

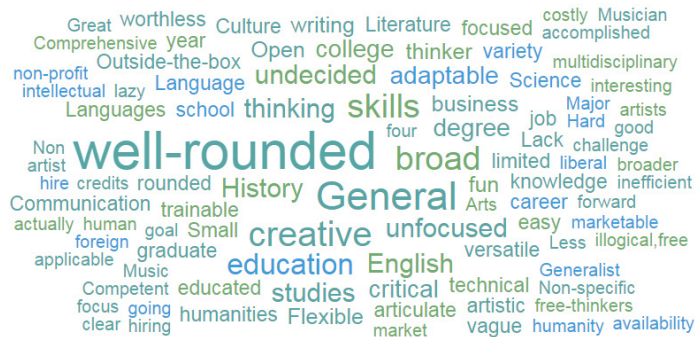
# 2015 ERC/NOCHE Liberal Arts Degree Perceptions & Hiring Practices Survey Report

# Key Findings

## First impressions

When asked to list the first four words that come to mind in regards to a liberal arts degree, the most popular phrases used by participants included “well-rounded,” “general” and “creative.” (See Figure 1)

Figure 1



## Candidates are versatile

Northeast Ohio organizations most frequently cited candidates’ versatile skill set as the reason for hiring or targeting individuals with liberal arts degrees. In addition, employers commented that these candidates know how to research and articulate their findings, have excellent analytical and problem-solving skills, work well with a diverse group of people, and are knowledgeable in technology use.

Other stated reasons are industry-specific:

“Skill set needed for event planning and program development.”

“We look for people with creativity as it relates to design and style, in keeping with our brand.”

“Psychology is an appropriate fit for human resources due to the need for people skills.”

“We are a fine art conservation and preservation organization focused very specifically on preserving the artistic and cultural heritage of this region. We need staff that are highly educated in these areas.”

Reasons organizations are hiring or targeting liberal arts degree candidates (# of organizations)

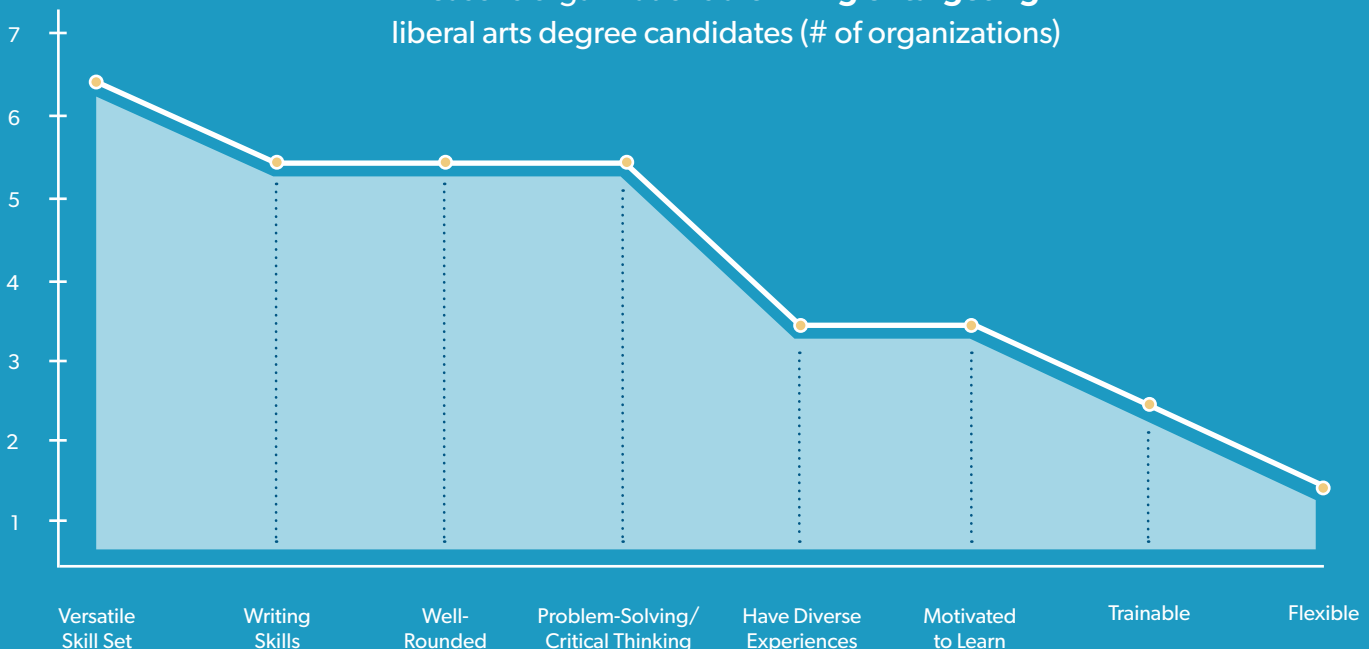


Figure 3

In the last 18-months, did your organization **hire** any candidates who were pursuing or had obtained a liberal arts degree?

