

LETTERS *from Santa Fe*

St. John's College—Santa Fe, New Mexico

Spring 1993



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"BUT WHAT WILL I DO WITH IT?" OR, BUSINESS AND LIBERAL EDUCATION

I once read how the colony of Virginia asked the British Crown for authority to begin a college in the New World in hopes that a proper education might help save souls. The response was blunt—"Souls? Damn your souls. Raise tobacco!"

We have never been, it would seem, without the conflict of making a living on one side and liberal learning on the other. But, today, the situation might well be more extreme than in the past. As I mentioned in a previous edition of this newsletter, probably no more than 15 to 20 percent of all college students today are concentrating on the liberal arts or some area of the liberal arts, and the percentage decreases each year.

Let me flirt with heresy for a second and say that surely worse things have happened in the world, even in the world of higher education. Professional schools and pre-professional courses have improved immensely over the years. They offer challenges to the intellect and often broaden rather than constrict a person's horizons. Many times they offer the rigor and richness once found in liberal education. And they are increasingly attracting the better students.

Conversely, liberal education today, in many places, is a pretty sad affair. Little rigor, much politics, and scarcely a view of what excellence or even "well-roundedness" might be. Today liberal education is not often the formation of penetrating minds and the cultivation of high character (much less the saving of souls). Far too many institutions have abandoned the broad sweep of general education requirements in important fields of knowledge and substituted choice for sequence, aimlessness for rigor, and boutique courses for difficult fields such as mathematics and science. An a la carte curriculum is not liberal education. Liberal education is, we forget, the polar opposite of dilettantism, unfocused electives and groundlessness.

What I have tried to do in this issue, besides my usual moaning about the condition of the world, is *not* to show that a professional education is bad but that it is not nearly as useful either to a career or to life as a good liberal education. I simply wanted to re-present the old view that a solid liberal arts background is good in itself and, in an age when most people will change jobs eight or nine times before they die, good for the more practical parts of life, too.

Sincerely,

John Agresto

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LETTERS from Santa Fe
A newsletter on higher education.
Published quarterly at St. John's College, Santa Fe
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FROM

THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY

DISCOURSE VII: "KNOWLEDGE
VIEWED IN RELATION TO
PROFESSIONAL SKILL"

by
John Henry Cardinal Newman

◆ We know, not by a direct and simple vision, not at a glance, but, as it were, by piecemeal and accumulation, by a mental process, by going round an object, by the comparison, the combination, the mutual correction, the continual adaptation, of many partial notions. . . . Such a union and concert of the intellectual powers, such an enlargement and development, such a comprehensiveness, is necessarily a matter of training. But, such a training . . . is not mere application, however exemplary, which introduces the mind to truth, nor the reading many books, nor the getting up many subjects, nor the witnessing many experiments, nor the attending many lectures. All this is short of enough; a man may have done it all, yet be lingering in the vestibule of knowledge: he may not realize what his mouth utters; he may not see with his mental eye what confronts him; he may have no grasp of things as they are; or at least he may have no power at all of advancing one step forward of himself, in consequence of what he has already acquired, no power of discriminating between truth and falsehood, of sifting out the grains of truth from the mass, of arranging

things according to their real value, and, if I may use the phrase, of building up ideas The bodily eye, the organ for apprehending material objects, is provided by nature; the eye of the mind, of which the object is truth, is the work of discipline and habit.

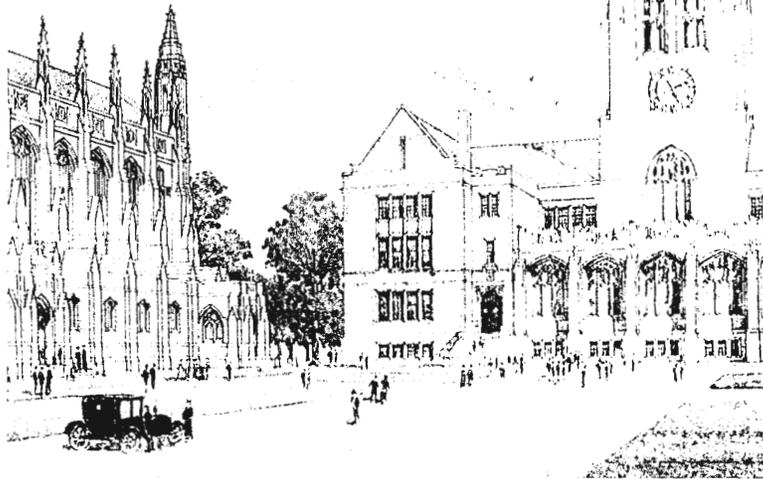
This process of training, by which the intellect, instead of being formed or sacrificed to some particular or accidental purpose, some specific trade or profession, or study of science, is disciplined for its own sake, for the perception of its own proper object, and for its own highest culture, is called liberal education. . . .

◆ Now. . . some great men . . . insist that education should be confined to some particular and narrow end, and should issue in some definite work, which can be weighed and measured. "Useful" and "utility" becomes their watchword. They very naturally go on to ask what there is to show for the expense of a university; what is the real worth in the market of the article called "a liberal education."

