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Whittier Means Business...Administration

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Whittier Means Business . . . Administration

And a lot of other things, too



Nathan Acuña

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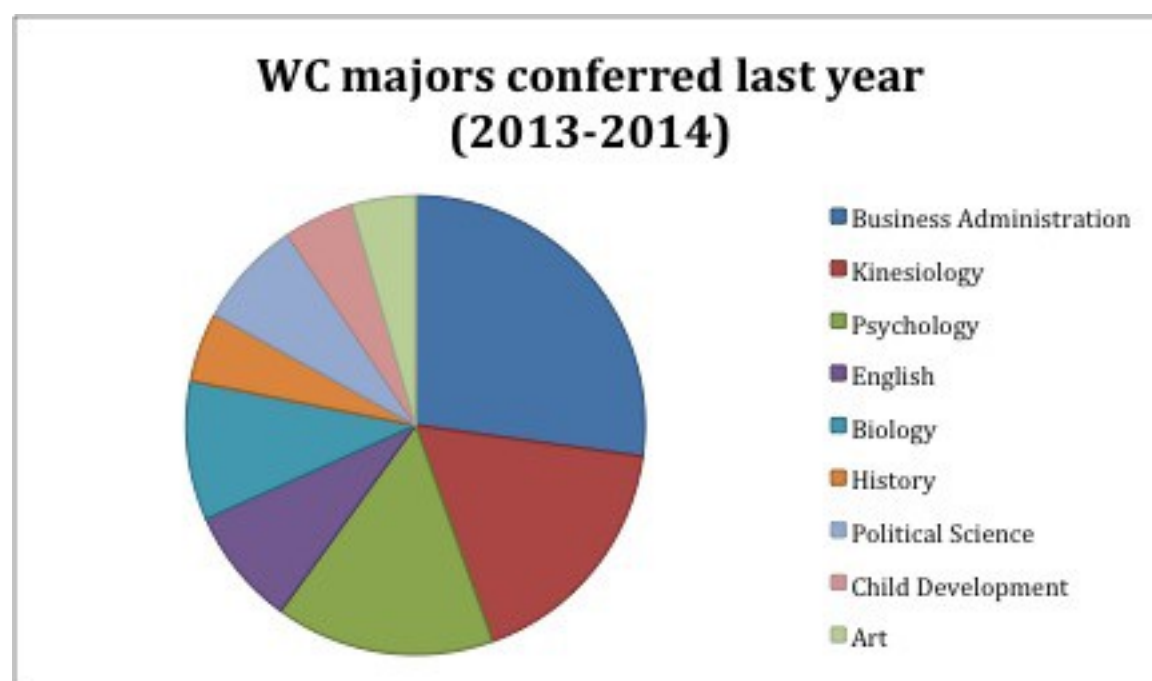
Sign of the times?

Whittier College has been deeply rooted in a liberal-arts tradition since it was founded in 1887, teaching students the importance of community, multicultural perspectives and

academic interconnection. Our school's costumed mascot, a purple-and-gold-clad Poet named Johnny, honors this the town of Whittier's namesake figure, Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier. The Poet is synonymous with the Writer and the Artist, and some would say it is the opposite of the Accountant. However, a look at the majors of last year's graduates might lead one to believe Whittier College students are more interested in spread sheets and management strategies than meter and verse. Perhaps the school's future mascot will be something like Warren, The Multi-billionaire CEO.

Among Whittier College's 31 majors, Business takes the biggest piece of the pie (chart) while humanities staples English and History account for smaller, though still significant slices. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reports that, of the 367 degrees given to Whittier College graduates in the 2013–2014 academic year, the top majors were:

- Business Administration (72 degrees or 19.6 percent)
- Kinesiology (46 degrees or 12.5 percent)
- Psychology (41 degrees or 11.2 percent)

