

ICPSR Data Brunch Podcast Episode 7: [Liberal Arts Education](#)

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Transcript

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Dory Knight-Ingram: Hey, everybody. Welcome to Data Brunch with ICPSR. If you love data, this is going to be food for thought. I'm Dory.

Anna Shelton: And I'm Anna.

Dory Knight-Ingram: We're recording these episodes and live from our remote offices. Please excuse anything you hear in the background, like canine colleagues, kids in class, and other unexpected moments.

Anna Shelton: I'm laughing because just before we started recording, one of our alarms went off and there was... Our dogs are joining us for the podcast, so you never know what might happen on Data Brunch. But, Dory, did you know that it is Endangered Species Day on Friday?

Dory Knight-Ingram: You know what? I did know that was coming up, Anna.

Anna Shelton: Yeah, I think it's pretty cool. I was looking at... Well, you know how we do, we always look to see what data we have when there's one of these national days. And I thought that our listeners might be interested in... There's a study that's called Trends in Illegal Wildlife Trade, that's available at ICPSR. There's also some really interesting questions that you can look into the data for. One of those questions is about cloning as a way to help preserve endangered species, and it's really interesting to see the way that the survey participants responded to that. I thought that was pretty cool.

And then I also found there's a study called the United States Congressional Roll Call Voting Records. There's a section in there regarding, and I'm going to quote here, "Trophy hunting or the international commercial trade in elephant ivory, elephant hides, or rhinoceros horns." And elephants and rhinoceroses are both rhinoceri? Rhinoceroses? The groups-

Dory Knight-Ingram: Good question.

Anna Shelton: ... of those. What?

Dory Knight-Ingram: I said that's a good question.

Anna Shelton: We have access to all of these data and I don't know the answer to this, maybe our listeners can write in and tell us. But in any case, you can see how your elected representatives might have voted on things like that. I think that that's a really cool use of data.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Yeah, as we were looking at the list, it used to be that the Florida manatee was my favorite endangered species, but then the manatee was moved off, I believe a few years ago, even though they're still protected. Another one that's near and dear to my heart is the sea turtle.

Anna Shelton: Yeah. Well, I'm glad to hear that the manatees are moved off and I'm glad to hear that they're still protected, even if they are moved off that. But boy, that's so sad. The sea turtles, they don't deserve that from us.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Yeah. Special creatures.

Anna Shelton: Yeah. Totally special creatures. All right. In other current events, speaking of special creatures, this one is close to my heart because it's about kids. This is a new article and this is about kids who don't have enough food. The article is called Exploring the Dynamics of Racial Food Security Gaps in the United States. The article uses data from the Child & Family Data Archive, and it looks at kids as young as kindergartners. In some of their findings they report, and I'm going to quote here that, "Hispanic and non-Hispanic white households with children are equally mobile in the long run, whereas non-Hispanic black households with children tend to be less upwardly mobile in food security status and more downwardly mobile in that status over time."

What that means is that white families and Hispanic families are equally able to gain better access to food over time. But that black families and non-Hispanic black families with kids, often have worse access to food over time. If you care about food stability, I would encourage you to read this article and to learn more about these data. We'll link to these in the show notes, but this is important work and this can make a difference in someone's life. If this is something that you care about, please do take a look. In other new and updated data, there are tons of new data available. There always are. If you're looking for data for your papers, as you wrap up the year, we have some great stuff for you.

There is a new update to what is affectionately called the L.A.FANS study. I love this one personally, because I am from Los Angeles and I love L.A. The L.A.FANS study, it looks at adults and children in neighborhoods in Los Angeles County. The new data is follow-up interviews with a 1000 randomly selected respondents from the previous version of this study. It's part of a broader project, which is called the Mixed-Income Project. It's about mixed-income housing in Los Angeles. There's another version of this study in Chicago as well.

It's pretty cool to see this. We saw that someone at Harvard has already used this study as part of their 2020 dissertation. So, very cool to see these data being used and, hopefully, lives being changed as part of that.

Another updated study is the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. The update was to the adult population survey data set from 1998-2017. Respondents were asked about entrepreneurship in general, and startup activities, and ownership, management of the new business, angel investors, all kinds of things that might be interesting to people who are looking at entrepreneurship in a variety of different ways. There are some really interesting articles that are written with these data too. For example, there's a paper called, does legal registration help or hurt? The effect of government corruption on resource acquisition by nascent ventures in an emerging economy, some fascinating stuff in there. You can see these data and the publications through the links in our show notes. And now Dory, I'm going to turn this over to you.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Okay. Hello everyone. Welcome back to ICPSR's Data Brunch. Today we are so excited to have members of the project team for College and Beyond II: Outcomes of a Liberal Arts Education. College and Beyond II, is an initiative led by a team of researchers from ICPSR and at the University of Michigan. It's supported by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. And so we are going to hear from the team in just a little bit, but I wanted to go ahead and introduce them.

