

I'm the child of scientists. I find the global disenchantment with the humanities worrying.



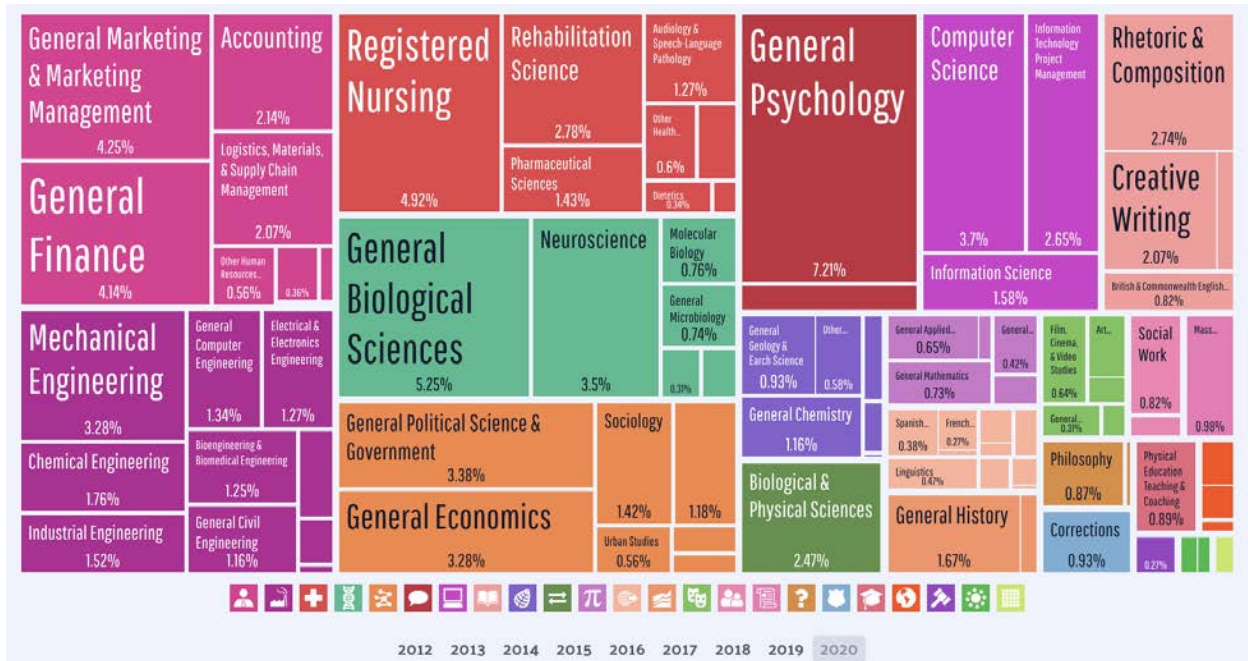
The author at ten in a lab, extracting DNA.

Somewhere in the early 2000s, the world shifted toward STEM. Science magnet schools sprouted around my hometown; enrollment in STEM degrees at universities around the country increased, [particularly among women](#), while [humanities enrollment plummeted](#); and the liberal arts major became the subject of endless standup witticisms. Harvard student Spencer Glassman told Nathan Heller for the New Yorker that for humanities courses, “One could easily walk away with an A or A-minus and not have learned anything. All the stem concentrators have this attitude that humanities are a joke.”

Born in 2003, the new emphasis on STEM has always been my reality. My parents are both professors of biology, my mom with her own genetics lab. For my dad, meanwhile, the philosophy of science was tantamount to a religion. The scientific method was God, peer-reviewed journals the scriptures, and A's in my science classes the straight and narrow way. Though I was never quite pressured to go into STEM, science as a way of thinking about the world was held in such high esteem in my house that I couldn't quite imagine a future outside of it.

For a long time, I saw no issue. I viewed scientific and technological innovation as the most worthy fields and the obvious direction for driven students. College brought me out of my bubble. I spent more time consuming art, learned more about the story and struggles of my new city, and met countless people with fulfilling careers that were neither in academia nor STEM—from food justice community organizers to _____. Seeing how much these fields contribute to the fabric of our society and to our quality of life, I had to square the necessity—and beauty—of this reality with my childhood conviction that STEM was the only real future.

I was good at biology; I kept a 4.0 in my major even as I began my upper-level requirements—but my heart wasn't in it, and I could no longer convince myself that this was the path for me, much less for everyone. I ended up changing my major, much to my relief—but not without great anxiety that it indicated a failure on my part, and deep insecurity that it meant I wasn't as smart—at least not in a way that mattered to the world—as the [roughly >60% of Pitt students graduating with a STEM degree.](#)



<https://datausa.io/profile/university/university-of-pittsburgh-pittsburgh-campus>

Even among peers raised by parents working in different fields, the pressure seemed universal, a sort of new cultural value for our generation. Of the eight people I knew best in high school, most of whose parents did not have STEM-related jobs, seven are now in science- or medicine-related majors—even though many of them loved our history and literature classes the most.

Now, in college, I'm surrounded by an endless sea of pre-meds—many with only a fleeting interest in science and service, and instead seek prestige, stability, and approval from their parents' generation. I've also spoken to plenty of computer science majors who hate what they study, but know they're guaranteed well-paid work in the future.

Our current moment's preoccupation with the pursuit of the specialty over the liberal arts education is understandable in an incessantly constricting economy where essential but underpaid service jobs are no longer viable ways to support a household and steady, lifelong jobs have become the exception, not the rule. But the pressure to get really good at just one thing at the expense of all other ways of thinking is undesirable for our society, both economically and socially. And having that thing be in STEM simply isn't right for everyone.