◆ "Tis matter of astonishment," Locke says in his work on education, "that men of quality and parts should suffer themselves to be so far misled by custom and implicit faith. Reason, if consulted with, would advise that their children's time should be spent in acquiring what might be *useful* to them, when they come to be men, rather than that their heads should be stuffed with a deal of trash, a great part whereof they usually never do ('tis certain they never need to) think on again as long as they live; and so much of it as does stick by them they are only the worse for."

In another passage he distinctly limits utility in education to its bearing on the future profession or trade of the pupil, that is, he scorns the idea of any education of the intellect, simply as such. "Can there be any thing more ridiculous," he asks, "than that a father should waste his own money, and his son's time, in setting him to learn the Roman language, when at the same time he designs him for a trade, wherein he, having no use of Latin, fails not to forget that little which he brought from school, and which 'tis ten to one he abhors for the ill-usage it procured him? Could it be believed, unless we have every where amongst us examples of it, that a child should be forced to learn the rudiments of a language, which he is never to use in the course of life that he is designed to, and neglect all the while the writing a good hand, and casting accounts, which are of great advantage in all conditions of life, and to most trades indispensably necessary?"

Nothing of course can be more absurd than to neglect in education those matters which are necessary for a boy's future calling; but the tone of Locke's remarks evidently implies more than this, and is condemnatory of any teaching which tends to the general cultivation of the mind.



Nevertheless, if a liberal education consists in the culture of the intellect, and if that culture be in itself a good, here, without going further, is an answer to Locke's question; for if a healthy body is a good in itself, why is not a healthy intellect?

◆ Let us take "useful" to mean, not what is simply good, but what tends to good, or is the instrument of

good; and in this sense . . . I will show you how a liberal education is truly and fully a useful, though it be not a professional, education. I lay it down as a principle, which will save us a great deal of anxiety, that, though the useful is not always good, the good is always useful. I say then, if a liberal education be good, it must necessarily be useful too.

◆ Health is a good in itself, though nothing came of it, yet . . . we never think of it except as useful as well as good, though at the same time we cannot point out any definite and distinct work or production which it can be said to effect. And so as regards intellectual culture. . . . I only deny that we must be able to point out, before we have any right to call it useful, some art, or business, or profession, or trade, or work, as resulting from it. . . . On the other hand, as the body may be tended, cherished, and exercised with a simple view to its general health, so may the intellect also be generally exercised in order to perfect its state; and this is its cultivation.

As a man in health can do what an unhealthy man cannot do . . . so in like manner general culture of mind is the best aid to professional and scientific study, and educated men can do what illiterate cannot; and the man who has learned to think and to reason and to compare and to discriminate and to analyze, who has refined his taste, and formed his judgment, and sharpened his mental vision, will not indeed at once be a lawyer, or a pleader, or an orator, or a statesman, or a physician, or a good landlord, or a man of business, or a soldier, or an engineer, or a

chemist, or a geologist, or an antiquarian, but he will be placed in that state of intellect in which he can take up any one of the sciences or callings I have referred to, or any other for which he has a taste or special talent, with an ease, a grace, a versatility, and a success, to which another is a stranger. In this sense then . . . mental culture is emphatically *useful*.

This then is how I should solve the fallacy, for so I must call it, by which Locke and his disciples would frighten us from cultivating the intellect, under the notion that no education is useful which does not teach us some temporal calling, or some mechanical art, or some physical secret. I say that a cultivated intellect, because it is a good in itself, brings with it a power and a grace to every work and occupation which it undertakes, and enables us to be more useful, and to a greater number.

◆ I have confined myself to saying that that training of the intellect, which is best for the individual himself, best enables him to discharge his duties to society.

If then a practical end must be assigned to a university course, I say it is that of training good members of society. It does not promise a generation of Aristotles or Newtons, of Napoleons or Washingtons, of Raphaels or Shakespeares, though such miracles of nature it has before now contained within its precincts. Nor is it content on the other hand with forming the critic or the experimentalist, the economist or the engineer, though such too it includes within its scope. But a university training is the great ordinary means to a great but ordinary end; it aims at raising the

intellectual tone of society, at cultivating the public mind, at purifying the national taste, at supplying true principles to popular enthusiasm and fixed aims to popular aspiration, at giving enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, at facilitating the exercise of political power, and refining the intercourse of private life.

It is the education which gives a man a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them. It teaches him to see things as they are, to go right to the point, to disentangle a skein of thought, to detect what is sophistical, and to discard what is irrelevant. It prepares him to fill any post with credit, and to master any subject with facility. It shows him how to accommodate himself to others, how to throw himself into their state of mind, how to bring before them his own, how to influence them, how to come to an understanding with them, how to bear with them. He is at home in any society, he has common ground with every class; he knows when to speak and when to be silent; he is able to converse, he is able to listen; he can ask a question pertinently, and gain a lesson seasonably, when he has nothing to impart himself; he is ever ready, yet never in the way; he is a pleasant companion, and a comrade you can depend upon; he knows when to be serious and when to trifle, and he has a sure tact which enables him to trifle with gracefulness and to be serious with effect. He has the repose of a mind which lives in itself, while it lives in the world, and which has resources for its happiness at home when it cannot go abroad. He has a gift

which serves him in public, and supports him in retirement, without which good fortune is but vulgar, and with which failure and disappointment have a charm.

