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CAREER PATHWAYS

for Social Science
Graduates

A Cross - Sectoral Survey

Department of Social Sciences,
Manipal Institute of Liberal Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences,
Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, India

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Career Pathways for Social Science Graduates: A Cross Sectoral Survey

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Authors: Amala Jayashree J, Anagha Shah, Arunima Ganguly, Firoz Alam, Mridula Bharati, Prithika Priyesh

Faculty Supervisor: Joyeeta Dey

Editing and Proof reading: Esther Moraes, Samayita Banerjee, Swati Goel and Swathi Shivanand

External Reviewers:

Kanchan Kaur, Professor of Practice, Department of Media and Communication,
MILHS

Sujaan Mukherjee, Senior Curator, Birla Academy of Fine Arts

R. Maithreyi, Strategic Lead for Adolescent and Women's Health, Karnataka Health
Promotion Trust

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Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to introduce *Career Pathways for Social Science Graduates: A Cross - Sectoral Survey*, a report that reflects not only the relevance of the question it explores, but also the seriousness and rigour with which our students have approached it.

Questions around career pathways for Social Science graduates are particularly significant at a time when the value of a Social Science education extends well beyond conventional disciplinary boundaries. What makes this report especially meaningful is the manner in which our students have chosen to examine this question—not by relying on assumptions or a single source of information, but by approaching it as a research problem that calls for systematic inquiry, evidence and validation.

The study brings together secondary research, survey-based findings, conversations with key stakeholders - students and peers, faculty perspectives and industry professionals, creating a crosssectoral view of the opportunities and challenges that shape Social Science careers. The effort to read widely, examine and verify information, engage with multiple perspectives, and triangulate findings across sources demonstrates a commendable understanding of the research process.

More than the findings themselves, I believe the report reflects the kind of scholarly temperament we hope to nurture at MILHS - curiosity that leads to questions, questions that lead to systematic inquiry, and inquiry that is grounded in evidence.

I congratulate the students for their initiative, perseverance and intellectual engagement, and acknowledge the faculty mentors whose guidance has helped shape and strengthen this work. I hope this report serves not only as a useful resource for students, educators and institutions, but also as an encouraging example of how undergraduate students can engage meaningfully and rigorously with research-oriented questions.

Dr Shilpa Kalyan

I/c Director

Manipal Institute of Liberal Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (MILHS)

MAHE Bengaluru

The Work of Reimagining Social Sciences

At the very young Department of Social Sciences (DSS) at MILHS, we are grappling with multiple questions: what the phrase of ‘relevance of social sciences’ means in everyday intellectual and practical terms; how to teach in an age of convenience, distraction and content; who are the Gen Zs students about whom much is said but much remains elusive. As faculty, even as we try to make sense of these questions in our embodied, intellectual journeys as pedagogues, we strive to remain attentive to the numerous concerns of our students: What next? How do I make sense of where I am going? What do I do now that I know the formation of middle classes; the shared histories of South Asia; the myth of the rational economic man; or the diverse trajectories of Indian politics? These questions may appear instrumental but for students transitioning from the relatively safe space of the university to an outside world of employment and advanced education, these questions generate palpable anxieties.

This report by mapping the various career pathways for social sciences students then acts as an initial navigation guide for both students and universities. In laying out the expectations and requirements from each sector in terms of knowledge, skills and dispositions, it urges, as our student authors point out, for more intentional and agential intervention in crafting learning journeys. This is a responsibility, as Joyeeta Dey, the faculty guide for this report says, that must be shared equally between students, faculty and institutions.

The report stands, in some ways, as a vindication of what academics across the world are saying about the relevance of liberal arts education, in particular the social sciences: that in an age of AI, not only has knowing the human gained added significance, it is liberal arts that can offer AI-proof careers. More work is necessary to elaborate on this point but the report offers a promising beginning by demonstrating the academic and behavioural core that the “industry” expects and which a social sciences education offers. An important point to note here though is the report’s demonstration of the low public intelligibility of social sciences as a category outside academia and within the sectors surveyed here. What are the consequences arising from this and what potential it holds for action is a matter worth debating.

Yet the most remarkable aspect of the report for us at DSS lies in the process and what the report represents: a democratic co-production of knowledge by students and for students, with support from faculty, where necessary. The commitment and rigour that our student authors have brought to this report gladdens the wavering hearts of my colleagues and I at DSS and that perhaps we are onto something: reimagining a social sciences rooted in democratic participatio, even if the polycrisis world of our times pulls us in far too many directions.

Dr. Swathi Shivanand
Head, Department of Social Sciences
MILHS, MAHE Bengaluru

Preface: Why the Report?

As this report's literature review points out, universities must take on the role of communicating to professional domains how a liberal arts education prepares students to be useful to these domains. This responsibility is particularly acute for liberal arts universities in Global South countries, where public understanding of these degrees is underdeveloped and mired in outdated and negative stereotypes. This report works towards building this missing bridge by both communicating to universities the needs articulated by 'industry' and, on the other end, laying out the ways in which universities can and already do respond to these requirements. Through this, we also speak to student anxieties about their professional futures and the common misunderstanding among parents that a social science and liberal arts degree lead exclusively to teaching or civil service jobs.

Among the critically minded, a pertinent question may arise: does this report then do a fundamental disservice to a social sciences education by viewing it purely as training grounds for workplaces? It would, given that their goals extend to preparation for life, not merely livelihoods. However, the findings of this study provide an interesting answer: more than 'skills', workplaces seek intellectual and emotional dispositions that are remarkably congruent with what is known to be valuable for active citizenship, democratic participation, and interpersonal connection. Perhaps then the ideas of 'civic personhood' and 'being a good worker' have some productive overlaps that are worthwhile to explore, contradictions notwithstanding.

One might also ask, given the advent of AI, is the question of work even that important anymore? White-collar jobs are undeniably declining/changing form and constitute generally treacherous territory for job seekers, but work is not identical to jobs, and that difference is best illustrated by how this report was put together. When the department put out a call for student researchers to volunteer for this study, several applicants wrote about how the research question was 'something we are always talking about with friends'. The selected undergraduate students then worked together over their vacations and pulled off this excellent report with the lightest-touch supervision. There was a palpable lack of alienation in their orientation towards the project. This really goes to show that 'jobs' may wither away, but so long as people genuinely wish to labour together towards a shared meaningful purpose, there will always be work to be done.

