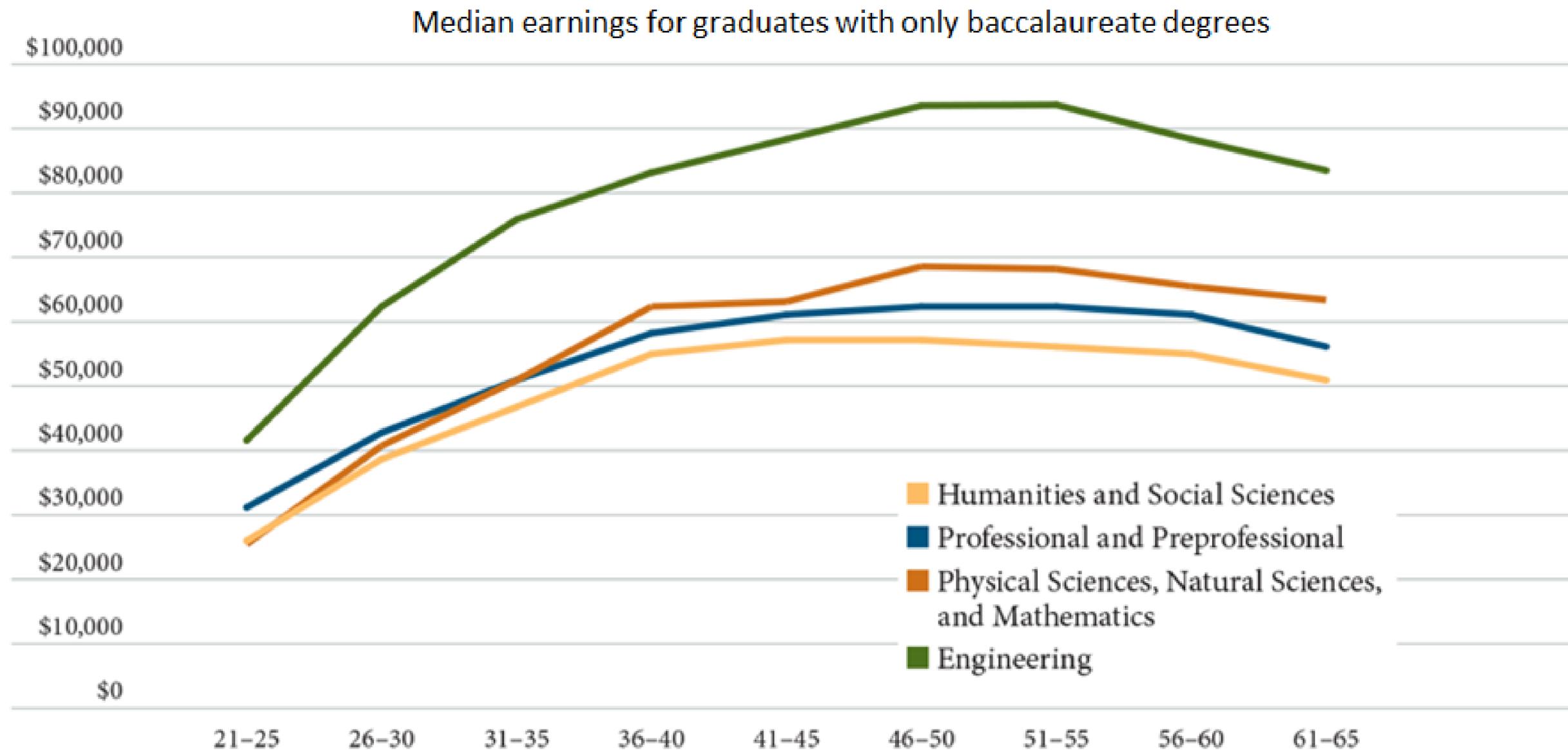
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FIGURE 1 / AVERAGE SALARIES BY DISCIPLINE / BACHELOR'S DEGREES

BROAD CATEGORY	2021 SALARY PROJECTION	2020 SALARY PROJECTION	% CHANGE
Computer Sciences	\$72,173	\$67,411	7.1%
Engineering	\$71,088	\$69,961	1.6%
Math & Sciences	\$63,316	\$62,488	1.3%
Social Sciences	\$59,919	\$57,425	4.3%
Humanities	\$59,500	\$53,617	11.0%
Business	\$58,869	\$57,939	1.6%
Communications	\$58,174	\$56,484	3.0%
Agriculture & Natural Resources	\$54,857	\$53,504	2.5%

Engineers Make More Money



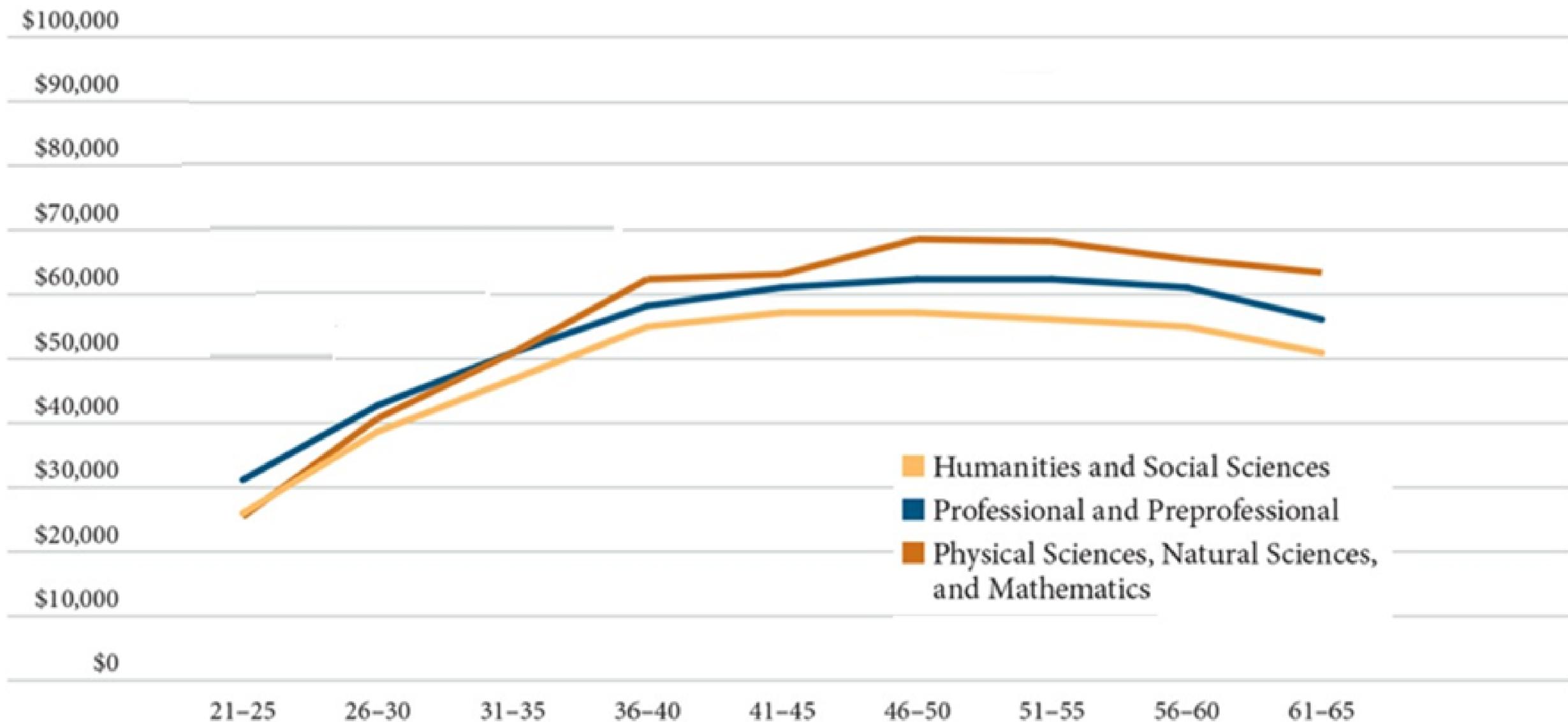
5% Are Engineers

- In 2016, 6.9 million people were employed in the U.S. as scientists and engineers, accounting for 4.9% of total U.S. employment.