The art which tends to make a man all this is in the object which it pursues as useful as the art of wealth or the art of health, though it is less susceptible of method, and less tangible, less certain, less complete in its result.

CHARTING A COURSE FOR

LIBERAL EDUCATION

by
Paul R. Verkuil

A defense of the liberal arts based on "relevancy" is always problematic. As a practical matter, career decisions are increasingly being made by students at the time they choose to attend a university and certainly by the time they select a field of concentration in their second year. When the career benefits of a liberal arts degree are obscured, students tend to select disciplines that have higher immediate returns and ignore the needs both they and the business community have for more satisfying and expansive educational programs.

The gift society offers our educated youth of today is the freedom to choose various life paths, . . . yet the pressure to choose seems, ironically, to narrow the range of options. A liberal education preserves options while at the same time providing the tools and the time to select intelligently among them. In the corporate world of today, where job qualifications and opportunities change with disturbing frequency, the broadest kind of educational preparation will often prove to be the most practical.

But if this is so, why are the liberal arts in jeopardy within the corporate hiring structure? I take it that corporations are undervaluing liberal education in the search for graduates with technical and business skills that may be relevant

only in the short run. Solid grounding in the arts, sciences and languages is overlooked and the long-run goal of globally competitive corporate leadership is jeopardized. In this sense then the injury done the "corporations at risk" appears primarily to be a self-inflicted one. If top management would just send different signals to the hiring committees, the problem should disappear. But of course, it is not that easy.

Liberal education bears some responsibility for the state we find ourselves in. And I say this as president of an institution committed to liberal arts and sciences which just graduated a class dominated by students of like mind. The burden of liberal education has to be that it prepares students not for a vocation, but for life. We do not try to anticipate and teach to narrow specialties. We take instead a broad view of education and teach for the ages; we value the past as a guide to the future.

That is a noble objective, but it does not always withstand scrutiny. During the last decade, many colleges compromised the conditions under which a liberal education best operates. Academic permissiveness encouraged students to design their own curriculums. This approach compromised the breadth of liberal education in two respects, both of which impact upon the business community. Left on their own, students often de-emphasized the demanding sciences aspect of liberal education in favor of more congenial humanities and social sciences programs. As the essence of analytical thought is the scientific method, we have been derelict in not requiring of students that they be conversant with both arts and

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sciences in defining a liberal education. Today colleges have largely backed off from this self-directed course selection era (indeed some of us never entered it) and that should help bring business recruiters back to the liberal arts graduates.

A related and no less critical oversight at many colleges has been a de-emphasis on foreign languages and a crippling of international studies. It is now obvious that our corporations deal in global markets and are at an increasing disadvantage vis-a-vis foreign business in terms of qualified multi-cultural personnel. One cannot correct this imbalance with quick fix language study just before executives are sent abroad. A total educational approach to the country and region involved is the best method for achieving an educated and culturally sensitive business elite. Area studies programs that deal on an interdisciplinary basis with language, literature and culture of a given region are ideal laboratories for producing Americans for the world business stage. Fortunately, there is a revival of language requirements on many campuses and this should lead to greater interest in area studies A mutual obligation arises: Universities must insure that liberal education lives up to its credo of depth and breadth; corporate sector hiring must recognize and act on the values inherent in such long-term educational preparation.



Henry Adams spent much of his life berating the backward-looking education he received at Harvard College. In the 19th century as today, Adams saw technology overtaking established thought. He was

deeply troubled about the degree to which society was unprepared for dealing with new energies released through scientific discovery. Yet, while he enthusiastically criticized his own education, in the final analysis Adam's message was not that university education could anticipate and solve all the problems of new technology, but that it took a lifetime of learning and study to do so. In fact in the *Education of Henry Adams*, Adams criticizes his college experience in an oddly complimentary way: "Harvard College, as far as it educated at all, was a mild and liberal school which sent young men into the world with all they needed to make respectable citizens, and something of what they wanted to make useful men."

I take comfort from Adam's observation because it implicitly recognizes that colleges can never expect to satisfy demands for fully educating our leaders. Of course we should strive to emphasize usefulness over respectability wherever possible. Ultimately, however, the liberal arts offers an appreciation of how much there is to know in life and the desire and means for beginning the quest. It offers insights into how persons of consequence, like Adams himself, lived their lives and it encourages others to follow in their path.

This article is taken from a longer paper delivered by Paul Verkuil, president and CEO of AAA and former president of William and Mary, to the Corporate Council on the Liberal Arts.

I make free

men out of

children

by means

of books

and a

balance.

*Taken from the
St. John's College Seal*

by
Nannerl O. Keohane

Are liberal arts colleges and universities these days deluding ourselves and our students, their parents and their employers, about how well our graduates are prepared for what they do when they leave our ivy halls?

We think not. In fact, we are convinced, now more than ever, that a liberal arts education is the best possible preparation for the leaders of the future, including the entrepreneurs and corporate CEOs as well as the scientists and the lawyers, the artists and the politicians. How do we support this claim?

THE VALUE OF LIBERAL LEARNING

I would begin by arguing that a good liberal arts education is not a dress rehearsal for anything: it is reality, a reality that involves maturing intellectually and personally, developing crucial skills. The real world lives in our libraries and laboratories and dormitories, as real a world as any we know.