The report covers a broad scope, with a fair degree of granularity devoted to the eight selected sectors, ensuring that it does not make homogenised claims across all sectors. However, we know that it misses several key and emerging possibilities in the future of work for social science students, such as entrepreneurial roles like that of an independent content creator. We hope that an enthusiastic reception to this study begets the next one to address this gap.

Tracing the development of this report uncovers the chain of debt that it owes to people. The process started with Dr. Swathi Shivanand, Head of Department of Social Sciences who took the germ of an idea placed by junior faculty seriously enough to commit departmental support for it. This was followed by encouragement and official support from Dr. Shilpa Kalyan, Director, MILHS. From the point that the call for volunteers was put out, students took charge – formulating the study, writing, designing, and leading it to its closing point. During this they needed to reach out to experts from industry through references and introductions generously provided by all social science faculty. Dr. Swathi Shivanand, Dr. Kedar Vishnu Shankarrao, Dr. Roopa Ratnam, Dr. Devisha Sasidevan, Dr. Ardra N G, and Dr. GSK Kiran require special mention for connecting students with an appropriately placed range of contacts for this study. As this study anonymized the respondents to elicit the most honest account of their domain we can not name them, however, to a large degree the value of the report stands on the time and insight they so generously shared with the students. Acknowledgments are also due to internal faculty members Dr. Esther Moraes, Dr. Samayita Banerjee, Dr. Swati Goel and Dr. Swathi Shivanand - for doing the painstaking work of reading closely, editing and commenting and our external reviewers Kanchan Kaur (Professor of Practice, Journalism and Media Department, MAHE), Dr. Sujaan Mukherjee (Senior Curator, Birla Academy of Fine Arts), Dr. R. Maithreyi (Strategic Lead for Adolescent and Women's Health, Karnataka Health Promotion Trust) for evaluating and providing feedback on the findings as domain experts.

The final word can only be reserved for our exceptionally capable students – Amala Jayashree J, Anagha Shah, Arunima Ganguly, Firoz Alam, Mridula Bharati and Prithika Priyesh – who need no further commendation from me, as their work eloquently speaks for them.

Joyeeta Dey,
Faculty supervisor
Assistant Professor, Department of Social Sciences
MILHS, MAHE Bengaluru

Executive Summary

This report explores the employment opportunities for social science graduates in sectors such as academia and research, media, GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums), corporate, market research and data, government and public sector, public policy, civil societies, and think tanks. The study seeks to understand the qualities and skills expected of a candidate during the hiring process and work culture, salaries, responsibilities, etc., for the fresh graduates, the changes in hiring practices with the coming of AI, and the changes in the curriculum to increase employability.

The study used a qualitative research design, drawing on two complementary sources: Job Descriptions (JDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The JDs were collected from major recruitment platforms and official career pages of organisations. The KIIs included semi-structured interviews with professionals from the selected sectors.

Most sectors do not have specific degree requirements except for sectors such as academia, corporate, and civil societies, and certain positions require a master's or higher degree. Fresh graduates enter these sectors through internships, fellowships, networking, and apprenticeships, and are offered modest salaries that are expected to increase over the years. Employers expect familiarity with basic technical skills such as MS Office applications and Google Workspace, as well as basic AI literacy and soft skills such as reading and writing. Furthermore, the candidates are expected to possess qualities such as communication, curiosity, and confidence.

Based on the analysis of data and findings, the study has developed cross-cutting recommendations that suggest changes to assignments and pedagogy to make it more interdisciplinary, improve critical thinking skills, communication skills, usage of mixed methods, etc. Additionally, in-house opportunities and guest talks are recommended.

Youth, Employment and Social Sciences: An Overview

India's higher education system has diversified at an extraordinary pace over the last two decades. The AISHE report (2021-22) recorded over 263,974 undergraduate social science graduates in that year alone. This is a cohort that is large and structurally underprepared for the labour market. Students of these disciplines are trained in the skill-sets that are valuable to the current labour market, but their career landscapes remain insufficiently mapped by the institutions that trained them. This report is concerned with a specific subset of this cohort, namely Gen Z students¹ at private Indian universities pursuing social sciences and humanities education.²

I. Youth Demographic & Employment

Deloitte's 2026 Gen Z and Millennial global survey points out that these generational cohorts have financial anxiety even as they desire value-aligned careers. This aligns with India-focused research by Mahapatra, Bhullar and Gupta (2022): Gen Z and millennial Indians are driven by ambition, social consciousness, and a desire for purposeful work and yet are also defined by anxiety with structural precarity and declining trust in institutions they occupy. Moreover, despite India's growing graduate labour market, meaningful

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Employment has not kept up pace, especially for those outside the professional course pipeline. Hannum and Buchmann (2005) identify this as a crucial tension where educational expansion in developing economies does not automatically translate to socioeconomic mobility, particularly when these labour markets are stratified by credential type and social capital. A 2020 CSDS-Lokniti survey, drawing from a cross-class

sample of Indian youth, points out that This report focuses on the privately-educated Indian Gen Z social sciences graduate who has invested in non-vocational, non-professional education, which promises training without clarity on what this investment would beget. This cohort occupies a considerably thinner slice of the youth demographic of the CSDS-Lokniti survey. They are shaped by educational capital and urbanlabour market exposure in ways the CSDS-Lokniti survey does not capture. Mapping their aspirations, anxieties, and labour market entry remains necessary for any attempt to inform student and institutional decision-making around career pathways. This report aims to address this by describing the career pathways in the social sciences that are potentially available to them.

In addition, research from India suggests that many of the sectors in which social science graduates seek employment are shaped by elite and informal professional networks (Maheshwari & Sparks, 2018; Khan et al., 2023; Ravikumar et al., 2026; Pathak-Shelat, 2023). These networks can influence access to information, internships, mentorship, referrals, and early career opportunities, creating an additional barrier for graduates who do not have pre-existing social or professional connections. This highlights the need for more structured mechanisms of access, particularly at the entry level, through which fresh graduates can gain exposure to employers, professional networks, and relevant work experience irrespective of their existing connections.