Earnings Not All That Different

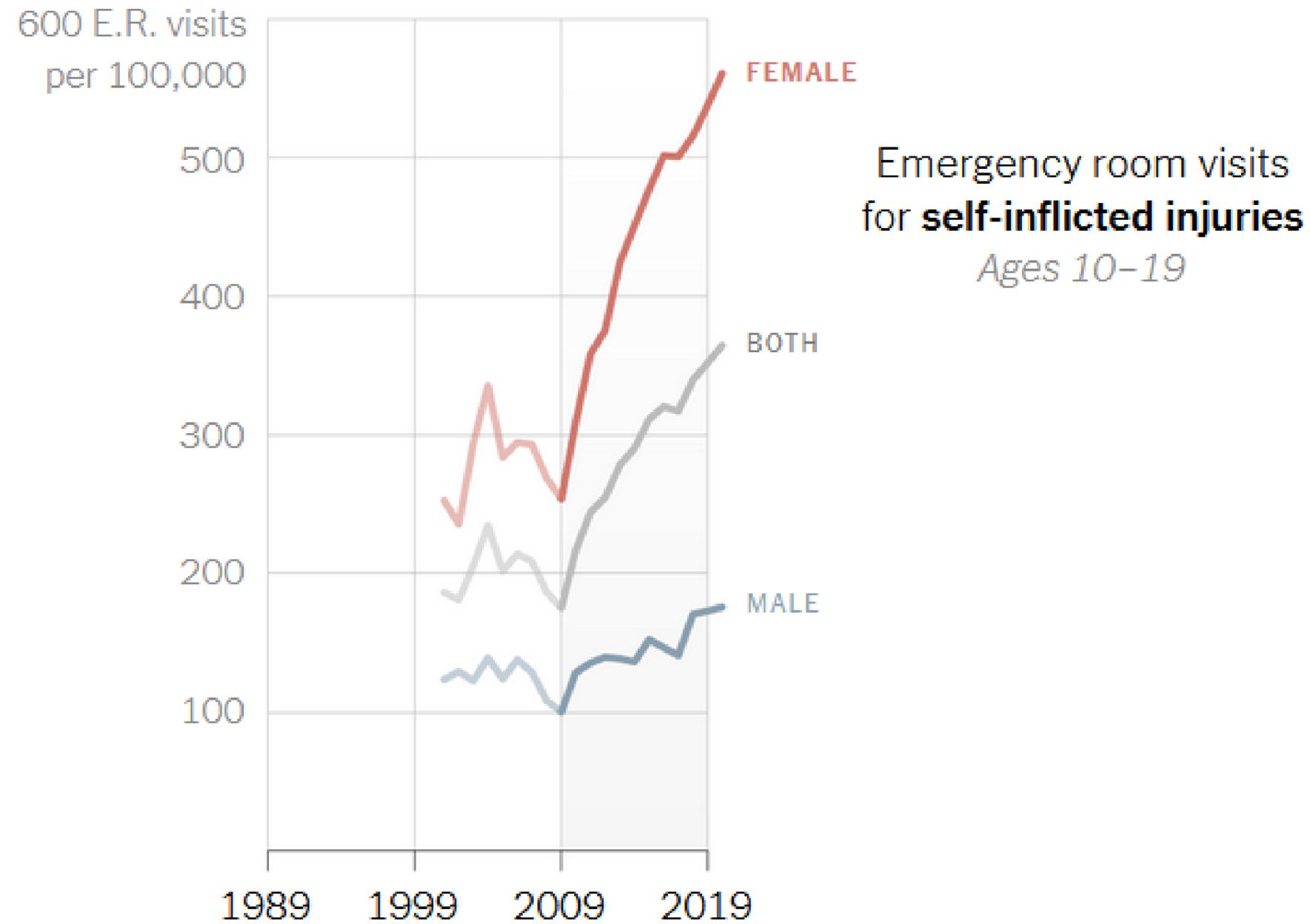
Median earnings for graduates with only baccalaureate degrees



Think Long-Term

Liberal Arts Majors	0-5 years	10-20 years	20+ years
English	\$39,000	\$69,000	\$73,000
History	\$41,000	\$72,000	\$81,000
International Relations	\$44,000	\$74,000	\$119,000
Philosophy	\$42,000	\$82,000	\$97,000
Political Science	\$43,000	\$77,000	\$89,000
Psychology	\$38,000	\$60,000	\$69,000
Other Majors			
Accounting	\$47,000	\$73,000	\$84,000
Business Management	\$45,000	\$69,000	\$81,000
Civil Engineering	\$56,000	\$89,000	\$108,000
Computer Science	\$63,000	\$103,000	\$116,000
Hospitality Management	\$39,000	\$60,000	\$70,000
Nursing	\$57,000	\$73,000	\$75,000

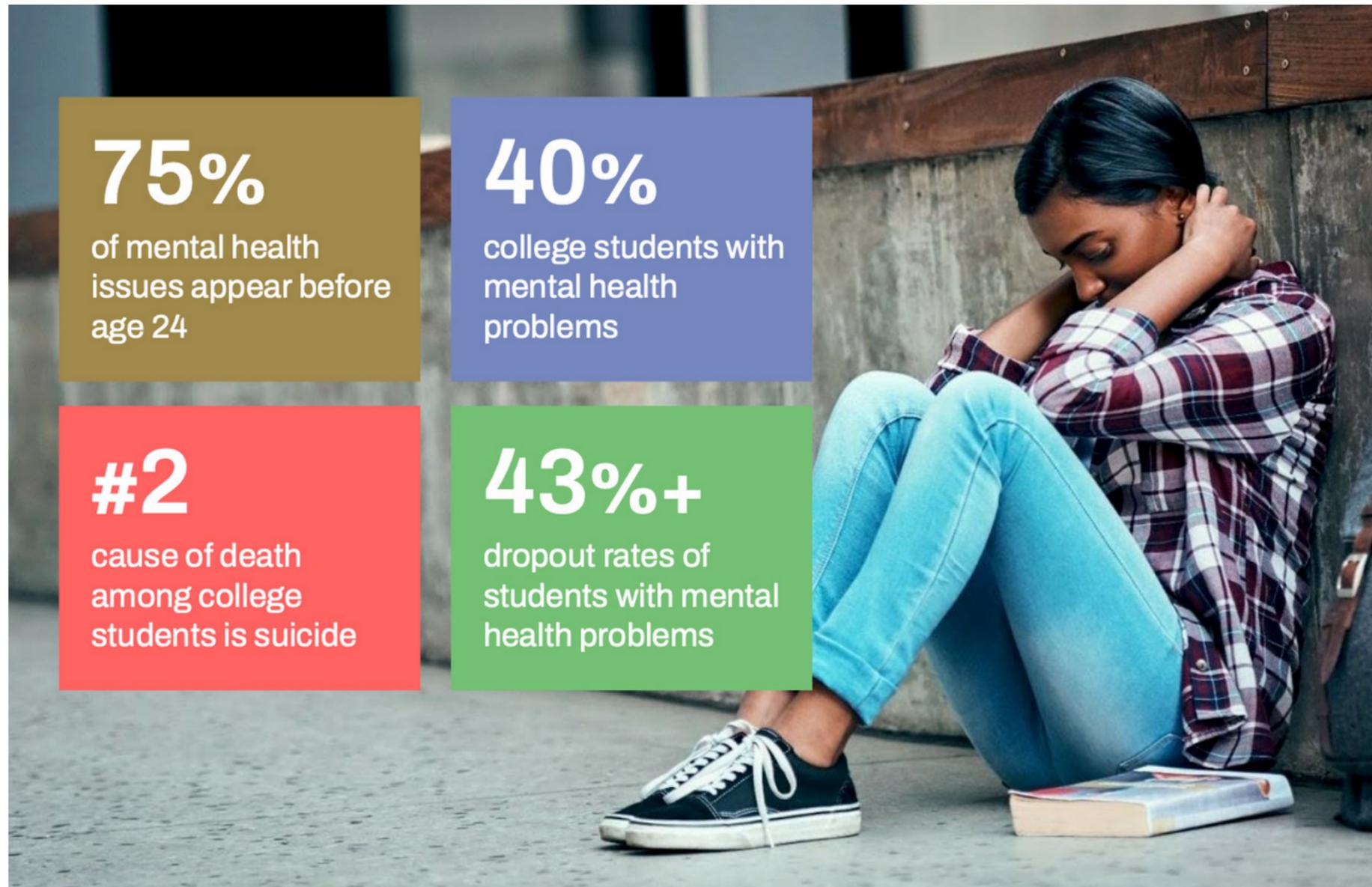
ER visits for self-harm by children and adolescents rose sharply over the last decade, particularly among young women



By The New York Times | Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/23/health/mental-health-crisis-teens.html>

Over 1,100 college students commit suicide each year; a subset of which are women athletes.