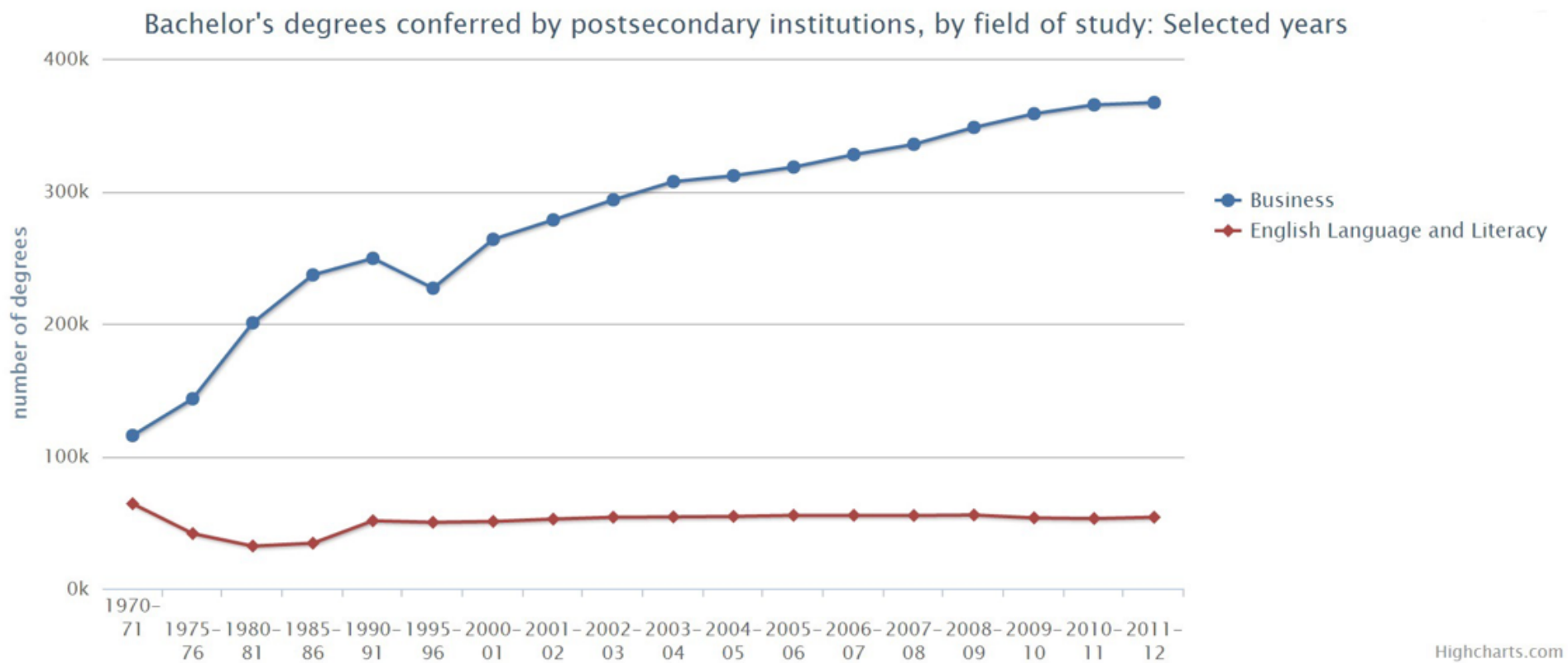


When we slice up the majors pie, business admin takes the cake.

Business Administration Department Co-Chair and Associate Professor of Business Administration, Jeffrey Decker, says this is nothing new and what his department has

come to expect during his 25 years here. This trend is also not unique to Whittier — colleges across America are seeing a fall in humanities majors. The new “it” major, the one that will make you a successful in your future career, is all about Business.

In a separate study of the most recent Digest of Education Statistics, NCES reported that 1,791,046 bachelor’s degrees were conferred by postsecondary institutions between 2011–12. Of these, 20.5 percent, or 366,815, were given for “Business.” This 20.5 percent is seconded by “History and social sciences” at 178,543, or 9.97 percent.



English degrees have remained stagnant over the past 20 years, while Business degrees have risen from just about 200k to between 300k and 400k..

Andres Magana, a junior Business Administration major with a concentration in Marketing, said that he came into Whittier with a desire to do cinematography, but was pulled into Business Administration when he took the survey course. “I originally wanted to be a film major, but when I realized Whittier doesn’t offer that, I was undecided,” Magana said.

“It was only until I took Business and Society with Decker in the fall of my freshman year that I decided to major in it. His passion inspired me.”

Long before he took a class with Decker, Magana said he was introduced to business through popular television shows such as *Shark Tank* and *Bar Rescue*. “These shows demonstrated to me how important the people who run businesses are and how necessary they are to running a successful [business] venture, regardless of how great an item or business may seem on its own. Others look to [those people] for guidance or suggestion,” said Magana. “Everybody involved in a business has some sort of role that supports [it] overall...I want that same sense of importance.”