II. Global Social Science Careers & AI

At the intersection of labour economics and higher education research sits a growing body of work, documenting the demand for social science competencies and the institutional failure to translate this demand into legible career pathways. Witherspoon (2021) captures the manner in which businesses increasingly recognise the value of social sciences training (e.g. research, analysis, contextual reasoning) while higher education policy has been slow to fund or formalise this recognition, resulting in graduates underprepared to articulate what their education is worth. Lenihan, Witherspoon and Alexander (2020) empirically prove this in their case study research across major UK private sector firms where they find social sciences knowledge and graduates deployed across all sectors, with earnings comparable to STEM graduates and their skills deemed essential to leadership, consumer understanding and organisational governance. Edmondson, Formica and Mitra (2020) provide nuance to this, drawing from World Economic Forum data to showcase the skills rising fastest in employer demand: critical thinking, creativity and emotional intelligence; those precisely cultivated by liberal arts education.

Gen Z and millennial Indians are driven by ambition, social consciousness, and a desire for purposeful work and yet are also defined by anxiety with structural precarity and declining trust in institutions they occupy.

Automation is driving down the premium on technical skills but this phenomenon places the liberal arts students at an unprecedented advantageous position. Aoun (2017) makes this case institutionally, arguing that AI-resilient education must foreground what he dubs humanics, the distinctly human capacities of critical thinking, cultural agility and meaning making; again, notably, core competencies of liberal arts education. Bail (2024) brings in the contemporary concern of generative AI and its impacts on social sciences research practice itself, where it accelerates certain tasks while sharpening the question of what distinctly remains of human judgement. Lacche and Spigraelli (2024) look at this in labour market terms, documenting new career categories emerging at the intersection cultivated by both humanities and digital technology (e.g. digital archivists, cultural data analysts, AI ethics specialists, etc.). Here they proclaim this as evidence that Social Sciences and Humanities-STEM integration is now a labour market fixation.

New career categories are emerging at the intersection of humanities and digital technology, such as digital archivists, cultural data analysts, AI ethics specialists, among others.

This literature demonstrates that while there may be anxieties about the ‘irrelevance’ of social science graduates in an AI-disrupted world, they are in fact becoming increasingly relevant. At the same time, it reveals a gap between the growing demand for social science competencies and the ability of institutions to translate this demand into clear career pathways and communicate the value of these skills to students.

III. Social Science Careers in the Global South and India

The literature on mapping the landscape of careers in social sciences, when situated in postcolonial, developing labour markets, is thinner. One rare example is Dayaratna-Banda and Dharmadasa’s (2022) empirical study documenting the structural underemployment among humanities and social sciences graduates in Sri Lanka: they point to a systemic mismatch between graduate supply and sector entry. This is worsened by the lower institutional prestige of nonprofessional degrees.

Given the relative absence of peer-reviewed scholarship on social science careers in India, this section draws from grey literature and media commentary. In using these sources, the report points to an ongoing debate that formal Indian scholarship has yet to catch up with, particularly around the employability, career trajectories, and changing labour-market relevance of social sciences graduates.

Majumdar (2025) argues that AI is now being actively deployed to redefine the purpose of liberal arts education in ways that strip it of its critical and civic function, stating this as a development with direct implications for the institutional environments social sciences students inhabit. Mattoo (2026) provides a counterpoint, contending that the age of AI makes liberal arts education more necessary rather than less, as the competencies it builds are precisely what the technological systems cannot replicate. Majumdar (2024) extends this to the Asian context, documenting the structural and political obstacles that institutions face in sustaining the conditions under which liberal arts education can genuinely flourish. In India, the active disinvestment at the higher education level, seen with funding cuts, faculty attrition, and curricular marginalization have constrained training quality and the visibility of career pathways for graduates in these disciplines.

This demonstrates that liberal arts education is characterized by institutional pressures and political contestations, which are comparatively understudied. This further indicates that the task of mapping careers and informing students’ decisions is all the more difficult and necessary. Employment for social sciences graduates are shaped by elite and informal professional networks which can influence access to information, internships, mentorship, referrals, and early career opportunities. There is need then for more structured mechanisms of access, a need universities can meet.

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative approach to understand the early stages of various career paths available for young social science graduates. The research uses two main sources of data. The first source consists of job descriptions (JDs) that were collected from online portals across select sectors. These descriptions were looked at to understand what qualifications, skills and responsibilities employers expect from entry-level candidates. The second source was key informant interviews (KIIs) with experienced professionals. These interviewees provided information on recruitment practices, workplace expectations, career growth and the realities of working within each sector. The two sources were compared to see whether the requirements mentioned in job advertisements matched the experiences of professionals working in these sectors.

Study Design	Job Descriptions	Interviews
A mixed-methods study of early careers for social-science graduates, to guide our placement policy and curriculum.	40 job descriptions from LinkedIn and Devnet, coded for tools, methods, soft skills, artifacts, AI exposure and pay.	24 interviews with professionals across all eight domains, from mid-tier to senior organisations.

JDs were collected from online recruitment platforms and the career pages of organisations across the selected sectors. To ensure that the dataset accurately recorded entry-level opportunities relevant to social science graduates, JDs were selected based on the sector, job designation, educational qualifications, organisational tier and their relevance to the study. Each JD was stored within a database to record the above-mentioned information and other relevant recruitment details. Working with this database allowed for a comparison of recruitment patterns both within and across sectors, allowing the study to identify common employer expectations as well as characteristics unique to individual industries.

For the KIIs, participants were recruited using purposive sampling. Their professional experience allowed them to provide important insights into hiring practices, workplace expectations and career progression within their respective sectors. Participants were contacted through referrals from existing faculty members who had professional contacts in the relevant industries. The study included professionals from eight broad sectors, with three individuals being interviewed per sector. The specific sectors – Media, Corporate and Consulting, Market Research, Public Sector, Think Tanks, Civil Society, Academia and GLAM - were chosen as they consistently generate opportunities, and hence an effort to understand these sectors could yield returns for a larger number of students.

Through semi-structured interviews, a common set of questions were asked to all participants while ensuring that they were allowed to discuss issues specific to their sector and experience. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and explored themes such as recruitment and hiring practices, undergraduate preparation and gaps in existing curricula. Participants were also asked about the value of postgraduate qualifications, the impact of artificial intelligence on recruitment, and personality traits associated with success and salary ranges. Other topics included career progression, opportunities for non-linear career paths and emerging areas of growth within each sector.