The virtue of the ivory tower metaphor, of course, is that it does convey something precious (in the non-derogatory meaning of that word) in what we are all about. We do offer some shelter from the relentless pressures of making an immediate livelihood and responding to the requirements of a profession or

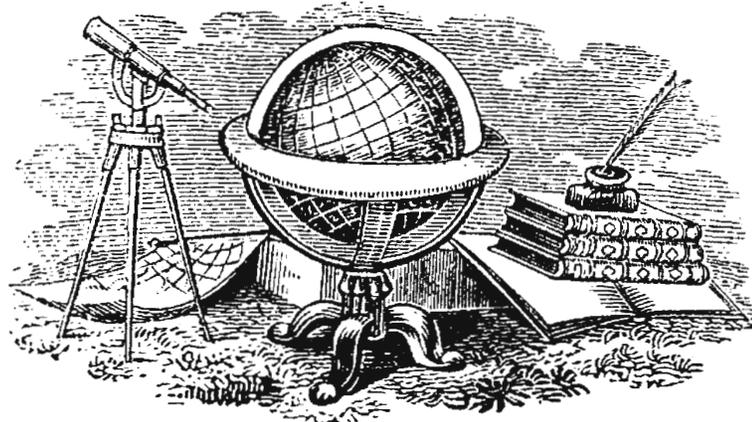
an employer. We offer time and space for thinking, for discussion, for roaming through the ages and across the world on voyages of discovery.

As Alice Freeman Palmer, President of Wellesley said in 1897: "We go to college to know, assured that knowledge is sweet and powerful, that a good education emancipates the mind and makes us citizens of the world."

Such stock elements in our social rhetoric, however bracing such rhetoric may be, are not however likely to convince the pragmatist who asks us what is the *use* of it all. To answer such challenges, to convince the skeptical parent or employer of the worth of what we do, we must show how a liberal arts education makes a difference in

will evolve and alter overnight. It will be more and more a world shaped by human handiwork and accessible to technological restructuring. Today we have, compared with even a few years ago, a vastly increased capacity to transform the features of the globe, to touch the universe. Our tools of measurement and memory and control are powerful beyond the imagination of our predecessors, and extended every moment.

In such a world, the ability to participate with some degree of comprehension, and even more to share in *shaping* the continuing flux and change, will depend on knowledge of general principles, on habits, on analysis, and on suppleness of mind. Liberal learning gives one the critical capacity for distance, for



one's ability to work effectively—and more than work, to manage and to change—in the world of the future.

Among the few things we can safely say about our future is that it will be a time of accelerating flux and change. The world our children will inhabit is virtually certain to be a world in which skills and instruments and ways of doing things

assessment, for stepping back and making judgments, for comparing what one sees before one with things of other times and places, for getting a perspective on the world. These are crucial attributes for anyone who sets out to master new complex phenomena, to make lasting and productive changes.

In the world that we can forecast for our children, anyone who lacks

such broad-based training, who is narrowly educated in specific technical skills of any kind, will become obsolescent almost overnight. Any immediate advantage that such a graduate will have in fitting into a new job will shortly be wiped out—and then forever lost—against the adaptive skills of someone who has been taught how to learn, where to go for answers, how to judge the answers that are given, and how to understand and communicate ideas.

This is our tremendous utilitarian advantage over any trade school, any narrow professional or pre-professional education: We teach people how to learn, and thus ensure them against the fate of obsolescence. Their future employers will not have to spend good time and money in perpetually retraining them as skills change, nor will they be so likely to be out of a job because the world has passed them by.

Liberal learning delights in equipping students for an array of possible futures, for the individual and for society. In doing so, a liberal education makes several futures possible, and gives liberally educated people an edge in determining which of those futures will come to be.

WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT WHAT WE DO?

One of my favorite responses to this question hinges on the double meaning of the phrase itself: a liberal education. On the one hand, a liberal education was designed for free persons, not slaves or helots—people (originally, of course, men) of free birth who were expected to have some responsibilities of public

service and some standing within their communities. In order to prepare such people well to lead such lives, a liberal education was required to instill in them the core values of their society, rooting them in history and culture, to make sure they understood and respected ancient truths and carried on worthy traditions.

The second meaning of a liberal education, however, stands diametrically opposed to this: the liberation of the mind, freeing the student from unexamined assumptions, opening horizons from narrow parochialism onto the wide, wide world. In order to accomplish this second part of its purpose, liberal learning needs to reward quite different habits of mind from those promoted by the first: a tolerance for ambiguity and complexity, an ability to be at ease with suspended judgment when closure would be premature.

When liberal learning works as it is intended to work, these two diametrically opposed meanings move in, against and through each other in a true dialectic—a dialogue, a synthesis, a play between opposites to capture the best of both in a truer whole. The juxtaposition of familiarity with the classics of the human mind, with a penchant for creativity and critical originality, creates the distinctive strength of a liberal education.

The good teacher imparts both a respect for the given, for the reasons for what is, and also a healthy skepticism and habit of continuing inquiry. The former is at least as difficult as the latter, for simply parroting old truths is not liberal learning; the student must be inside those truths, must take them on, adapt them, make them his own.

In a community devoted to liberal learning, in the interplay of teacher and student, in the mind of every scholar, there should be a fruitful tension of positive and negative: a respect for the ceremonies, a willingness to follow rituals and fall in line with tradition—but also a questioning and questing spirit that never lets itself become wholly absorbed in anything that is.