Alejandro De la Torre, a junior majoring in social work said that the prospect of learning more about business was what initially inspired him to go to college. “I think [that’s] what got me interested...how broad of a major it was and how in the future I saw it becoming more and more popular — and not just in schools, but in the actual workforce,” said De la Torre. “Coming into this school, I didn’t know it was really big. I just knew overall when I thought of college, I thought, business.”

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The trend toward business and away from the humanites has spurred considerable debate in education circles. American author, essayist and literary critic William

Deresiewicz's essay, "The Neoliberal Arts, How College Sold Its Soul to the Market" for Harper's Magazine, draws out the historical contingencies that have led to the popularity of vocational majors, such as Business Administration, and what it means for high education's traditional role in developing young men and women.



Neoliberalism, he argues, is the idea that education, just like everything else in a America, has been turned into a calculation of monetary risk and reward. Furthermore, this new mode of educating “believes that we have reached the end of history, a steady-state condition of free-market capitalism that will go on replicating itself forever. The historical mission of youth is no longer desirable or even conceivable. The world is not going to change, so we don’t need young people to imagine how it might.” The main goal of colleges, then, is not for establishing the next generation of creators and freethinkers, but to build the next generation of careers in an eternal workforce.

“Why is Business popular?” Decker asked, repeating the question posed to him by a reporter while reaching back and handing out his business card. The book, “Rethinking Undergraduate Business Education: Liberal Learning for the Profession” has been pulled from pristinely organized bookshelves and strategically set on a neat and orderly desk in this well-organized office. “Well, certainly some folks, and especially at Whittier, are like I was — from a lower-class background. I wanted to change how I lived and how my family lived, and Business gave me an opportunity to do that.”

Third-year history major Karen Pe echoed the economic imperatives behind the popularity of business majors. “I feel like business administration is more popular than the humanities because people think they’re highly guaranteed to get jobs, and a lot of people don’t really know about humanities,” she said. “I know a lot of people are doing [business administration] because they think it’s a safe zone...but also [it’s] not knowing what they want to do after they graduate.”

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However, at least at Whittier College Decker says the line dividing the humanities from vocational majors is not clear cut. “I’ve been teaching here for almost 25 years, and to tell you the truth, I don’t know whether my class is a humanity or a social science, because I use knowledge from both fields,” said Decker. “When we’re talking about strategy...it becomes a creative art. And so, for me, putting together a company that

does good and does well is almost like somebody putting together a really good movie, or somebody writing a really good book.”

The decidedly lived-in office of Professor of English Sean Morris provides a stark contrast to Decker’s. Piles of papers and books are stacked high on the floor and desk. If he didn’t stand well above six-feet, Morris would disappear behind the stacks when he sits down at his desk. If there is an existential crisis in the humanities, though, he’s not suffering from it. “I agree that we’re a liberal arts college and we’re about understanding things, broadly, and that it’s possible that too much focus on professions could undermine that,” said Morris, “but I’d also caution that because it’s a liberal arts college, even somebody who is majoring in business...it’s just a major!”

For Morris, who did admit to always holding out for more English majors, a singular focus on one’s major does not make for a strong education. “I think that’s really what [the liberal arts program] is designed to do. So, no matter what your major is, you really ought to be trying to get a sense of what these other fields are,” Morris said. “The stereotype is that in professional disciplines, you’re just going through things with blinders on and you don’t care about anything and all you want is, ‘I’m just going to do X, Y and Z and hand me a check,’ but the truth is that if you really are that kind of person, you’re not going to get into the most lucrative kinds of jobs anyway. Somebody who has skills in something practical, if they can also bring in that larger knowledge and understanding, [they are] going to do better at it.”

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— Professor of English Sean Morris

Besides, he reminded, at Whittier College it’s practically impossible to put too much emphasis on any single discipline. “No matter what you do as your major, it’s one-quarter, there’s a specific requirement of 72 units outside your major and that’s more

than an associates degree in things that aren't your major!" said Morris. "It's designed that way on purpose for these reasons we're talking about."

So, while Whittier, like other liberal arts colleges, may increasingly mean business, it's not going to lose that humanities touch anytime soon.

Thanks to Joe Donnelly (hide).

Liberal Arts

Business Administration

Humanities