After data collection, every interview was transcribed verbatim and recorded using a common format to create a standardized database. Maintaining interview data in a consistent format allowed comparisons across sector and identifying recurring themes, shared trends, and sector-specific insights. The interview findings were further analysed alongside the job description database, allowing the study to compare employer expectations shown in recruitment advertisements with the perspectives shared by professionals. The JD data and interview findings were therefore considered together to understand the skills employers look for and how these expectations relate to actual experiences within different sectors.

Mapping the Nature of Work and Trajectories: Findings from the Study

How to Read the Findings by Domain

1	Nature of the work in each sector
2	Skills and dispositions valued
3	Artifacts: What outputs are expected
4	Skills and dispositions valued
5	Artifacts: What outputs are expected

I. Government and Public Sector

The government and public sector require students who can contribute to governance through policy implementation, public administration, programme management, and evidence-based decision-making. Interdisciplinary knowledge, analytical thinking, stakeholder engagement, and the ability to translate complex information into clear recommendations are valued across the sector. Employers also seek communication, integrity, reliability, adaptability, and a strong sense of public responsibility, alongside skills in data analysis and policy research. Practical exposure to governance processes and fieldwork can further help enter and sustain in this sector.

Unlike the corporate sector, the government and policy sector does not have a single, formal, or linear pathway for fresh graduates. One can enter the sector through three broad routes. The most accessible path is through think tanks and policy research organizations, where positions such as research assistant, junior analyst, and associate consultant are commonly available to bachelor's degree holders. Recruitment is generally based on academic performance, demonstrated skills, and relevant experience. Entry-level salaries are approximately around ₹3 LPA, with scope for progression through experience and specialisation.

A second route is through government-adjacent organizations that collaborate with government departments on policy implementation and public-sector projects. These roles involve programme coordination, stakeholder engagement, and implementation support rather than dedicated policy research. Trying to find employment through this route may depend on professional networks, internships, and voluntary or project-based experience. The third route is the civil services, which are formally open to graduates from any discipline meeting the minimum eligibility requirements, but require competitive examination scores and a lot of preparation rather than directly transitioning from university to employment.

finance, and specialized analytical roles often require postgraduate qualifications. Across the sector, a working understanding of the economy, including budgets, fiscal and monetary developments, and the economic implications of public policy, is important. Advanced excel is widely used, alongside applied econometrics, AI-assisted research, and basic legal and constitutional literacy.

Communication, presentation, networking, and the ability to translate complex information into concise policy briefs or presentations are equally important. Career progression requires sincerity, ownership, reliability, and continuous self-directed learning, while changing government priorities make adaptability, comfort with ambiguity, and the ability to think on one's feet very valuable. Typical work responsibilities include policy briefs, data visualizations, fiscal analyses, cabinet bills, parliamentary committee responses, audit replies, and opinion articles.

Overall, whilst think tanks and policy research organizations provide relatively direct entry points for bachelor's graduates, government-adjacent roles offer another route through programme and implementation work. Government positions and civil services involve higher barriers to entry through postgraduate qualifications or competitive examinations. Across these three pathways, demonstrated skills, communication, networking, integrity, and ownership remain important alongside formal qualifications.

Artifacts	Academic Core	Behavioural Core
• Data-driven briefs and narratives • Policy documents • Quasi-judicial orders • Audit replies • Cabinet bills • Committee responses	• Economics fundamentals • Advanced Excel and applied data analysis • Data storytelling • Policy-process knowledge • Note-making	• Sincerity and ownership • Reliability • Networking • Excellent communication and presentation • Comfort with ambiguity • Integrity

II. Corporate and Consulting Sectors

Roles within the corporate sector span across HR, consulting, business analytics, corporate communications, and strategy. Apart from just the various quantitative and technical skills, this sector focuses on research, communication, stakeholder engagement, and collaborative problemsolving. Above mentioned skills are often extensively focused upon within social sciences education. Those interested in working within the sector must be able to combine disciplinespecific knowledge with software tools, analytical skills and lessons learnt from practical work experience.

Many jobs often require a master's degree, or prior work experience for roles such as analyst or consultant. A bachelor's degree mainly leads to internships and short-term roles

paying ₹3–4 LPA, whereas a master's degree allows applicants to apply for analyst and consultant positions paying roughly ₹7–14 LPA, including pathways from business analyst to data scientist. For most graduates, entry-level work largely revolves around operational or back-office work. This includes reporting, compliance, and process support rather than strategic or analytical responsibilities. This shows the sector's broader career structure and its linearity, with a master's degree often serving as the gateway for better roles.

A basic understanding of economics and markets, interest rates, and broader economic trends is needed alongside technical skills in SQL, Python, Advanced Excel, Power BI, Tableau, R, SPSS, statistical methods (regression, forecasting, time-series analysis), and increasingly, AI tools. Typical work responsibilities include dashboards, economic models, executive presentations, SQL datasets, Python models, and legal or compliance document reviews. Soft skills are equally important, particularly stakeholder management, client communication, confidence, dynamism, initiative and a continuous willingness to unlearn and relearn.

With the above aspects established, career progression typically depends adaptability and confidence than qualifications alone. Once employed, problem-solving ability is weighted greater than certifications or institutional reputation, with promotions typically happening every three years based on performance. Findings from interviews indicate that this sector may not be suitable for those who prioritize public purpose over commercial outcomes, since they are likely to find it less meaningful.

Artifacts	Academic Core	Behavioural Core
• Dashboards • BAU and ad-hoc reports • Economic models • Regulatory analyses • Pitch decks • Executive presentations and recommendations	• Quantitative methods and statistics; data tools (Excel/BI/Python/SQL) • Economic modelling • Translating evidence into decisions • Applied problem-solving	• Adaptability • Continuous unlearning/relearning • Thinking on feet • Ownership and initiative • Client communication confidence

III. Policy sector:

The policy sector seeks out graduates who are able to conduct interdisciplinary research and understand complex evidence to translate into practical policy recommendations. We have identified the following abilities as essential in this sector: Policy writing, fieldwork experience, stakeholder engagement, and strong analytical abilities. Significantly, AI use is seen with caution in this sector. To be successful in this field, practical exposure to policymaking processes along with professional networks, and communication skills, aided with disciplinary knowledge is seen to be required.