75%
of mental health issues appear before age 24

40%
college students with mental health problems

#2
cause of death among college students is suicide

43%+
dropout rates of students with mental health problems

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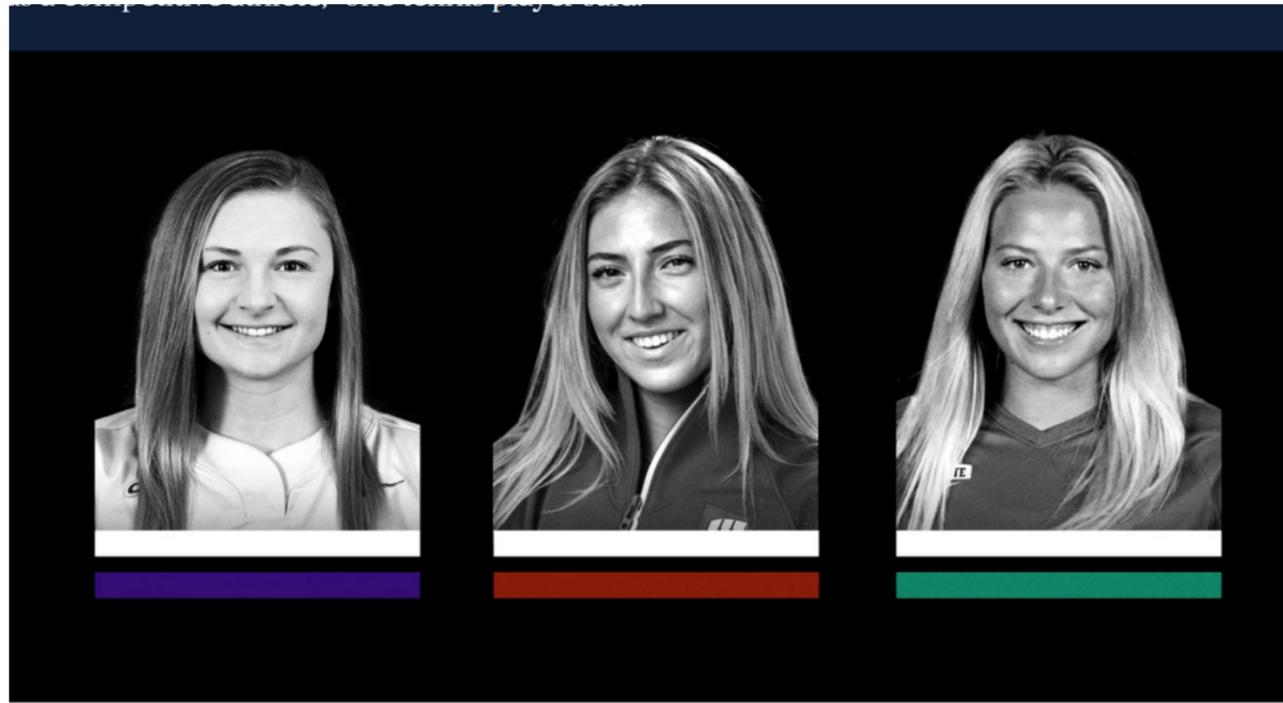
THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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ATHLETICS

'It's Definitely a Crisis': Why Women in College Sports Are Struggling With Mental Health

By Nell Gluckman | MAY 6, 2022



— Lauren Bernett, Sarah Shulze and Katie Meyer were all top-performing student-athletes who died by suicide in the last two months.

FALLAY C

The image features seven light-colored wooden blocks arranged in a row on a grey surface. The first six blocks are upright and contain the letters 'F', 'A', 'L', 'L', 'A', and 'Y' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The seventh block, containing the letter 'C', is tilted at an angle and placed on top of the 'A' block. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey with a warm, golden glow on the left side. A green leaf is partially visible on the right edge.

LOGIC

Fallacy #1

- *Confusing association with causation fallacy:* (“with this, therefore because of this.”) Correlation does not imply causation is a phrase used in science and statistics to emphasize that a correlation between two variables does not necessarily imply that one causes the other.

“Our preconceptions and suspicions about the way things work tempt us to make the leap from correlation to causation without any hard evidence.”

Ex: You need to major in business because employers value students with that major over all other disciplines.

LOGIC

Fallacy #2

- *Post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy*: (“after this, therefore because of this”) “Since event Y followed event X, event Y must have been caused by event X.” The fallacy lies in coming to a conclusion based solely on the order of events, rather than taking into account other factors that might rule out the connection.

Ex: Shelly had an offer of full-time employment prior to graduation and it's because she majored in economics.

LOGIC

Fallacy #3

- *Single-cause fallacy*: It occurs when it is assumed that there is a single, simple cause of an outcome when in reality it may have been caused by a number of only jointly sufficient causes. This fallacy often demonstrates a lack of awareness about the specific topic examined and can disclose one's bias to demonstrate contempt prior to investigation.

Ex: Employers only care about your grade point average; the higher it is, the better your chances of being hired.

LOGIC

Fallacy #4

- *Anecdotal fallacy*: using a personal experience or an isolated example instead of sound reasoning or compelling evidence. This is a common fallacy committed by parents, relatives, or friends of undergraduates. There is a tendency to persuade students into a major based on one's experience with that specific academic program.

Ex: My sorority sisters and I majored in business, economics, or finance and we all have extraordinary careers, so major in one of those subjects and you will be just as successful as we are.

