UC SANTA BARBARA

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A Liberal Arts Advantage

For many liberal arts students, a career path isn't always clear cut or obvious. The skills they acquire as they work toward their university degrees are varied and often don't point them in a particular direction.

But job opportunities and career options do exist on the other side of a degree in the humanities, and highlighting that fact was the goal of the inaugural Liberal Arts Advantage Career Conference at UC Santa Barbara.

Sponsored by the Division of Humanities and Fine Arts in UC Santa Barbara's College of Letters and Science, UCSB Career Services and the UCSB Alumni Association, the conference featured representatives from a variety of fields, including history, English, and political science.

John Majewski, acting dean of humanities in the College of Letters and Science, professor of history and a conference speaker, emphasized that while liberal arts students don't have the tailored skill set of an engineer, mathematician or computer scientist, they do have a range of abilities applicable to many career fields. "The liberal arts teach students vitally important skills such as research, writing and critical thinking," he said. "In essence, you learn how to learn." The conference, he added, was designed to help students translate those invaluable skills in the practical realities of the job market.

For English major Naomi Zaldate, who developed a passion for literature as a child reading Shel Silverstein's "The Giving Tree," the conference offered an opportunity

for her to learn more about becoming an author herself. “I am looking for a future in writing, and through this conference I want to become more aware of the career options available to me,” she said.

Senior Alec Killoran said he attended the conference in search of guidance. “I’m hoping to be enlightened by a career option that utilizes my writing and communication skills,” he said. “I felt a sense of urgency to find direction as I am nearing graduation.”

Noted Ignacio Gallardo, director of UCSB Career Services, “The conference aims to help our students recognize that through their education they are gaining skills that are highly desired by employers. Any list of strengths desired by modern employers is nearly 100 percent from our arts and humanities curriculum.”

Among those offering words of wisdom and encouragement to conference participants were keynote speaker Susan de la Vergne of Alder Business Services Inc. She discussed the importance of an employer’s needs in order to effectively communicate skill sets. Other speakers included Rose Hayden-Smith, from the University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources, who urged students to use a liberal arts education creatively when deciding on a career field. She reminded them that “career missteps will happen, but life is all about rewriting and editing, and you will stumble into great things.”

Kenneth S. Kosik, Harriman Professor of Neuroscience at UCSB and director of the campus’s Neuroscience Research Institute, presented a unique perspective by connecting literature to science. “It is important to build basic fundamentals, which in essence is the humanities. You must learn how to tell a story because no one sees the experiment. Literature acts as the scaffold to many career experiences, especially for research,” he said.

According to Majewski, “Salary and survey data shows that arts and humanities majors enjoy stimulating and rewarding careers. This conference shows students how that discovery process works so they can be confident and proactive in finding a career that best fit their interests and talents,” he said.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.