

To be, or not to be: more STEM education funding

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ABSTRACT

While I'm still not sure why my brother chose to study the classical languages (Latin and Greek) or what he'd ever do with them (he's a paralegal today), I never would have discouraged him from trying to obtain a college degree just because it wasn't useful to America's economic growth. Some are just interesting, and make us more well-rounded (I'm looking at you, game designers, morticians, and other unusual high-paying jobs [<http://www.bankrate.com/finance/college-finance/high-paying-nontraditional-degrees-1.aspx>] that include puppetry and racetrack management [<http://www.cheatsheet.com/personal-finance/how-much-can-you-earn-with-these-5-weird-college-majors.html/?a=viewall>]).

FULL TEXT

While more funding for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) is certainly needed, we shouldn't ignore other educational pursuits.

When I started my college career, I knew immediately that I wanted to study something in the biological sciences. I had selected several extra science courses in high school, and I was well-prepared to launch my college career as a science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) student.

After a year of college coursework, I worked summers, holidays, and any other time I could at a local veterinary clinic. My goal, after all, was to be a veterinarian, so I wanted to see what it was all about. After more than 2 years of work at this clinic—where the owner and veterinarian gave me responsibilities beyond my wildest dreams—I realized that I didn't really want to become a vet. I was still interested in science, and at the same time interested in communications, so what could I do?

My counselor wasn't much help—what else could a 20-year veteran of reproductive physiology tell me? He had no idea how I could marry my love of science with an interest in communications, so he wasn't able to provide any guidance. The dean's assistant was my saving grace—she suggested I also apply to the College of Communications (I was at a huge land grant university, so everything was split up by core areas). Her help in navigating the challenges of straddling two colleges and two degrees allowed me to obtain exactly what I wanted and needed: a degree in animal sciences and a degree in journalism.

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Fast-forward to today. I just read an article in the New York Times

[<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/22/business/a-rising-call-to-promote-stem-education-and-cut-liberal-arts-funding.html>] that highlights an idea being floated about students not receiving state funding unless they're obtaining a STEM degree or something deemed "useful" to today's economy. While I'm still not sure why my brother chose to study the classical languages (Latin and Greek) or what he'd ever do with them (he's a paralegal today), I never would have discouraged him from trying to obtain a college degree just because it wasn't useful to America's economic growth. Not all degrees in college are vocational in nature. Some are just interesting, and make us more well-rounded (I'm looking at you, game designers, morticians, and other unusual high-paying jobs [<http://www.bankrate.com/finance/college-finance/high-paying-nontraditional-degrees-1.aspx>] that include puppetry and racetrack management [<http://www.cheatsheet.com/personal-finance/how-much-can-you-earn-with-these-5-weird-college-majors.html/?a=viewall>]).

Job training should definitely be aligned with the job market, no question. Statistics abound about which job markets are growing and where we'll need more workers in the future (health care, anyone?). But even with all of these data points, how do we know that natural resources experts won't be a necessity in 20 years? Or that people with communications degrees won't be in high demand at high-tech firms?

Funding will follow the job market; there isn't a doubt about that. However, I recommend that state educators not stray so far away from the basics (reading, writing, and arithmetic) that we wind up with a horribly lopsided workforce. We need more doctors, electrical engineers, and genetic researchers. But at what cost?

Credit: Amara Rozgus

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DETAILS

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