Nannerl Keohane, newly appointed president of Duke University, delivered a longer version of this article at a conference "Corporations at Risk: Liberal Learning and Private Enterprise."

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LIBERAL EDUCATION:

PREPARING TOMORROW'S

BUSINESS EXECUTIVES

by

Peter A. Benoliel

Plain and simple, a liberal education, is the optimal vehicle in undergraduate years for preparing for a business management career. I speak not as an academician but rather as a practicing executive who contends daily with the many-faceted challenges of business, utilizing many of the techniques and disciplines taught in business schools.

The latter remark introduces a concept which I think we continue to lose sight of in assessing the role of educational institutions, namely, the distinction between education and training. It appears to me that the great bulk of what is today called education is really training, whether it be in specific professional disciplines such as engineering, medicine and the law, or in more prosaic but no less necessary vocational training.

In no way do I wish to demean or minimize the importance of training or the role of educational institutions in providing it. My immediate point is that the majority of our students complete their undergraduate years under the misconception of being educated, when in reality they are undergoing sophisticated training. This brings me to my central point, which is that the undergraduate years of a

student, especially if that student wishes a career in business management, would most profitably be spent *not* in taking business courses leading to a degree but rather in undergoing a liberal educational experience.

It then becomes incumbent upon me not only to define what I mean by a liberal education but to enumerate those qualities, characteristics and skills that may be necessary for a fulfilling career in business management. I must further make a distinction between those characteristics which for the most part are innate and those which are acquired. Understand, please, that in describing characteristics, I am thinking of those individuals who will rise above middle management into levels of top responsibility.

Necessary Innate Characteristics

1. High degree of intelligence—intellectual curiosity
2. Creativity
3. Goal orientation
4. High energy—drive
5. Leadership capabilities—inter-personal skills.

Acquired Characteristics

1. Problem solving—analytical skills
2. Synthesis capabilities—ability to relate seemingly disparate factors into a meaningful whole
3. Perspective—ability to maintain a balanced consideration of factors—an overview
4. Critical judgment—in part, a synthesis of the three preceding characteristics
5. Specific skills acquired through on-the-job training supplemented by formalized modes of instruction, including school courses, seminars, reading:

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Technical—Engineering,
Scientific
Financial
Legal
Marketing
Manufacturing—
Production
Behavioral Sciences

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The above is not an all-inclusive list, and there are areas where no sharp distinction can be made between those characteristics acquired and those innate. Further, it may legitimately be doubted whether the specific skills I have enumerated can be acquired on the basis suggested. I differ, and will endeavor to explain why by submitting my concept of a liberal education.

My ideal student would have exposure to the natural sciences, engineering, and/or mathematics, with in-depth study in some specific area. This should comprise at least 25 percent of a student's undergraduate activity. Such a student should also have an introductory exposure to the social sciences, and this area of activity might occupy as much as fifteen percent of his time. The balance, and certainly no less than half of the student's activity, should be in the humanistic studies, with in-depth involvement in at least one area. I recognize that in any such educational process there are certain elements of training as distinct from education. In my experience, these can be minimal, and the emphasis should be on a Socratic, dialectical approach.

Hopefully, it is not necessary to paint the picture in full to see that such an educational experience is almost precisely designed to develop more fully the innate characteristics I previously cited as needful for a manager, as well as enabling that

individual to acquire the aforementioned skills of analysis, synthesis, perception and critical judgment. To put it another way, I strongly contend that such a program, designed as it is to expose a person to the achievements—scientific, technical, political, social, philosophical and artistic—of great minds past and present, will nurture the heart and mind of the student, so as to incite to fever pitch his curiosity, increase his ability to assimilate new ideas and skills, nurture and sensitize his spiritual, moral and aesthetic sensibilities, and promote the self-generation of perspective and overview. In short, develop the critical and analytical faculties without dulling that individual's vision.

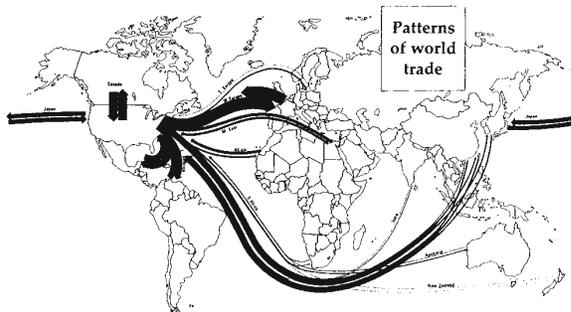
Now it may be fairly asked how, in fact, such an individual with no specific skills is able to enter the job market. I would submit that, at entry level, any management or professional position (the law and medicine excepted) requires very little in the way of skills that such an individual would not have or could not readily acquire. I speak of positions ordinarily filled by newly graduated engineers, scientists and holders of degrees in business. An honest appraisal of starting positions would show that they demand very little in the way of technical knowledge that the individual would not already possess or could not acquire on the job, supplemented by study.

I contend that merely to train an individual as a mechanical engineer, as a chemist, or in business is to unnecessarily narrow his vision, and possibly deny him broader horizons.