Today we have three guests. We have Susan Jekielek, who is Associate Research Scientist and ICPSR and director of our education and early childhood projects. We have Kevin Stange, an Associate Professor of Public Policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy here at the University of Michigan. And then we have Jenni Brady, a Liberal Arts Research Area specialist, Senior, here at ICPSR. Welcome.

Kevin Stange: Sure. Thanks Dory. Thanks so much for having us.

Dory Knight-Ingram: At Data Brunch, we love to see the stories behind the data. To the project team, can you give us an overview of College and Beyond II? I'm going to point that to you, Kevin.

Kevin Stange: We've been working on this project for a bit of time now. And so we're excited that it's actually starting to come to fruition. We're excited to share that with you all. This project is really interested in high-quality undergraduate education and students' experiences in college. Broadly, the liberal arts education is a lens through which we're approaching that, the aim is to improve the quality of undergraduate education. It's a major goal of this project, but also to create a data set that will facilitate all sorts of social science research by scholars in many disciplines throughout the country.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Thank you so much, Kevin. My next question is going to be for Jenni. How do you define liberal arts education?

Jenni Brady: I think that is a fantastic question and part, because it's one that a lot of people have. And that's whether they're students, or parents, or faculty, or researchers like us, listeners to your podcast, I am certain. And so for a long time, a liberal arts education has been understood to be what students get out of liberal arts college. That's whether it's at Amherst, or Williams or at a unit like the College of Literature, Science and the Arts here at UM. It's a residential education. There are lots of co-curricular and extracurricular activities on offer.

Academically, there are small classes, there are lots of opportunities to interact with faculty, and they're studying certain kinds of what we might think of as traditional academic subjects. This definition would suggest that liberal arts is an attribute of institutions. But liberal arts education can also be defined through those subjects that people study right through curriculum.

The important pieces here at the liberal arts education is broadly understood to not be vocational or professional. So not to be an engineering degree or not to be an accounting degree, many would argue, and it's broad. There's a range of disciplines and subjects, and then it's a particular depth of knowledge and a single area, like a major. In terms of range of disciplines, I should add that liberal arts is shorthand for liberal arts and sciences. It's not just humanities in the arts, it's also the social and natural sciences, so a chemistry degree, would be a liberal arts degree by this definition.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Thank you. And so I just took away from that many things, but chemistry is part of liberal art, so. Thank you for that great overview. Okay. Can we talk about what makes this College and Beyond II project such a great story? Because I know it is. I've been following it since it started, so I'll just... Tell us a little bit about the stories behind the project.

Kevin Stange: Everybody will have a different answer to this. But what what's been so exciting for me about this project is all of the things that Jenni just described, all the attributes of the liberal arts education, all the outcomes of a liberal arts education. These are multifaceted, they're complex, they're really slippery, they're hard to measure. And so one of the things that's been really exciting about this project is the opportunity to collaborate with folks in many different disciplines, coming with many different subject expertise, a diverse set of subject expertise.

I'm an economist by training, but on this project, I regularly interacting with social psychologists, and humanists, and writing experts, and education scholars and political scientists. All of that expertise is coming together to think about how do we measure some of these outcomes that Jenni described. How do we measure some of the experiences that students are having and whether or not that's a liberal arts education or not?

I think one of the exciting stories here is just about life is multifaceted and multidimensional and we hope education is the same. And so in order to really study it, you really need to bring people from all those different areas together to think about how best to measure some of these concepts. That what's been exciting to me about this project, is bringing together these different perspectives.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Thank you, Kevin. Next question is for Susan. Do you mind talking to us about what makes this project unique?

Susan Jekielek: Sure, Dory. Well, first we all know that on average college graduates fare better economically than non-graduates. Our project takes us a few steps further by asking about an examining what it is about a college experience that produces lasting outcomes. We include a variety of non-economic outcomes. I think both Kevin and Jenni gave a little bit of insight into our broad thinking about outcomes that we were trying to examine in this study.

Second, we see this project as contributing resources to the field in a few ways. As Kevin mentioned, we will be sharing our de-identified surveying administrative data for other researchers to analyze. This will allow new analysis and maybe even competing hypothesis to be examined. The data themselves are unique in that higher education administrative data for research use is hard to come by. Also, the ability to link student administrative data that it was collected simultaneously as a student was in school, and being able to link it to long-term outcome outcomes is also unique.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Let's talk about some potential uses for the data. What do you think students and parents or anyone else that you might imagine using these data from this project... What do you think they'll be able to do with the research that comes from College and Beyond II?