LOGIC

Fallacy #5

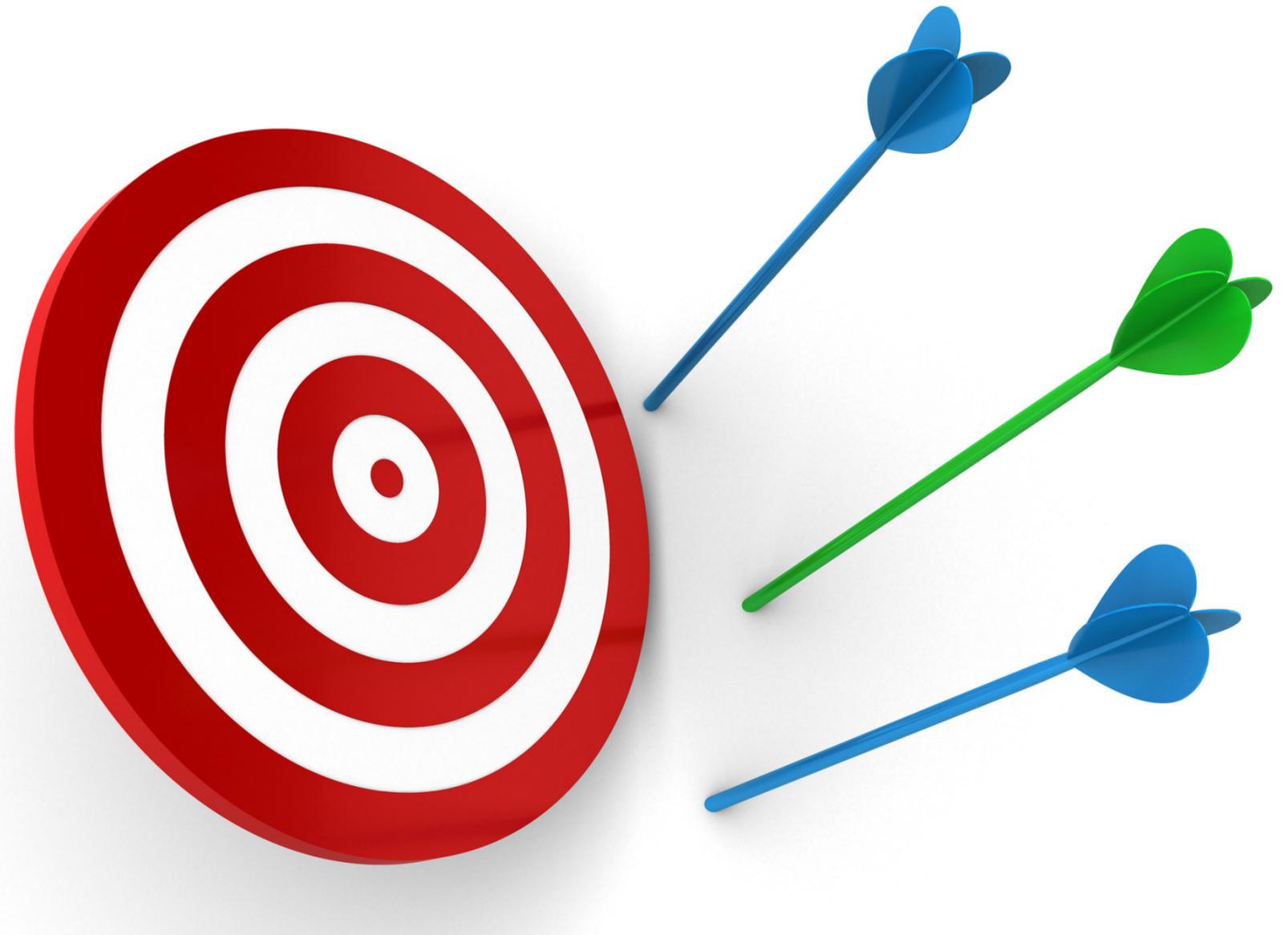
- *Sweeping generalization fallacy:* assumes that what is true of the whole will also be true of the part, or that what is true in most instances will be true in all instances. Sweeping generalizations also tend to correspond with other fallacies such as the single cause or anecdotal.

Ex: Recent college graduates with a history degree are all unemployed.



Your degree is a prerequisite for the competitive workforce; *the topic is irrelevant.*

According to recent research, 62% of recent college graduates are working in jobs that require a degree, yet only 27% of college graduates are working in a job that even relates to their major.



93% of employers believe that critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills are more important than a job candidate's undergraduate field of study. Furthermore, 95% of employers are looking for candidates whose skills translate into out-of-the-box thinking and innovation, as many of the jobs being filled today come with challenges that are more complex than in the past. *Soft skills are the skills of the future.*



Harvard Business Review

Business And Society

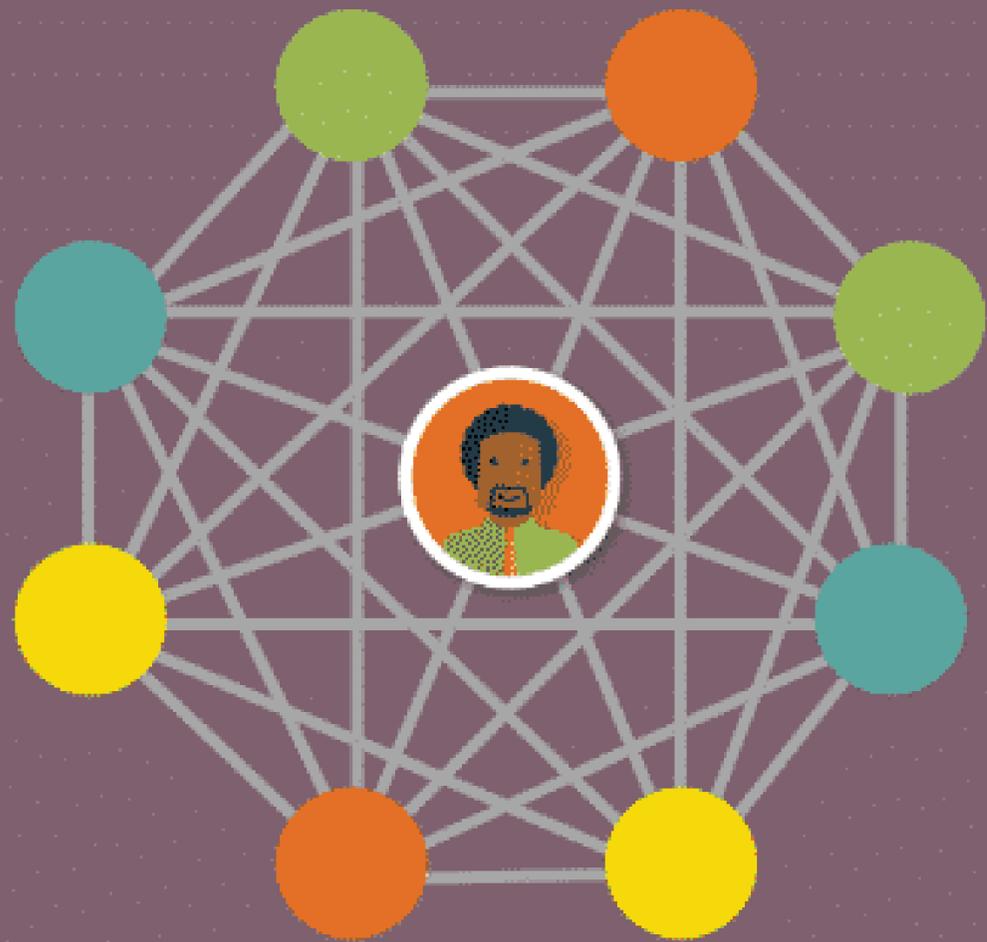
Accenture CEO Julie Sweet on the Most Important Skill Job Seekers Need Today

May 06, 2022

HBR editor in chief Adi Ignatius sat down with Sweet in this episode of our video series [“The New World of Work”](#) to talk about:

- The most important skill Accenture looks for in any employee, regardless of their expertise level: the ability to learn.
- How AI and other technologies can aid in the re-skilling of workforces necessary to keep up with ever-changing demands.
- What the “phygital” (part physical, part digital) future workplace might look and feel like with the aid of “augmented connections” and the metaverse.

Your network matters way more than your college major.



CLOSED NETWORK



OPEN NETWORK

A November 2021 Ernst & Young survey found that 63% of Gen Z employees feel it is “very or extremely important to work for an employer that shares their values.”





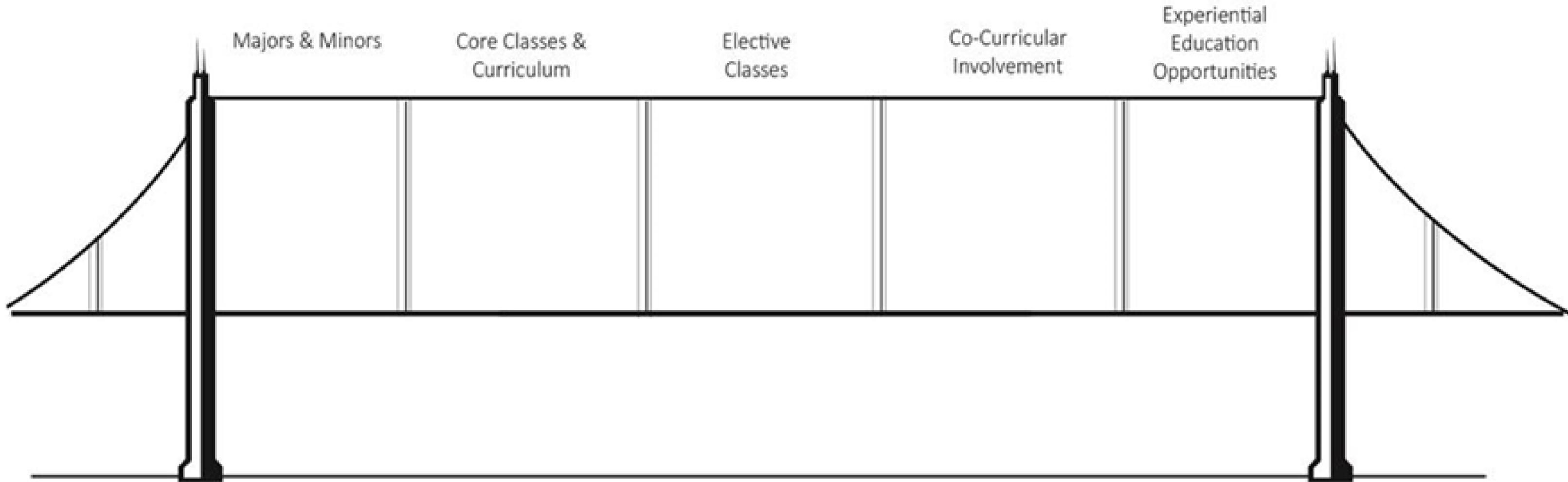
Job instability during the COVID-19 pandemic reshuffled the priorities of millions of workers, who placed greater importance on work passion rather than financial security, according to a newly published University of Michigan study.