Entry-level roles (e.g., Research Assistant, Research Associate, Fellow) follow a slow, apprenticeship-style trajectory. Early career professionals typically spend several years supporting senior researchers through data cleaning, administrative coordination, literature reviews, and report writing before being entrusted with independent research responsibilities. Salary structures and career progression vary considerably across organizational tiers as well as institutional models, wherein income sources and teamwork expectations wildly differ. Employers affirm this when speaking of entry-level salaries, which generally range from ₹5.4–8.4 LPA, with progression influenced by organizational funding models, specialization, and academic credentials. While some organizations offer comparatively higher starting salaries for candidates with advanced qualifications, long-term salary growth remains relatively modest compared to corporate sectors. Permanent positions are increasingly supplemented by project or grant-funded consultancy roles.

Regarding skills, disposition, and work outputs, both quantitative (SPSS, R, regression analysis) and qualitative (focus group discussions, interviews, case studies, surveys) and methodological competence are treated as baseline expectations and do not necessarily tip the scales in the hiring process. What does distinguish successful candidates from others are those who emphasize clear articulation and argumentation, particularly the ability to communicate evidence simply and effectively, while also able to develop logically structured arguments. This coupled with the ability to engage constructively with critique, without taking it personally is seen as a valued trait. Furthermore, discipline and attention to detail in research and writing with humility when engaging with evidence and critique is appreciated.

Successful candidates thereby tend to be self-driven, comfortable with ambiguity, patient with gradual institutional change and are motivated by policy or social impact. They are also described as resilient in environments where social science perspectives may compete with more technocratic approaches in the now globalized, digital age. AI is viewed cautiously. Interviewees also emphasized that they seek to distinguish between candidates on the basis of whether they are only capable of information retrieval or also possess genuine analytical understanding. Typical work outputs include scoping and literature reviews using established frameworks, grant proposals, project budgets, stakeholder maps, and self-initiated research publications.

Artifacts	Academic Core	Behavioural Core
• Consultation responses • Technical reports • Scoping/systematic reviews • Position papers • Policy briefs • Grant applications • Two writing samples	• Economics and quantitative literacy • Mixed-methods and review methodology • Evidence-based policy writing • Grant writing and operationalising theory into design	• Clear articulation and argumentation • Discipline and attention to detail • Intellectual humility • Collegiality • Political grounding • Resilience

IV. Market Research and Data

The market research and data sector is experiencing significant changes with the coming of automation and artificial intelligence. Graduates are required to interpret data, generate strategic insights, and communicate findings, in addition to performing routine analytical tasks. This sector puts equal emphasis on technical proficiency with analytical tools, research, commercial awareness, and the ability to present evidence to support the organisation's decision-making.

Entry-level roles (e.g., trainee, analyst, research support) are primarily observation- and execution-oriented, as described across interviews conducted with organizations spanning consulting firms, media and analytics companies, and consumer-facing enterprises. Early responsibilities span across fieldwork shadowing, data cleaning, questionnaire design, and survey administration and may progress to interpretation, strategic analysis, or client-facing work. Entry-level salaries typically range from ₹3–9 LPA, varying substantially across organizational tiers. Career progression depends less on years of experience in the traditional sense and more on demonstrated technical ability, initiative, and individual negotiation, with more substantial salary increases often occurring after three to four years. Interviewees also noted that career progression is highly malleable, open to different disciplinary entries into the sector, reflecting the sector's dynamic nature rather than a standardized junior-to-senior pathway.

In terms of skills, disposition, and outputs, superficial familiarity with multiple platforms is less valued than proficiency in at least one analytical tool (such as Advanced Excel, Power BI, Tableau, or SPSS) through which the candidate is able to navigate through problems and solutions. Employers also emphasize clear articulation and argumentation supported with substantial evidence. Given the nature of the field, while dealing with data and producing reliable outputs, keen attention to detail is important. Intellectual humility is especially valued when findings challenge initial assumptions/hypotheses and require further validation.

Being able to work with multiple people also shapes effective workplace performance, particularly when much of the work in the sector is done collaboratively. Interviewees emphasised the importance of entrants being able to navigate ambiguity, respond to setbacks, and possess a greater understanding of the broader social and institutional context in which research is conducted. This is necessary for motivation and a sense of fulfillment with work. Graduates are expected to be self-motivated as career progression is gradual in this sector. AI usage is expected to be done within pragmatic bounds, leveraging it to improve efficiency while consistently validating and crosschecking outputs.

Typical work products include interactive dashboards, client-ready analytical reports developed from raw datasets, recruitment and screening questionnaires, and hypothesis-generation exercises, many of which also feature in recruitment assessments

Artifacts	Academic Core	Behavioural Core
• Questionnaires and survey scripts • Clean data reports • Client presentations • Insights briefs • Competitive blueprints • Go-to-market playbooks	• Advanced Excel + BI tools • Applied statistics • Research methodology • Insight & hypothesis design • Commercial awareness	• Interpretive instinct • Attention to detail • Flexibility • Curiosity • Depth over breadth • Client storytelling

V. Civil Society and Development

The civil society and development sector requires graduates who can address social challenges through research, stakeholder engagement, and programme implementation. Alongside this, graduates need competencies in project management, monitoring and evaluation, donor reporting, and AI-assisted operational workflows. Through structured fieldwork, internships, and applied project experiences, social science graduates can be prepared for diverse responsibilities expected in this field.

The development and social sector offer a fragmented and largely unstructured entry path for fresh graduates, shaped by fieldwork, stakeholder engagement, and a strong orientation toward social purpose rather than immediate, measurable outcomes. Typical roles include Programme Associate, and Research Associate spanning programme management, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), donor reporting, and budgeting. In addition to fundamental tools such as MS Office and Google Workspace, the sector increasingly expects familiarity with Management Information Systems (MIS) platforms, CRMs, and AI-assisted workflow and data management tools, alongside sectorspecific competencies such as donor reporting systems and, at senior levels, construction and project management platforms (BIM, PMC tools) for delivery-focused roles.

Hiring is overwhelmingly concentrated at the Masters level; undergraduates typically enter through short-term internships, fellowships, etc., or roles of under a year, often undertaken as preparatory exposure before pursuing a Master's degree rather than as a terminal career step. Academic subject knowledge is explicitly de-prioritised in hiring decisions. Instead, employers prioritise demonstrated practical exposure through fieldwork, internships, and applied projects. This reinforces the need for universities to treat these as structured learning experiences rather than incidental add-ons, and to strengthen project management and M&E training so graduates can articulate the transferability of their experience.