Kevin Stange: This is where I think the, the range of experts and researchers that we've had involved evolved already comes into play. Because everybody's going to have a different type of question that is particularly important and to tell in their discipline, to answer, and we hope to be able to. In my discipline, in economics, and particularly the study of labor economics, labor markets and earnings, and inequality, adaptability comes up. The notion that higher education should be equipping students when they enter the world and particularly in the labor markets to be able to navigate technological changes in the labor market. Help them navigate the great recessions and the economics ups and downs.

This is something and that you can acquire that by having acquired a broad set of skills that could be applicable in many different types of jobs. There is indirect evidence for that, but no one has been able to measure the thing that they say is the critical attribute underpinning that, namely, career adaptability. And so that's one study that I'm excited about sort of working on, or we've already started to, to measure how career adaptability is related to students' experiences in college. But the courses they take, even within kind of what

major. You might have some majors that students still take a fairly broad set of courses and other majors where they take a very narrow set of courses. Those are the kinds of things that I'm excited about. But I don't know about, Susan, if you want to mention another one, that's not in the economics realm or Jenni.

Susan Jekielek: I think one thing that is interesting is that we have this really rich administrative data along with the survey data that we have, which is also rich. I think we have a lot of ideas of how data that's already collected in a systematic way that many institutions have could be used to describe a part of a student's experience. And so I know our team has some ideas, but I think that there are plenty of ideas for others to use this administrative data that other institutions may already have collected without collecting even new data, to learn a little bit about the experiences of their students in their institutions.

Jenni Brady: I might just hop on to add that. There are so many long-term outcomes that we're interested in this project, the kind of economic outcomes that Kevin has outlined. We also have measures of cognitive and non-cognitive skill use, measures of civic engagement and political participation, also, health and psychological well-being. I mean, the rhetorical argument for liberal arts education has long been something along the lines of it prepares you for the life well lived. So that you can have a meaningful career and also have things in your life besides that and whether are hard times and find joy in those times. I think something we've all been thinking about for this past year.

I think the potential to be able to tie those outcomes to specific experiences from college, can tell us a lot about what experiences we want to invest in, and what experiences we want to make accessible to a broad range of students. And so the potential of this project and the data set to make it available to all of these researchers that are out in the world to ask these questions and to have the data, to answer them, it's a really rich dataset. It's going to be exciting to see everything that comes from it.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Okay. Let's hear a short sound clip from the Liberal Arts and Life colloquium series from Dr. Earl Lewis, who is director of the Center for Social Solutions here at the University of Michigan and president emeritus of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Dr. Earl Lewis: I mean, part, I think the challenge for us as we look to the future and talk about being robot-ready and robot-proof is to make sure and understand that the students that we're educating now and preparing for their roles in society, those students will not just change careers but will change a full jobs eight or 10 times based on most projections. What we need is not make sure they have so much, a certain kind of domain knowledge, is the ability to figure out what questions do they ask, how do I actually puzzled over those questions? How do I should continue to explore them over a period of time and how to tell the good from the bad, the junk from what is valuable?

Dory Knight-Ingram: Wow. That is really timely, especially in the time period that we're in right now. Let's talk about how we brought visibility to this project.

Jenni Brady: Sure. We just concluded a year-long public colloquium series called Liberal Arts and Life, as you said Dory. In which we were bringing together researchers, and academic leaders and just a wide variety of folks who are invested in liberal arts education. To think about what we know and what we want to know about liberal arts education and specifically how data and measurement can help to provide those answers. We're really trying through the series to think through some big questions about liberal arts education, about what it is, and how we know it when we see it, how we measure it, how we can make the case for it.

I think what Earl Lewis was just talking through there, is really showing us the necessity of it. But also how sometimes the skills can come across as kind of a morphous, even as they come across as really essential. How do you figure out the good and the bad, the junk and what's valuable? How do we teach students to do that? How do we measure whether we did our jobs at doing that?

Dory Knight-Ingram: Back to what we talked a little bit earlier, about any insights that you might have into how the COVID pandemic may have affected on liberal arts education?

Kevin Stange: I think that the last 16 months has really underscored the importance of having a broad understanding of how the world works. Because now, everybody out there on some level needs are really basic understanding of biology, economic policy, political phenomenon, sociology, and social processes to understand kind of the racial justice, upheaval that we've seen. There is a lot going on in the world that really requires an understanding of many disciplines, many different ways of thinking, basic statistics to understand risk.

