

A CAREER AFTER COLLEGE OFFERS PLENTY OF SURPRISES

BY DANNY HEITMAN, *FORUM* EDITOR



When I entered college more than four decades ago, I already knew that I wanted to be a reporter, and I was sure what I wanted to write

about, too. Politics looked like the center of things, a subject that could occupy my interest for a lifetime.

Any courses on campus that didn't directly speak to my career goals seemed beside the point. I tolerated my classes in math and science, certain I wouldn't need their lessons again. I really enjoyed studying literature and philosophy, but their insights didn't feel rooted to life as a daily newspaper journalist. Nor, for that matter, did the theater and film classes I took on a whim.

But after I graduated and landed my first full-time newspaper job, life took me in unexpected directions. When the staffer who covered the environment resigned, I was pressed into service to take his place. How lucky that I'd paid attention to science and math, two key disciplines for

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understanding environmental policy. When I became a husband and father, I transitioned to a new role writing about film, books, and culture because the hours were better for a new parent. That's when my arts and literature education proved a lifeline.

I've worn many hats as a journalist over the years, and my work has been sustained by things learned long ago that, at the time, didn't strike me as especially relevant. In a long career, I've interviewed hundreds of people from many walks of life. In recalling their career path, they often mention the very thing I've just described. Regardless of their occupation, circumstance has nudged them to draw on unexpected strands of thought from their classroom days.

One of the abiding paradoxes of education is that young students cannot fully grasp all the things they might need to know as they prepare for the world of work. This has deepened my conviction that every college student, regardless of declared major, should be required to complete a curriculum that includes at least basic instruction in science, math, and the humanities. Those fields of knowledge promise to be important parts of anyone's toolbox.

I'm also convinced that even an ideal college education can't fully prepare graduates for the challenges and opportunities they'll face in the workplace. They'll have to keep learning, just as I've had to do in a 40-year career.

The pivots in my work life have reminded me that even the most carefully planned careers are full of surprises. The daunting thing – and the thrilling thing – is that I'm not always sure what will happen next.

DANNY HEITMAN (Southeastern Louisiana University) is editor of *Forum*. He frequently writes about literature and culture for *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and other national publications.