Researchers sought to learn more about what happens to the career priorities of college-educated workers who lost their jobs or were furloughed during the pandemic.

Contrary to assumptions that people in economic turmoil will prioritize financial security above all else, research shows that workers who experienced employment instability as a result of the pandemic were more likely to prioritize finding passion in work than people whose jobs were stable over the pandemic.

UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE

Your undergraduate experience consists of five elements:



FOUNDATION

Past Experiences

Family Members

Friends

Personal Traits

Beliefs



Preparing for Law School

Introduction

There is no single path that will prepare you for a legal education. Students who are successful in law school, and who become accomplished professionals, come from many walks of life and educational backgrounds. Some law students enter law school directly from their undergraduate studies without having had any post-baccalaureate work experience. Others begin their legal education significantly later in life, and they bring to their law school education the insights and perspectives gained from those life experiences. Legal education welcomes and values diversity and you will benefit from the exchange of ideas and different points of view that your colleagues will bring to the classroom.

Undergraduate Education

The ABA does not recommend any undergraduate majors or group of courses to prepare for a legal education. Students are admitted to law school from almost every academic discipline. You may choose to major in subjects that are considered to be traditional preparation for law school, such as history, English, philosophy, political science, economics or business, or you may focus your undergraduate studies in areas as diverse as art, music, science and mathematics, computer science, engineering, nursing or education. Whatever major you select, you are encouraged to pursue an area of study that interests and challenges you, while taking advantage of opportunities to develop your research and writing skills. Taking a broad range of difficult courses from demanding instructors is excellent preparation for legal education. A sound legal education will build upon and further refine the skills, values, and knowledge that you already possess.



According to the most recent data released by the Association of American of Medical Colleges (AAMC), among the more than 53,000 candidates who submitted scores on the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) as part of their medical school application, roughly 60% had an undergraduate major that could be classified as focusing on biological sciences.

In total, the AAMC has data tracking 22,239 students who matriculated to medical school in 2020. The breakdown of primary undergraduate majors in that group generally had a heavy emphasis on science and math, which tend to align with medical school prerequisite requirements.

The most common majors were:

- Biological sciences—12,845 total matriculants.
- Physical sciences—2,240.
- Social sciences—1,991.
- Humanities—832.
- Specialized health sciences—784.
- Math and statistics—156.

It is worth noting that the second largest group of matriculants (3,391) tracked by the AAMC fell into the “other” category.

The Focusing Illusion

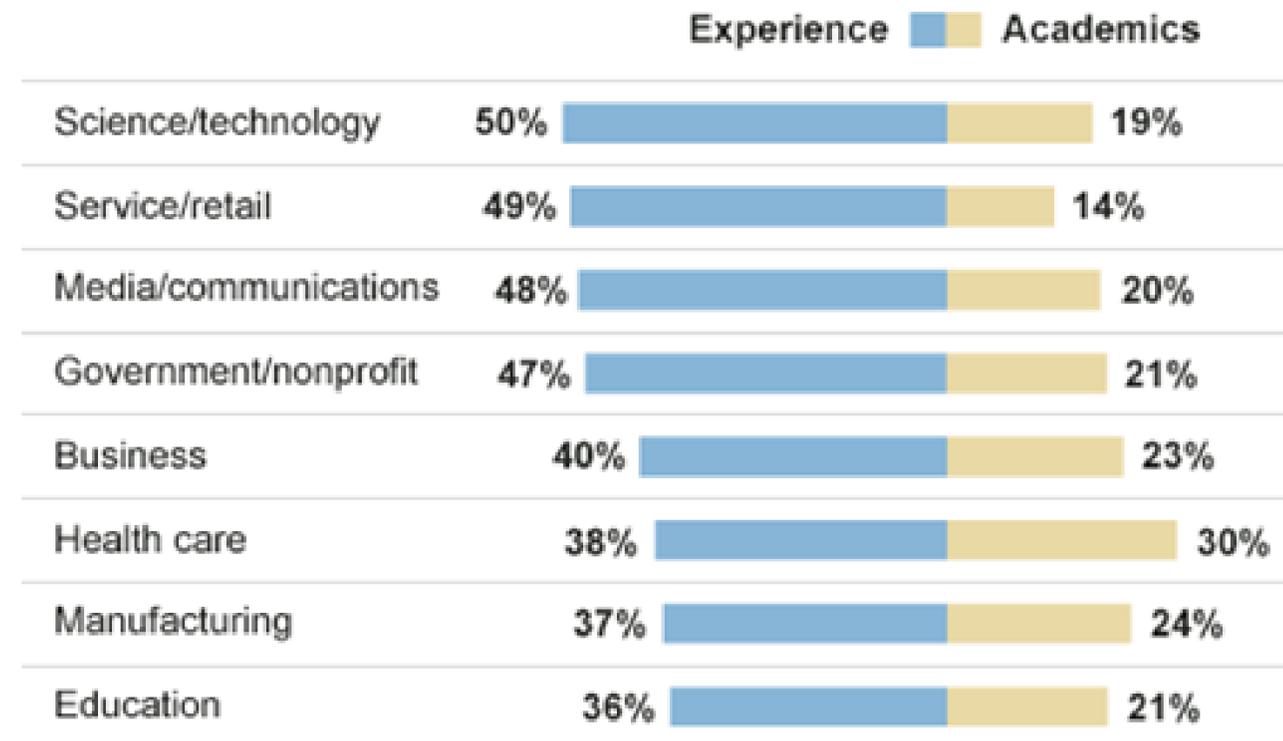
“Education is an important determinant of income — one of the most important — but it is less important than most people think. When you focus on education you neglect the myriad of other factors that determine income.”