All this does have clear implications regarding current attitudes of the academic world and of business. I

suggest consideration of the following ideas strongly implied by my views:

1. The undergraduate degree in business should be eliminated. It is not necessary and has little relevance to the individual's intellectual and spiritual development, let alone what he or she will encounter in the business world. This does not mean that individual courses in finance,



accounting, marketing and distribution should not be retained for individuals to take as electives, although my personal predilection is to avoid such courses in undergraduate years. This kind of material is easily assimilated later by a well-trained mind.

2. More extensive use should be made of cooperative programs which enable the student to leave the academic world for specific activities, work or research in the "real world." There need not always be a specific relationship between a student's academic program and his "co-op project."

3. The principal form of academic training for business should be the graduate M.B.A. programs offered by many institutions. I would submit that more relevant use of M.B.A. programs would be made by individuals who have had at least two year's experience in the business world.

In other words, I am suggesting that no one be admitted to business school fresh out of college.

4. Greater use should be made by the world of business and industry of graduate business schools by allowing managers to take sabbaticals of one month to a year for attending graduate business courses.

5. Business and industry should not require that an individual have a degree in a specific skill in order to gain entry into a position. It should be a relatively simple matter, through test-

ing and interviewing, to ascertain an individual's capabilities to adequately perform job entry positions. Adequate provision should be made by business to enable individuals to supplement their on-the-job training with specific courses in specific disciplines.

6. Business and industry is missing a valuable resource by requiring that all people have college degrees before being given consideration for management positions. There was a time when a college degree was not a requisite. Now, it has become tantamount to working papers. This is unfortunate. Individuals with energy, ambition and intellectual capabilities can and should be given all possible opportunities.

I realize the above suggestions may be greeted with a great deal of justifiable skepticism. I wish to emphasize that I am quite serious

about the first three suggestions. The latter three carry with them many practical problems, not the least of which revolve around the resources of smaller companies, many of which do not have the managerial depth and financial capabilities to support the kind of programs suggested.

There has been a marked tendency among our brightest students to pursue careers in law, government and scientific research in preference to business management. In many cases, they do so with a mistaken view that business does not serve the noble purposes embodied in other callings. It is not the purpose of this paper to refute such a contention—except to suggest that well-managed business enterprises are crucial to the nation's and indeed the world's social, economic and political viability, and I say this in terms of the quality of human existence.

In today's world of international trade and the growing activities of the multinational enterprise, talented and committed business leaders are in increasing demand. How best to develop them? Robert Goheen, former president of Princeton University, once remarked, "The true basis of a liberal education is its power to nourish a mind—its ability both to enliven and enlarge a man's conscious jurisdiction. It seems to draw out our potential for awareness, for rational understanding, and thus to extend our capacities for beneficent service, for responsible action, wherever we happen to find our chosen work."

Peter A. Benoliel is chairman and CEO of Quaker Chemical Corporation and former member of the St. John's College Board.

AN ORAL EXAM FOR THE
NEW LIBERAL ARTS
GRADUATE

by
John Agresto

THOUGH A LIBERAL
EDUCATION MAY BE
OF INESTIMABLE
BENEFIT TO THE
INDIVIDUAL, ITS
IMMEDIATE SOCIAL
UTILITY IS NOT
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A DOCTOR IS NOT
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READ HOMER IN
THE ORIGINAL GREEK.

Soon those new college graduates who have not yet found employment will be knocking on corporate doors asking for jobs. The business world will affirm and reaffirm its belief in liberal education, and then rush to hire graduates with business degrees. The liberal arts graduate will try to convince his future employer that, having studied philosophy or literature or sociology or a bit of math, he can do everything, or at least something. Perhaps a little honesty on both sides would help.

Though a liberal education may be of inestimable benefit to the individual, its immediate social utility is not readily apparent—a doctor is not a better doctor because he has read Homer in the original Greek. Such an education may well contribute to an individual's personal edification during his professional life—but that's really beside the point to the employment officer looking at the recent graduate on the other side of the desk.

Sensing that it has a hard case to make in the face of the natural skepticism of the business community, liberal education has come up with some ready, but shaky, responses. The first involves "skills."

"No, our graduates have not studied accounting or business law or marketing, but they have high

intelligence and have developed truly useful skills, skills of thinking, speaking, communicating. Their combination of brains and skills makes them fast learners and universally helpful." This isn't a totally useless argument, but the business community usually needs more than skills. It needs employees with "content" as well. And business and technical programs have been able to attract increasingly impressive students over the years; their graduates have native ability, skills and *useful* knowledge.

The second line of defense for liberal arts graduates is to argue that what they know *is* useful, even if not technical. That knowledge of literature and English, of philosophy and history, of mathematics and science gives their minds a kind of furnishing that has social and economic utility if properly directed. Through reading and study, the liberally educated candidate may actually know more than others about human nature, its limits, and the achievements of men and their failures. He or she may best be able to grow on the job, to adjust to changes, write more powerfully, see problems and propose solutions more cogently, work independently and not fear to explore the limits of technical expertise.

These kinds of things one can learn from studying history, literature or philosophy. It is no surprise that the top executives of the nation's best companies have been, far more often than not, educated in the liberal arts, not a technical field.