### Where are the jobs?

Participating employers were more likely to have hired candidates for internships or entry-level positions (22.5% and 18.8%, respectively), compared to positions that required more experience. Only 7.5% of participants had hired candidates for supervisory positions. (See figure 3)

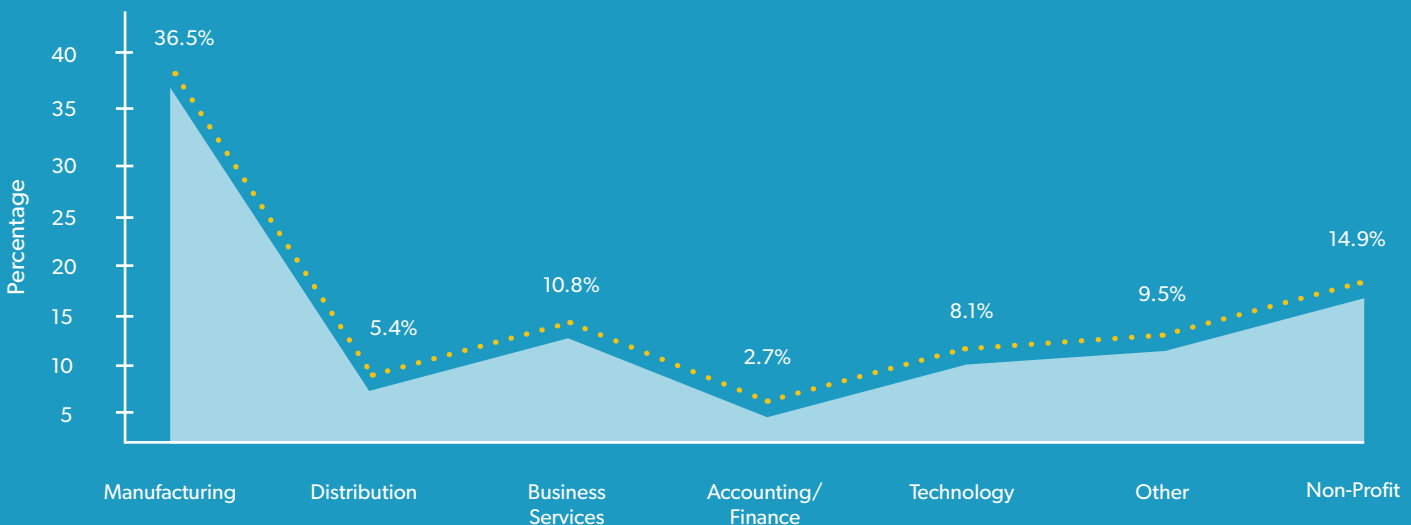


### Common positions for which individuals were hired:

- Intern (i.e. Communications, Database, Environmental, Events, Graphic Design, Marketing, Research)
- Business Development & Sales
- Program/Project Coordination & Management
- IT (i.e. Database Coordinator, Systems Analyst, Analyst)
- Non-Profit (i.e. Development, Grant Coordinator, Volunteer Coordinator)
- Graphic Design
- Writing
- Inside/Inbound Customer Service
- Account/Client Services
- Special Events and Programs
- Public/Media Relations
- Operations & Administration (i.e. Purchasing Coordinator, Office Assistant, Operations Associate)
- Human Resources

### Which industries are hiring?

Employers that reported hiring or targeting candidates who were pursuing or who had obtained liberal arts degrees represented a number of different industries, most commonly Manufacturing and Non-Profit. (See Figure 4 below)



## Conclusion

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A number of participating employers shared a common misperception that liberal arts degrees lack specificity and fail to prepare students with skills that are needed in the workforce. At the same time, we know that many employers cite a lack of “soft-skills” to be a critical talent management issue (AAC&U, 2013; Chegg, 2013; ManpowerGroup, 2013). Interestingly, based on our findings, the highly desired “soft skills” such as problem solving, communication, analytical, and creative skills are exactly those that are perceived to be fostered in liberal arts programs. Institutions of higher education can play a major role in endorsing and promoting that these in-demand skills are a key component of a liberal arts education.

This data suggests that while a majority of employers are not currently targeting liberal arts candidates during their recruitment process, they continue to seek the types of skills that liberal arts students possess. This is a strong indication that there is a need to bridge the gap between the misperception and the reality regarding the skillset that liberal arts students acquire.

Colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to resolve this paradox and should seize the opportunity to market and promote the characteristics and skills of their liberal arts students in a more strategic way.

## Purpose and Methods

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As part of an effort to examine and understand perceptions of and opportunities for individuals who have obtained or are pursuing degrees in the liberal arts in Northeast Ohio, the Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education (NOCHE) engaged the services of ERC (Employers Resource Council) to conduct a survey of employers.

In May of 2015, the survey was distributed electronically by ERC and NOCHE to HR and business professionals employed by organizations that have business operations in Northeast Ohio. This summary outlines key findings related to the responses provided by 82 participating organizations.