Within these constraints, progression and sustaining a job depend heavily on dispositional fit rather than technical qualification alone. Employers consistently emphasise a motivation

to serve beyond personal advancement, “social maturity” in navigating diverse stakeholders, and the ability to build trust and demonstrate the value of one’s work through sustained relationship-building rather than credentials. Employers noted that candidates who are unwilling to subordinate individual preference to team processes struggle in these workspaces, regardless of ability.

The sector also appears structurally unsuited to graduates seeking rapid advancement or corporate-comparable compensation or career progression, typically offering only one or two levels of progression rather than the multi-tier structure found elsewhere. Entry-level pay is around ₹6 LPA (or ₹40–50k/month in better-resourced organisations), rising to roughly ₹12–15 LPA after four to five years. Candidates expecting either quick lateral mobility, or who demonstrate a pattern of frequent job changes, are seen as poor fits since consistency is explicitly valued.

Typical work outputs include annual work plans, monitoring frameworks, donor and audit reports, and data dashboards at the programme level; enrollment records, outreach reports, and participant databases at the community level; and strategic execution plans, decision-tracking systems, and executive presentations at senior levels. These suggest that competence in this sector is demonstrated through a documented history of field-based work and stakeholder-facing work, towards a purpose-oriented career trajectory.

According to interviewees, growth in the domain is thematic. Research has previously demonstrated that the development and social sector is defined by shifting thematic foci dependent on global policy goals and philanthropic funding patterns (Tamang, 2009). Interviewees affirmed this by noting that professional growth in this sector is defined by thematic specialisations. Climate change stands out as a particularly high-growth area, especially within CSOs and service-oriented organisations, whereas advocacy and rights-based organisations are seen as expanding more slowly. Other emerging areas include AI, data-driven research, and initiatives to foster entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Artifacts	Academic Core	Behavioural Core
• M&E frameworks • Work plans and budgets • Field and donor reports • Concept notes • Stakeholder maps • Dashboards	• Mixed-methods research • Basic statistics • PM frameworks • Budgeting and M&E • Proposal writing	• Empathy and people skills • Reading • Collaboration • Cross-cultural sensitivity • Mission commitment • Consistency

VI. GLAM

The GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums) sector demands professionals who can combine rigorous research with public engagement and knowledge dissemination. These are cultural institutions that are increasingly prioritizing accessibility and

interdisciplinarity. Hence, they seek graduates who can conduct research and possess skills such as communication, ideation, brainstorming, coordination, presentation, project management, and visual literacy, as well as basic technical skills, such as familiarity with MS Office applications. This sector has seen no changes in its hiring practices with the coming of AI.

The GLAM sector offers diverse opportunities for social science graduates across museums, archives, libraries, cultural organisations, and heritage institutions.

Galleries

Careers in galleries are typically based on curation, exhibitions, collections, public engagement, and creative programming. Job descriptions indicate that there are no specific degree requirements, but public communications, ability to do editorial work and interdisciplinary knowledge are highly valued. Entry-level opportunities include roles such as programme associate. Work requires developing, writing, maintaining, editing, coordinating, conducting, shaping, contributing, and documenting and technical skills such as familiarity with Google Workspace and MS Office. Typical work outputs include programme abstracts, open calls, festival copy, booklet content, programme content repository entries, annual and internal reports, and exhibition labels, captions, notes, readers, and reports.

Libraries

From the job descriptions, it is evident that the sector requires professionals who can manage information resources, support knowledge access, and maintain both physical and digital collections. Libraries are increasingly adopting digital repositories and information management systems. Hence, candidates must be aware of Integrated Library Management Systems (ILMS), Digital repository platforms such as Koha and DSpace and methodological skills such as Quantitative library fiscal auditing, cataloguing, academic search optimisation, and emerging educational technological assessment. This sector may require additional qualifications such as an M.Sc. in library and information science for some positions, such as Assistant Librarian. The outputs include library strategic plans, fiscal budgets, asset registers, formulated collection development policies, technological integration roadmaps, and digital library index logs.

Libraries

Archives are open to graduates from diverse academic backgrounds, including history, law, sociology, anthropology, and management, who can contribute to archival work. Employers seek qualities such as critical thinking, attention to detail, and an understanding of the social context of the records. Familiarity with conservation work and digital humanities tools and doing an archives course offered by the National Archives of India may also be beneficial. Entry-level work is mostly hands-on, including cataloguing, metadata creation, digitisation, conducting oral history interviews, exhibition research, donor liaison, and collection preservation. This sector is increasingly embracing digitisation, and familiarity with archival software such as Archives Space and DSpace is considered valuable. The salary for working at public archives starts from ₹65,000, and after 3-5 years, some benefits can be expected. For private organisations, salaries depend on the organisation.

Museums

Careers in museums combine operational, educational and curatorial responsibilities and offer opportunities in exhibitions, collections, public programmes, visitor engagement, publishing and administration. Entry-level roles include research assistants, junior coordinators, assistants to various departments, junior copywriters, and junior roles in the marketing, exhibition, and collections departments. Progression usually happens from junior to senior roles or through movement across departments. Employers seek qualities such as coordination, ideation, brainstorming, communication, and public speaking, as well as basic technical skills in Google Analytics and MS Office applications, particularly PowerPoint and Excel. Interviews highlighted that initiative and genuine interest in culture are rewarded.

Artifacts	Academic Core	Behavioural Core
• Newsletters • Website and social copy • Personal CV and portfolio • Exhibition labels and readers • Curation briefs • Finding aids and catalogues • Press releases	• Public-facing and editorial writing • A research portfolio • Cataloguing/metadata • Visual literacy • Project management • Digitization skills.	• Self-starting initiative • Institutional curiosity • Creativity • Attention to detail • Patience • Agentic offline networking

VII. Media and Communication

The media sector is undergoing rapid transformation driven by digital platforms, audience analytics, and artificial intelligence. While technical skills such as content production skills remain important, employers are seeking graduates who can critically engage with diverse audiences from several political and cultural backgrounds. Since social science courses typically train students to develop these competencies, they are relevant to this sector. However, social science degrees are often not mentioned as requirements in job descriptions.