2.9

Avg GPA of American Millionaires

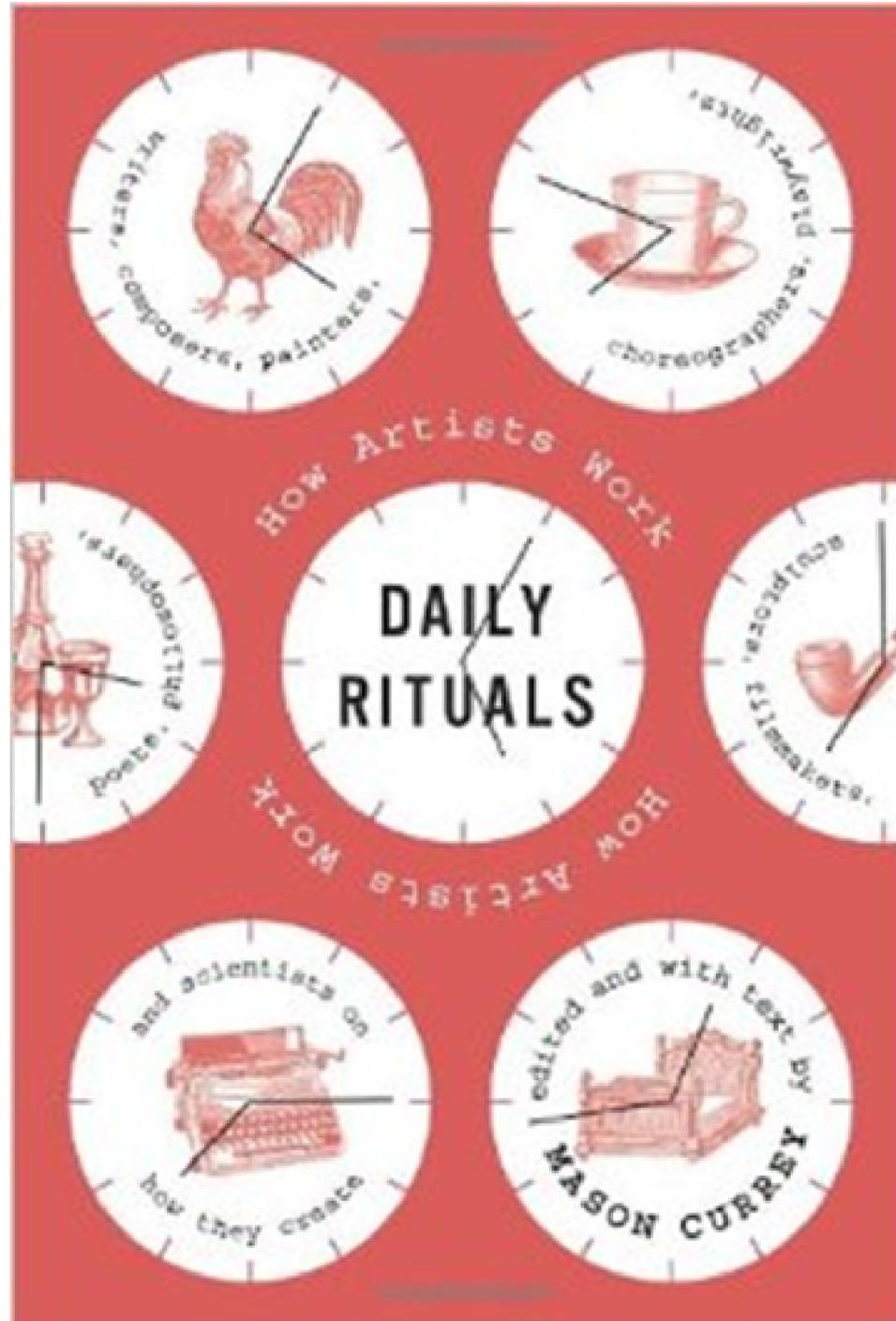
Internships and Experience

- 78% of seniors had an internship or apprenticeship prior to graduation.
- 65% said it helped land a job.



Note: The original data included a category labeled "neutral." It has been eliminated to focus on experience and academic considerations. As a result, the numbers do not add up to 100%.

Subtle Maneuvers



"Time is short, my strength is limited, the office is a horror, the apartment is noisy, and if a pleasant, straightforward life is not possible, then one must try to wriggle through by subtle maneuvers."
Franz Kafka