But caution is in order. If what the liberal arts graduate studied under the guise of a liberal education was nothing more than the latest of fashionable attacks on Western

civilization, or if his philosophy and literature courses did not teach him to learn from the world's great thinkers and writers but, rather, to play theoretical games, treating all ideas as "culture-bound" or expressions of authorial prejudices, or if he was taught that all history is really the history of oppression and oppressed groups, then you probably have before you a person who knows less than the most narrowly focused business-school graduate. So much academic garbage passes itself off as liberal education these days that all of us have to be careful.

So, what should you ask before hiring a liberal arts graduate? Here's a list:

• *Can you write clearly and persuasively? Can I know exactly what's on your mind through the medium of a piece of paper and will I take it seriously?*

• *Have you worked in the business world? I would not put graduates with business-related courses above the ones who worked for a business in the summer. Interest verified by experience is 10 times better than a course in accounting and 50 times better than a course on "The Image of the Businessman in Modern Drama."*

• *Can you work cooperatively? Since a good part of liberal education is very introspective and solitary—and cooperative work on exams and term papers is usually, rightly, frowned on—look for some evidence of sociability. Did the applicant, for example, go through four years taking notes in large lecture classes or did he put himself into the give and take of conversation in small seminar classes? And, though independence is hardly a vice, make sure the person knows that working for someone, not just with*

someone, is expected every day. This is sometimes a hard lesson for liberal arts graduates to learn.

• *What do you think about this job as a career? The last thing you need is a graduate whose philosophy has taught him that he is noble and businessmen are corrupt. If the graduate has been indoctrinated with the notion that the world of business and industry is a species of ugly materialism, vulgar commercialism or the work of social elements only one step above the criminal class, he is of no use. Let him stay in the academy.*

• *What did you study and what did you learn? Not all liberal education is great or even good. Did the candidate before you study broadly and widely in major fields covering important topics or was he narrowly trained? A course on rape and rebellion in contemporary poetry is no substitute for a course on Dante or a seminar in calculus. Did he read books? Good books? Did he take these books seriously? Do not be afraid to ask these questions!*

Finally, see if the applicant's education had an effect on his character. Did four years of college make him thoughtful, inquisitive, brave and serious? Or just haughty, pedantic, smug and vain?

Pursue these questions, for they not only will make businesses happier but might even do something to improve liberal education in this country.

This article originally appeared in the Wall Street Journal, April 23, 1991.

NOT ALL LIBERAL
EDUCATION IS GREAT
OR EVEN GOOD. . . A
COURSE ON RAPE
AND REBELLION IN
CONTEMPORARY
POETRY IS NO
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CALCULUS.

JUST SAY NO TO COLLEGE

by
Aram Bakshian, Jr.



ANTICIPATING NANCY
REAGAN BY TWENTY
YEARS, I "JUST SAID NO"
— IN MY CASE, TO THAT
MOST MIND-BENDING
OF HALLUCINOGENS, A
SECOND-RATE LIBERAL
ARTS DEGREE.

Few things in life are worth standing in line for, especially on a sweltering summer day in Washington, D. C. Higher education certainly didn't seem like one of them in September of 1963, when, overcome by the dinginess of George Washington University's downtown campus, and the industrial-strength effluvium issuing from long queues of nervous, sweaty registering freshmen, I made what may well have been the defining choice of my life. Anticipating Nancy Reagan by twenty years, I "just said no"—in my case, to that most mind-bending of hallucinogens, a second-rate liberal arts degree. It meant chucking a generously apportioned yet unappetizing academic scholarship, but my mind was made up: rather than go to college, I would get an education.

More immediately, I decided to abandon campus and walk a few blocks to the old Circle Theatre on Pennsylvania Avenue. By happy chance, Lucino Visconti's exquisite film adaptation of Giuseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* was playing and the erratic air conditioning system was working that afternoon; two auspicious omens in a row convinced me that I had made the right decision. As I watched the world-weary patrician hero turning his back on the gilded sham of *risorgimento* Italy, I felt a smug kinship, excusable, perhaps, for one still in his teens.

From elementary school onward, I had always learned more from independent reading and conversation than from the standard gruel dispensed in class, taking to heart the Shakespearean admonition that

No profit grows where is no pleasure ta'en; In brief, sir, study what you most affect

and agreeing with Sydney Smith (to the aggravation of numerable family members over the years) that there is "no furniture so charming as books." So much so that, from junior high school onward, I regularly played hooky to visit the vast, dusty secondhand bookstores that still dotted the Washington landscape in the 1950s and 1960s. Nearly all of them, Lowdermilk's, Pearlman's, Estate, Savile, and Park Books, are gone now.

Today's book fanciers, usually forced to choose between overpriced antiquarian dealers and chain retailers limited to standard current titles, would be amazed at how far—and wide—a few dollars could go in those literary old curiosity shops. Nicely bound broken sets of the collected works of Voltaire could be bought for all of seventy-five cents a volume and Homer, Plato, Thucydides, Xenophon, Le Sage, Clarendon, Cervantes, Marcus Aurelius, Gibbon, Macaulay, Carlyle, Thackeray, Dickens, Sterne, Smollett, Daudet, de Maupassant, Surtees, Suetonius, Sheridan, Aristophanes, Chaucer, Emerson, Parkman, Pascal, Molière, Madame de Sévigné, Saint-Simon, Pepys, Pope, Johnson, Boswell, Montaigne, Dryden, Goldsmith, Goethe, Byron, Tennyson, Kipling, de Ligne, Luther, and Dante, not to mention more recent and routine titles, could be had for a song,

sometimes in morocco or calf.