Based on job descriptions and interviews, the sector has no specific degree requirements, and roles are open to candidates regardless of academic background. Entry-level roles largely depend upon the organisation, and most people enter either as a trainee producer or reporter. Most roles are open to fresh graduates unless seniority is explicitly required. Employers seek skills such as written and spoken communication, reporting and interviewing, research and fact-checking, basic AI literacy and coding, CRM (Consumer Relationship Management), ability to work with design tools, PR tools, and monitoring tools, and the ability to produce content in multiple formats.

Furthermore, qualities such as curiosity, ethical judgement, persistence, storytelling, creativity, stakeholder management, adaptability, and building trust are valued. Although some welcome the use of AI, others oppose it, as it can lead to dishonesty and outsourcing thinking. Career progression depends on experience, networking, and reputation. Salaries for entry-level roles range from ₹3 to ₹4.8 LPA, and financial stability is achieved only after several years in the profession.

Typical outputs include news articles, multimedia reports, social media campaigns, video content, brand channel content, press releases, audience engagement metrics, PR integration outputs, and policy-oriented or investigative stories.

Artifacts	Academic Core	Behavioural Core
• Articles and news copy • Video and reels • Multimedia pieces • Campaign content • Brand narratives • Newsletters	• Social-science grounding (over a journalism degree) • Clear newswriting • Reporting and factchecking • Multimedia production • Audience analysis • Media ethics • AI literacy.	• Curiosity • People-reading and trust • Persistence • Ethical judgement • Versatility • Networking • A daily reading habit.

VIII. Academia and Research

The academic and research sectors require graduates who can conduct rigorous research, communicate complex ideas, and contribute to teaching, knowledge creation, and scholarly publishing. The employers in this sector seek strong analytical abilities, academic writing, research methodology, and critical thinking. Familiarity with digital research tools and data analysis are appreciated but the ethics of AI use are questioned. To have a successful career in academia and research, candidates must combine a commitment to continuous learning, intellectual curiosity, practical research experience, and effective communication.

Degree requirements for a teaching or research path range from a Master's to PhD, and experience requirements range from 0 to 15 years, depending on the job title. On the other hand, for academic publishing jobs, there are no requirements for specific undergraduate major specialisations; what matters is an aptitude for close reading, theoretical interpretation, motivation, and attention to detail, along with baseline familiarity with MS Office and project management tools. Within the former, roles open to fresh bachelor's graduates are application-focused, like data collection/market research work, teaching or research assistantships, and art instruction. Tenure-track roles require a Master's or PhD. This reflects the sector's career structure, where credentialing and publication record are gateways to tenure-track or long-term research roles. Entry-level pay is geography-dependent: roughly ₹3–5 LPA in India.

Alongside domain-specific technical skills such as statistical software (SPSS, STATA), geospatial and survey tools, lab techniques such as qPCR and bioassays, nearly all roles expect proficiency in MS Office/Google Workspace and presentation software. They also require the ability to translate complex research into accessible forms for both expert and lay audiences for teaching, conferences, job interviews, etc. Soft skills were also emphasised upon including intrinsic motivation and genuine curiosity. These sustain researchers through uncertainty since recognition in research is rarely immediate or guaranteed. Thus, tenacity and openness to criticism are an essential given that rejection is described as the field's “standard outcome”. Intellectual humility and proof of navigating team-based work are valued hiring signals, partly to counter an existing bias against the perceived Gen Z work ethic. Typical work outputs vary according to specific tracks within the academic and research sector. This includes, but is not limited to, research papers, policy briefs, grant applications, fieldwork findings in policy/development research; survey instruments, RCT and coding logs, policy drafts in applied economics research; lesson plans, curriculum, student assessment reports in teaching-facing roles; and product evaluations, test results, or portfolio-based creative work. Academic publishing has its own structured career path: entry-level roles typically involve managing author communications, coordinating submissions and reviews, and supporting editorial, sales, and open-access teams, etc.

Environment and climate, health, and AI ethics are notable emerging areas in the domain overall, with interviewees emphasising a contracting academic job market and the importance of staying informed and adaptable.

Artifacts	Academic Core	Behavioural Core
• Research and conference papers • Edited volumes • Curriculum and session plans • Grant applications • Abstracts • Literature reviews • Rubrics • Op-eds	• Critical reading and sharp critique • Academic and publicfacing writing • Research methods • Data analysis and visualisation • Citation rigour • Currency with the literature	• Intellectual humility • Tenacity • Openness to criticism • Intrinsic motivation • Self-direction • Work ethic

Takeaways and Recommendations from Student Authors

I. General reflections

- We realized that the skills and knowledge we have gained through social sciences education are valuable across sectors but for it to translate to employability, we must be able to demonstrate them through artefacts.
- We also realised that career pathways are rarely linear. While this was something we had heard before, it was different to consciously register what that truly meant through these conversations, especially in a society that often treats failure as something final rather than as part of a career journey.
- An understanding of social sciences as a field seemed to not be present. We realized the vast difference that exists between speaking to people within the social sciences and those outside them, as our questions were often found to be interpreted, particularly by corporate professionals through the lens of their own careers, with discussions centering around economics rather than the broader social sciences.
- Through working on analyses of JDs, we learnt that a wide range of roles are available to students of the social sciences. We realised through this exercise that employability is not limited to one defined career path but extends across sectors in ways that are not always immediately obvious.
- We realised that fulfilment did not always equate to a higher salary, and that different career paths involve different trade-offs in terms of values, work culture, and purpose. Aligning our aspirations with the nature of the work can lead to more informed career decisions.

II. Reflections on skills

- While we expected technical competencies to dominate the interviews, employers consistently returned to qualities such as intellectual humility, reliability, and the capacity to adapt.
- We realised that certain qualities are considered more important for a job than a specific degree, and that reading and basic technical competencies in addition to basic mathematical skills and data analysis, including MS Office and Google Workspace, are regarded as important in all sectors.
- While AI needs to be learned, it should be used mindfully. Moreover, that AI is now regarded as a baseline expectation rather than an additional advantage with employers seeking applicants who understand what it can and cannot do.

III. Methodological reflections

- We had to often reframe our questions, probe further be done, halt a line of questioning when it was not yielding information. We ultimately realised that being dynamic and adaptable during interviews was very important.
- Working through different sources also made us aware of contradictions arising in the results. What was often emphasised in the job descriptions was completely different from the skills and dispositions valued and discussed by the interviewees. We understood that much of the work involved in this research consists of bringing diverse findings from different sources together to form a complete picture.