Geography Matters

Financial managers

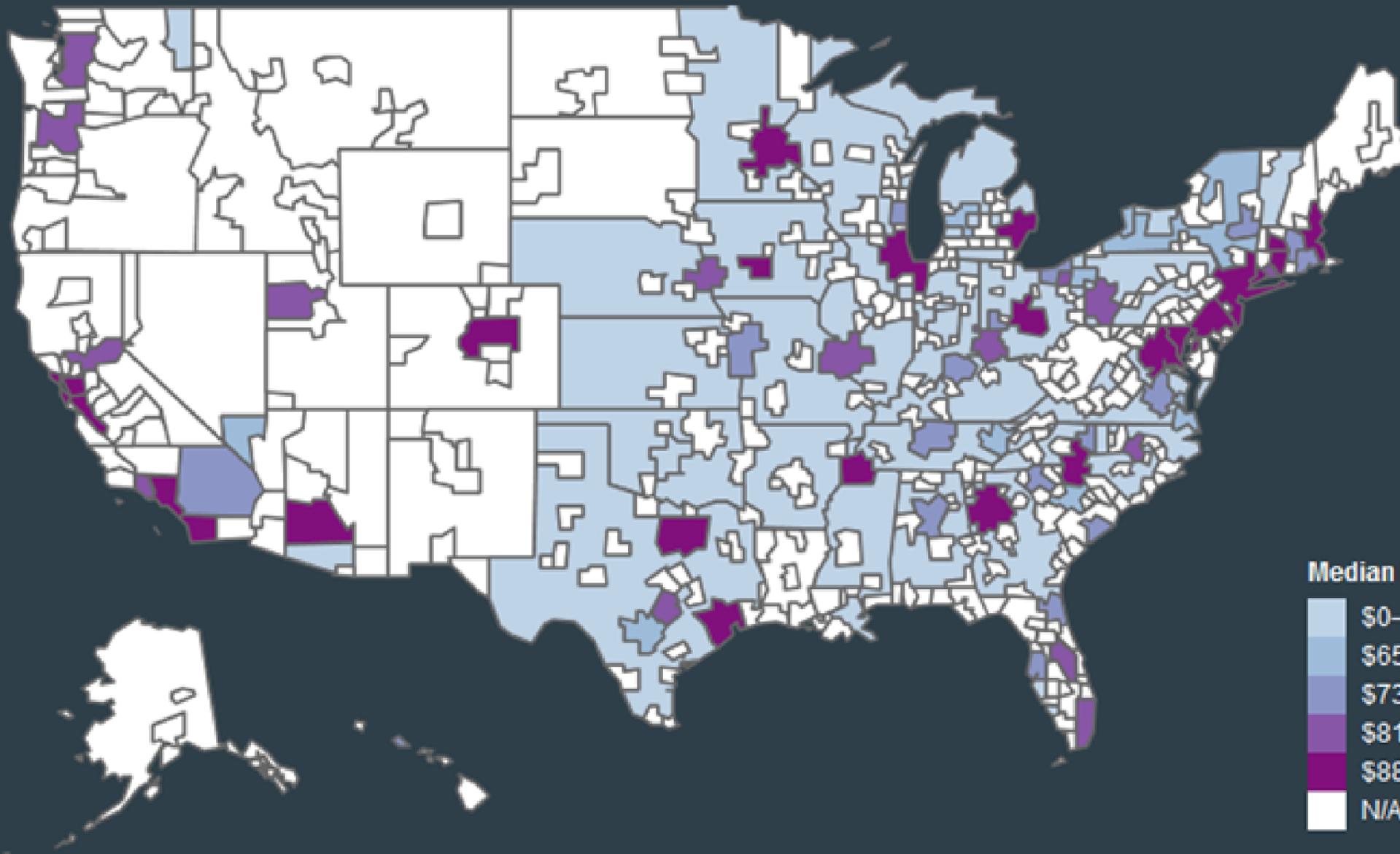
45-54

- Cost of living
- Income taxes

+

-

↺



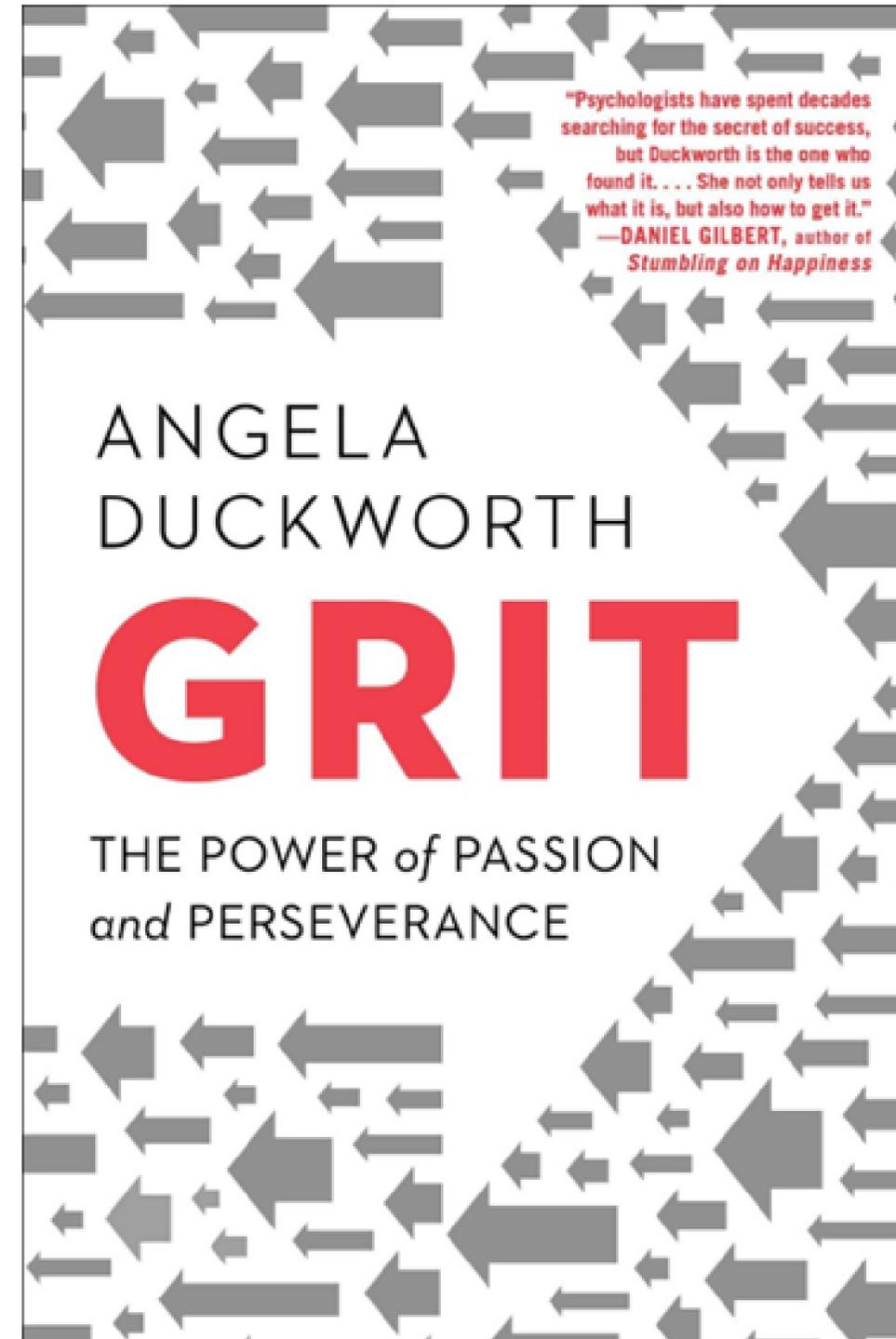
Median Earnings

- \$0-\$65,687
- \$65,688-\$73,415
- \$73,416-\$81,143
- \$81,144-\$88,871
- \$88,872 and above
- N/A

Develop Your Grit

Grit related to four key behaviors of those sitting in the corner office:

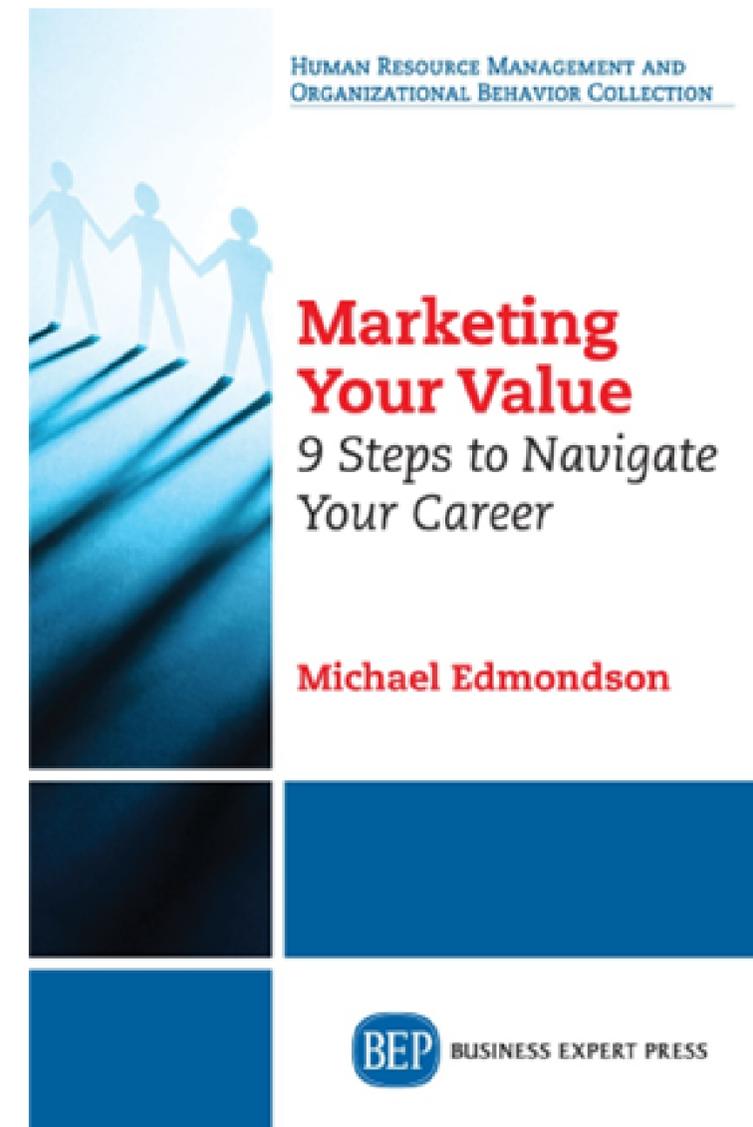
- They are decisive
- They are relentlessly reliable
- They adapt boldly
- They engage with stakeholders without shying away from conflict



Market Your Value

- "Most workers have some sort of online presence today– and more than half of employers won't hire those without one. This shows the importance of cultivating a positive online persona. Job seekers should make their professional profiles visible online and ensure any information that could negatively impact their job search is made private or removed."

- [Rosemary Haefner](#), chief human resources officer at CareerBuilder.



Clean Up Your Social Media

- 70% of employers use it to screen candidates
- 40% use it to check on current employees.



Justine Sacco @JustineSacco

5h

Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white!

📍 from Hillingdon, London

← Reply

↻ Retweet

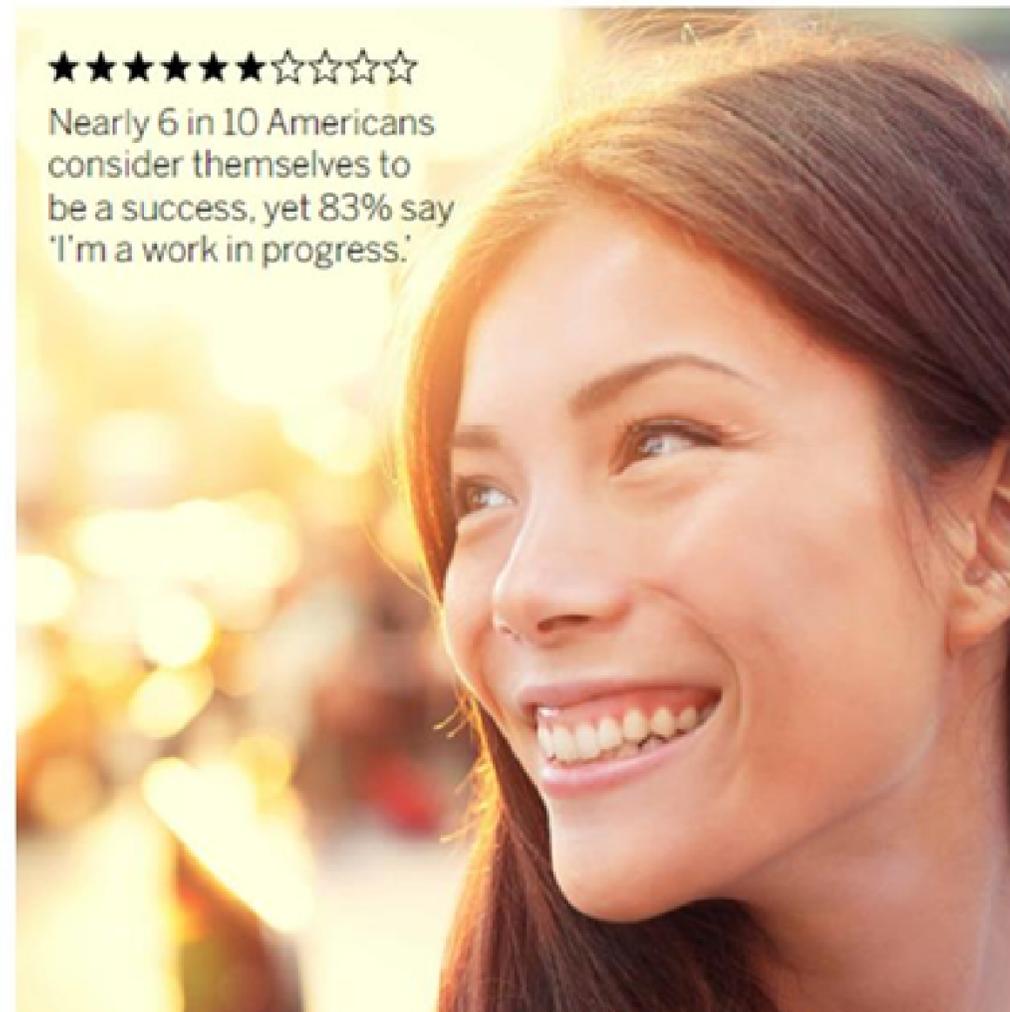
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Be A Work in Progress