"Good as it is to inherit a library, it is better to collect one." wrote Augustine Birrell, and at that time, even a newspaper carrier turned copyboy like myself could afford to start. The very act of working to pay for each volume seemed to quicken one's appetite for reading it, a principle that probably applies to students who have to work for their tuition. Serving as a copyboy, first at the (now-defunct) *National Observer* and then at the (now-unrecognizable) *U.S. News & World Report*, also meant access to good reference libraries and interesting conversation with the less stuffy writers and editors. One of the earliest pleasures of my own writing career came when, a few years after I had left the *National Observer*, I appeared in its pages as a book critic and was able to renew earlier acquaintances on a more equal footing.

Reading, writing, and intelligent discussion are the keys to a good liberal arts education in academia; I simply sought, and was lucky enough to find, the same essentials in the outside world without being subjected to the nuisance of gym, the irrelevance of Geology I, and the forced purchase of dozens of badly written textbooks, as expensive as they were worthless.

This is not to say that I owe nothing to formal education. Several inspiring elementary and secondary school teachers tolerated my maverick streak and encouraged my interests in history and literature. As a day student at a cozy if somewhat down-at-the heels little academy called Woodward Prep, I even learned the elements of real, as opposed to apparent, political power: Control communications

and law enforcement and it doesn't matter who is president.

Editing the school newspaper and literary supplement and commanding the hall monitors meant real power and real rewards: Extensive writing on the topics of one's choosing, more free time and fewer scheduled classes, and the ability to slip out for an illicit beer (I was tall for my age) with the connivance of one's subordinate hall monitors.

At the same time, a curriculum that still included Latin meant an early grounding in the fundamental structure of languages that would make later acquisition of rudimentary French and German easier. How Latin came to be dropped by some high schools as "irrelevant" baffles me to this day; it is the most practical subject many secondary school students will ever study. Given a little Latin, years later you will be able to get the gist of street signs, simple news clips, and broadcasts in Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and, in a pinch, even Romanian.

Unlike the author of a recent bestseller, I do not claim that everything I needed to know I had already learned in kindergarten. But I can honestly say that everything I needed to learn—in *school*, that is—I knew by the twelfth grade. While my own curiosity deserves some of the credit, so does a motley but worthy crew of teachers, not one of whom was an education major.

They included a deaf, dentured retired colonel, Merritt Booth, who taught algebra and geometry with the logic and precision they deserved; a dedicated young English teacher named Bill Gaull who, while working his way through law school, took the trouble

to encourage bright students to read non-syllabus authors like Fielding and Tolstoy; a one-legged Seventh Day Adventist history master named Donald F. Haynes who, although somewhere to the right of the John Birch Society, graded fairly and taught passionately; and a wonderful 76-year-old chemistry teacher, "Doc" Valaer, whose enthusiasm for his subject was such that, although a teetotaler, he had written a book entitled *Wines of the World*, painstakingly analyzing their chemical compositions without tasting any of them.

My graduate and post-graduate teachers, while more famous, have all been untenured and unofficial: editors, authors, politicians, journalists, artists, and a widening circle of interesting friends.

The odds are that I would have missed out on most of these opportunities if I had kept my scholarship and followed the off-trodden rut of academia, where as early an observer as William Penn remarked that "much reading is an oppression of the mind, and extinguishes the natural candle, which is the reason of so many useless scholars in the world." At the very worst, I might have ended up as a tenured, politically correct hack.

Fortunately, all I had to do was just say no.

From The American Spectator, September, 1991.

PROFILE

St. John's College:

An independent, non-sectarian, four-year liberal arts college.

Founded:

Established in 1696 in Annapolis, Maryland, as King William's School and chartered in 1784 as St. John's College. Great Books Program adopted 1937. Second campus in Santa Fe opened in 1964.

Curriculum:

An integrated, four-year, all-required liberal arts and science program based on reading and discussing, in loosely chronological order, the great books of Western civilization. The program requires four years of foreign language, four years of mathematics, three years of laboratory science, and one year of music.

Approach:

Tutorials, laboratories, and seminars requiring intense participation replace more traditional lectures. Classes are very small.

Student/Faculty ratio is 8:1.

Degrees Granted:

Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts. Master of Arts in Liberal Studies.

Student Body:

Enrollment is limited to about 400 students on each campus. Current freshman class made up of 55% men and 45% women, from 30 states and several foreign countries. Sixty-five percent receive financial aid. Students may transfer between the Santa Fe and Annapolis campuses.

Alumni Careers:

Education - 21%, Business - 20%, Law - 10%, Visual and Performing Arts - 9%, Medicine - 7%, Science and Engineering - 7%, Computer Science - 6%, Writing and Publishing - 5%.

Graduate Institute:

The Graduate Institute in Liberal Education is an interdisciplinary master's degree program based on the same principles as the undergraduate program. Offered on both campuses year-round. Readers of the newsletter may be especially interested in applying for our summer session. For more information please contact the Graduate Institute in Santa Fe (505) 982-3691 ext. 249 or in Annapolis (301) 263 - 2371.

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