IV. Recommendations to peers

1. How to build a portfolio

- Maintain a portfolio and CV regularly. Do not forget the "little" things, such as projects, presentations, internships, workshops, volunteer work, and others, that become genuine artefacts.
- Do not rush through assignments merely to meet submission deadlines, as the work done now can become tangible evidence of their abilities and skills later.
- CV is often only a starting point for negotiating salary brackets. Securing a position depends on demonstrating how one has applied relevant skills in assignments, projects, presentations, etc., to provide more reliable evidence of their abilities.

2. Be intentional in your learning

- Remaining a learner being perhaps one of the most important ways to build a sustainable and evolving career.
- Learn software and digital skills since these are becoming baseline expectations across almost every sector. They are much easier to build gradually than to learn hurriedly before placements or applications.
- Students should also learn at least one coding language or develop advanced Excel skills, as even within public policy, a reasonable degree of comfort with numbers, data interpretation, and quantitative findings is increasingly important.
- Cultivate a multidisciplinary mindset, drawing on the benefit of the double-major course's focus on more than one subject, its emphasis on making unexpected connections, from matters of everyday concern to abstract theories discussed in class. This form of lateral thinking which is being distinctly encouraged in the course and highly valued in public policy, think tanks, market research, and data-related fields.

3. Reading and Writing are still important

- Take reading and writing seriously, as almost every interview emphasised their importance. Practise writing clearly, as these habits shape not only how you communicate but also how you think.

- Read beyond the coursework and, where possible, find opportunities to discuss readings with others. Conversations often deepen understanding in ways that solitary reading cannot.

4. AI needs careful handling

- Understand what AI can and cannot do reliably.
- Learn how to write effective prompts, as the quality of the output often depends on the quality of the question.

5. Be open to feedback and conversations

- Value offline networking as conversations with people, exposure to different perspectives help one remain informed, adaptable, and open to learning throughout your journey
- Do not take feedback personally. This came up repeatedly, particularly in academia, where criticism is part of the process rather than a judgement of oneself.

6. Craft long-term goals and build your learning journey accordingly

- Recognise that a master's degree is increasingly becoming a requirement for higherlevel analyst roles in consulting and public policy, and that those entering the workforce after a bachelor's degree should expect operational or back-office roles to serve as stepping stones, with internships also providing valuable exposure and work experience.
- Shed any stigma or fear attached to pursuing research, academia, the corporate sector, or any other career path. Instead focus on introspection and choosing a path that aligns with your values.
- Keep long-term goals in mind and think intentionally about how the degree shapes your career prospects and how your career interests shape the way you approach your degree. Recognising the relationship between the two can help create a more focused and meaningful academic and professional path.

Way Forward: Pedagogical Practices within Social Sciences

Joyeeta Dey

I. Assignments as portfolio building

A recurring finding throughout the report is that employers are looking for evidence of students' ability to create real-world artefacts such as policy briefs, social media advocacy materials, and interview questionnaires, rather than mere claims in CVs and transcripts. This shows that there is a need for assignments that require students to create such artefacts and for students to become comfortable with professional formats such as a viva, a presentation, a video abstract, etc.

It is equally important that the students are trained in what goes into making these artefacts, such as choosing the right artefact for a task, incorporating feedback, and submitting well-produced work on schedule. Some assignments can also develop over the semester through multiple stages and rounds of feedback, and marks can be allocated based on the effective implementation of that feedback.

Further, process documentation, positionality statements, and reflective accounts could be incorporated into research group projects to enable metacognition about work, and assessment rubrics could recognise timely submission, adherence to instructions, accuracy, and attention to detail.

II. Strengthening the core capacities to write and communicate

In the age of AI, employers continue to place a premium on written communication (academic and public-facing), oral, interpersonal, and visual forms. Therefore, the university must focus on providing individualised attention and feedback on writing, protecting individual voice, developing collaborative understanding through discussion, structured listening, and ethical engagement in interactions.

To deepen visual literacy engagement, visual media in the form of photographs, posters, maps, infographics, videos, and data interpretation must be incorporated into the courses, and the faculty must explain the purpose, conventions, value, and limitations of each form.

III. Reimagining foundational skills in social sciences

Some specific skills and knowledge that seem to have cross-domain purchase, such as mixedmethod research and source evaluation, Excel and statistical software, data visualisation, digital storytelling, project management and AI literacy. These can be taught as compulsory courses for social science students.

IV. Investing in building dispositions

A clear takeaway from the study is the significance of emotional skills such as resilience, adaptability, collaboration, conflict resolution, and negotiation, which can make students desirable to employers. This can be done by providing a foundational module early in the undergraduate programme to understand these qualities and can subsequently be pursued throughout the undergraduate programme through regular group work.

V. Teaching action

It can also be seen that the employers value both critical thinking and strategic capacity to translate analysis into action. Therefore, simulations and case studies must be incorporated into teaching, assignments, and examinations. These activities help students in critical analysis and pragmatic action. A shared repository of contemporary cases must be created for this purpose, and this ability must be evaluated through assignments and research projects.

Moreover, the ability to navigate the real world can be developed through university processes such as internships, a short course in fieldwork, and community engagement. Additionally, inhouse opportunities such as teaching, editorial, and research assistantships must be created to gain work experience.

VI. The contemporary world in syllabi

Since employers value intellectual curiosity, awareness of current developments, and independent learning, departments can develop resource lists of newsletters, magazines, podcasts, and other publications for use in classroom discussions, and encourage students to read beyond the syllabus and undertake online courses.

Partnerships and guest sessions must be organised to expose students to emerging trends, workplace expectations, and realistic career pathways. Finally, universities must take an incremental approach to implement these insights to prevent unnecessary repetition, distribute responsibilities across courses and avoid placing excessive demands on students and staff.

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ABOUT THE REPORT

Career Pathways for Social Science Graduates: A Cross Sectoral Survey explores the employment opportunities for social science graduates in sectors such as academia and research, media, GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums), corporate, market research and data, government and public sector, public policy, civil societies, and think tanks.

The study seeks to understand the qualities and skills expected of a candidate during the hiring process and work culture, salaries, responsibilities, etc., for the fresh graduates, the changes in hiring practices with the coming of AI, and the changes in the curriculum to increase employability.

Department of Social Sciences,
Manipal Institute of Liberal Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences,
Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal, India

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