I have to figure out what to do with the rest of my life.

“A majority of Americans consider themselves to be ‘a work in progress’ and are willing to take any number of roads less traveled to achieve their goals.”
American Express 2013 Life Twist Study



Three Different Career Paths



Knowledge Career Path

Historians as Educators

Elementary Schools
Secondary Schools
Postsecondary Education
Historic Sites and Museums

Historians as Researchers

Museums and Historical
Organizations
Cultural Resources
Management and Historic
Preservation
Think Tanks

Historians as Communicators

Writers and Editors
Journalists
Documentary Editors
Producers of Multimedia
Material

Historians as Information Managers

Archivists
Records Managers
Librarians
Information Managers

Historians as Advocates

Lawyers and Paralegals
Litigation Support
Legislative Staff Work
Foundations

Historians in Businesses and Associations

Historians in Corporations
Historians and Nonprofit
Associations



Issue Based Career





52%

LifeTwisters

Have a path mapped out, but are open to veering off that path



25%

Passivists

Do not have a specific path in life, they go wherever life takes them



13%

Traditionalists

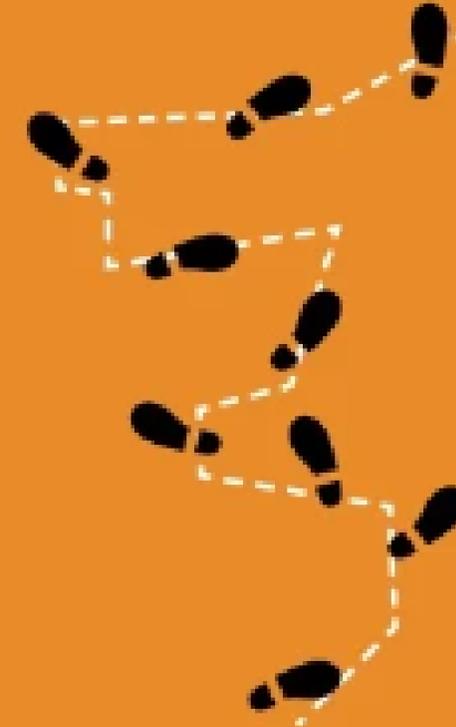
Have a path mapped out and they're determined to "stick to it"

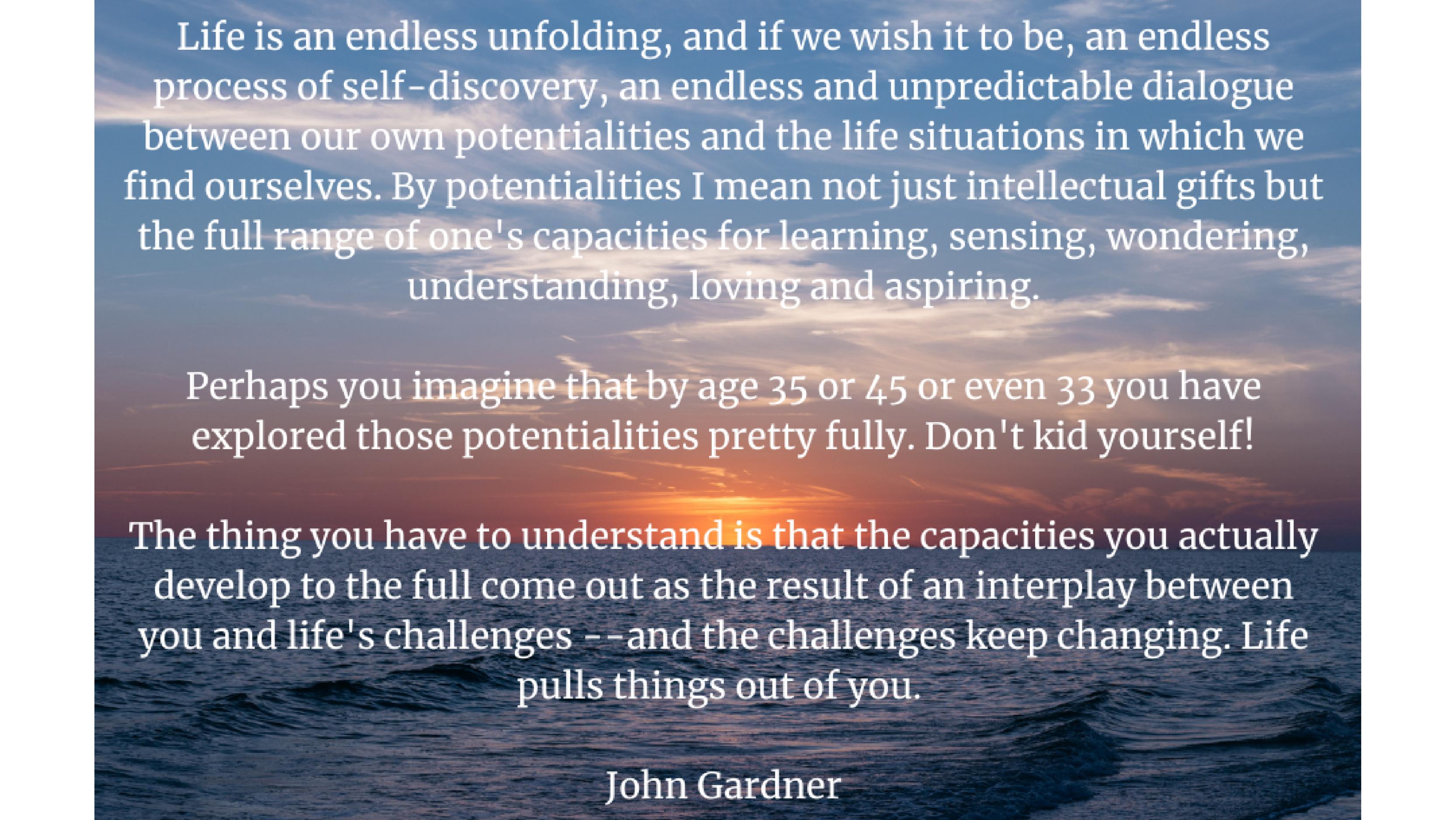


11%

Reinventionists

Actively seek out change in their life to reinvent themselves



A sunset over the ocean with a blue sky and dark water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm orange glow. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds. The water in the foreground is dark blue with gentle waves.

Life is an endless unfolding, and if we wish it to be, an endless process of self-discovery, an endless and unpredictable dialogue between our own potentialities and the life situations in which we find ourselves. By potentialities I mean not just intellectual gifts but the full range of one's capacities for learning, sensing, wondering, understanding, loving and aspiring.

Perhaps you imagine that by age 35 or 45 or even 33 you have explored those potentialities pretty fully. Don't kid yourself!

The thing you have to understand is that the capacities you actually develop to the full come out as the result of an interplay between you and life's challenges --and the challenges keep changing. Life pulls things out of you.

John Gardner



best

right

Questions?

thank
you



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