Innovation is unquestionably how we can improve our material conditions. If we can make [farming more efficient](#), [transportation cheaper](#), AI smarter (I say cautiously), we can reach a point where the basic standards of human rights are satisfied—and this can't happen without research and work to get there.

In the face of the climate crisis, it's especially true that we need STEM innovation. We quite literally cannot carry on without new means of extracting energy and fuel, and it's scientists and engineers whose research will make this possible. But it's equally true that someone has to coordinate manufacturing and distribution of these new technologies. Someone has to write the laws regulating them. Someone has to ensure that they're shared equitably. And someone definitely needs to jog the public conscience when things get opaque or stagnant in opinion pieces, to put to words the existential anxieties that keep us up at night, to beautify our public spaces with art.

This isn't to suggest that we shouldn't encourage young people to go into STEM, nor that college humanities majors are some sort of oppressed, endangered species. Rather, I mean to salve the worries of young people like myself who struggle to see how their interests fit into a world that emphasizes technological innovation as the only future. One small point of satisfaction in the wake of ChatGPT's splashy release is that the only AP exams it did not pass were AP English and Literature, on which it [scored woeful 2s](#). Though AI will doubtless become more sophisticated, [the human touch will always have a place](#), and we'll continue to need people who approach language with sensitivity and thought.

One of the main lines of thinking expressed by people who chose STEM degrees despite being more passionate about the humanities is that if they're going to spend thousands of dollars on a

degree, they have to make it “worth it” by studying something highly valued today. I’d contend that any study that develops critical thinking is “worth it”—and, more importantly, that we should question what we attribute value to at all.

I study one of the [most quintessentially “useless” majors](#), according to the alpha male podcasters and student loan forgiveness-adverse Baby Boomers of the internet—philosophy. I’m very aware it’s a conversation killer at the Thanksgiving table. But my philosophy classes have opened my mind to more creative, critical, agile, and skeptical ways of thinking than my biology research experience ever did. Now, I’m more thoughtful about my use of language and its public consequences. I’m also more in touch with my place in the world as a person, understanding that I’m one in a millennia-old tradition of inquiry, questioning, and the pursuit of self-knowledge.



Kang Of The South 
@issaghetto



Because why tf you a philosophy major

 **Big Pat** @_kleapatra · Apr 13

College isn't a scam ... y'all choose majors that

- A. Make you no money
- B. passion based
- C. Require more education or the degree is useless

Y'all don't wanna admit YALL went into debt for stupid ass choices . Y'all pick y'all majors twitter.com/CoconutShawarm...

<https://twitter.com/issaghetto/status/1646519846010773505?s=46&t=69uADp67EUMpR09OCYwLww>

For instance, in a recent semantic theory class, we spent nearly forty minutes dissecting what was contained in the meaning of the word “promise.” Can you promise to enact something that the other party would actively prefer not happen? Is affirmative agreement—“Yeah, I’ll do the dishes”—the same level of commitment as a promise? Are one theory’s requirements to consider something a promise overly restrictive if they only apply to future events—what happens to real-time cases like “I promise I’m not mad,” for instance? This type of nitpicky, logical thinking is specific and highly academic in nature, but its lessons about the nature of interpersonal communication are not. Semantic theory’s inquiry into the relationship between

what we say and what we mean is a prime example of philosophy's gift of allowing us to be more in touch with our expression and cognitive abilities as humans.

Does a person need to major in the humanities to exercise these muscles? I don't think so; I don't believe a person needs to get a degree at all to strengthen them. But I do think the emphasis on STEM above humanities at all costs is symptomatic of a disinterest in these historically valued skills. Deborah Fitzgerald, professor of the history of technology at MIT, says she sees this in the thinking of college students' parents. [She says](#), "Knowing science kind of stands in for smartness in a way that knowing Shakespeare used to stand in for that...It's a placeholder for 'my kid is a smart kid.'" The attitudes of parents, often the ones with the most influence on their childrens' mindsets about life and careers, are telling of the generational shift in priorities. Though I don't think there's necessarily something wrong with the paradigm of "smartness" shifting, I don't buy that relocating it to STEM is a fair measure of intelligence or personal and social value.

It's tempting to worship STEM. In high schools around the country, bright students are encouraged—often by very well-meaning teachers and mentors—to pursue careers in tech and medicine, to put their smarts to "good use." Most of these students could indeed excel in STEM education and thrive in these fields as adults. But just because they can doesn't mean they should, and just because they're inundated with praise for excelling in these subjects doesn't mean they should default to them even in the absence of passion.

I could have continued in biology and enjoyed it; likely found a rewarding career. But I'm glad I followed my instinct to the humanities—glad I deconstructed my relationship with the all-powerful Science that ruled my childhood. My studies allow me to explore the questions most pressing in my mind—what are the most pressing human issues? What is the nature of humans, and what's really politicized propaganda? How can I work with language in ways that feel genuine to me to express the thoughts that tighten in my chest, the anger incited by our current realities, the waves of love for others and for beauty?

The world would be a worse place without artists, without authors letting us think outside our realities, without translators, without sociologists tracking life expectancy by demographic, without copy editors and philosophers and even mediocre Internet poets. I love science, and I still believe the scientific method is one of humanity's greatest innovations. I'm also a part of Gen Z, deeply anxious about climate change and fully aware that we can't support our lifestyles without new technology. But we can't all be ice cap researchers or computer scientists, and we shouldn't all be. STEM is not God, and our world will be in a much worse place if we continue to

discourage young people from pursuing what's right for them—what they'll ultimately be able to best serve the world doing.