I think that the... I mean, I would say that now, if anything the pandemic is really underscored, to me, the importance of having understanding in a broad set of areas for the general population, not just experts. Because a lot of the decisions we're making in the pandemic are really personal. People have to understand themselves and certainly don't appear to just follow what the experts say. That to me is another way that COVID has really affected, I think, and underscored the importance of a liberal arts education.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Thank you. This next question I'm really, really heavy, if the College and Beyond II team had to make a meal together, what would it be?

Jenni Brady: I like thinking about is making a meal together, because we have only seen each other through our screens for so long. I don't know what we would make. I can make pretty good scrambled eggs, so that would be my contribution to the College and Beyond II team brunch, maybe. I know, Kevin and Susan, what would you make?

Susan Jekielek: We would provide a buffet. I think we've talked about a buffet many times throughout the course of this project, and the different kinds of outcomes that we want to select from. There would be a broad buffet.

Kevin Stange: I would agree with that. Depending on the time of day, maybe I'll add some cocktails to it, maybe not for brunch.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Cocktails are perfectly fine. Thank you for that. Okay, I have one more special request. ICPSR staff has been known to have a karaoke session at II, so what is your favorite karaoke song?

Susan Jekielek: I Will Survive.

Dory Knight-Ingram: I was thinking the same thing, Susan. That's a good one. Purple Rain, high up on my list.

Jenni Brady: About The Devil Went Down to Georgia, if somebody can sing that, well, want to be in that karaoke audience. I will say that I have never sung karaoke in [inaudible 00:23:37], because I have a sister who's older than me who has a fantastic voice, so I've always been a great audience for her vocal talents.

Kevin Stange: For me, I can't. I have very incredibly narrow range. The only two songs that I could ever sing, that sounds anything like the original are the song called Callin' Baton Rouge by Garth Brooks. I'm not even a huge country guy, I just happened to know that song, and Pretty Women by Roy Orbison. The voice, that's the only thing that I could come close to.

Dory Knight-Ingram: How can listeners find out more about this or contact you?

Susan Jekielek: We have a webpage at the ICPSR website. You can go to icpsr.umich.edu and search for the College and Beyond II project. I honestly just google College and Beyond II and usually it comes right up. You can get more information about the project what's going on, what will be going on with the project and also how to contact us.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Well, thank you so much for the College and Beyond II team. We're just looking forward to seeing all of your research and all of the data that comes out of this project.

Kevin Stange: Thank you. Thanks for the great opportunity.

Jenni Brady: Thank you so much, Dory, and Anna and [Scott 00:24:57].

Susan Jekielek: Thank you.

Anna Shelton: That was so cool. As someone who has a liberal arts education, myself, is fascinating to hear about how this is being measured. Boy, that's really cool. I

can't wait to dig some more into those data. A few upcoming events, and as always, if you're listening to this episode at a later date, you can always visit icpsr.umich.edu to see our current job listings and our upcoming events. And we are hiring, again. We are growing like wild. It's fantastic.

We are hiring a few positions, those include a digital product designer, a full stack software engineer, as well as a senior full stack software engineer and a supervisor. We're hiring a senior DevOps engineer, a paralegal, or a legal assistant, an IT desktop support specialist and a statistician. We're going to be growing by leaps and bounds. I know it's really fantastic. You can find the links to all of those in our show notes.

And then I also wanted to say our summer program has started, and it has been such a joy to see all of our scholarship winners who are sharing their good news on social media. That's been really, really fun, and please keep those coming because that just makes our day when we see those.

And then finally, please join us on June first and second 2021, for a two-day celebration of a new book, that's called the Influences of the IEA Civic and Citizenship Education Series: Practice, Policy and Research Across Countries and Regions. The IEA here is the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. The data series is called the Civic Study Series. You can find out more about this awesome new book and the workshop on our website.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Thank you, Anna. Wow. That brings us to the end of today's episode. Thank you for being with us.

Anna Shelton: In our next episode, we get to talk to Dr. Debbie Carr, who talks to us about stress and COVID and more, and it is just a fascinating conversation. I hope you join us for that.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Yes, that will be a treat. If you aren't already, subscribe now on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts.

Anna Shelton: Thank you as always to the ICPSR membership, this podcast would not be possible without the ICPSR members.

Dory Knight-Ingram: Yes, thank you ICPSR members and everyone, you want to make sure you can get in touch with us by visiting our website icpsr.umich.edu or emailing us at icpsr-podcast@umich.edu.

Anna Shelton: And we love hearing from you, so please do get in touch with us. It is such a treat for us to get to hear what you're interested in and how you've used these data, so please do send us a note. With that I am Anna.

Dory Knight-Ingram: And I'm Dory. Thanks for joining us at ICPSR's Data Brunch.

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