

Liberal Education: Vital for a Successful Future

Blaine Primeau

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The digital era has spawned an epidemic of misinformation, opinion, problems and a polarizing stance on most everything from politics, environment, social justice and human rights. Most stories or controversies contain more than opinion or tangents of thinking. Unfortunately, opinions towards widely debated topics are formed subjectively and are emotionally biased. They are based on little, if no facts at all. With all the education available at the click of a button, western society only seems to want to educate themselves on what has their best interest, having never entertained more than one possible outcome or opinion. Liberal education is key to opening up various disciplines within an individual to explore problems, views and interpretations. With more diverse education, liberal education will provide better capacity for problem solving, empathy and understanding the complexity of our polarized society. It will allow individuals to become better in their jobs and education regardless of the career choice. It will make for a more diverse employee who is capable of critical thinking, efficient problem solving and excel in interpersonal skills.

I had the absolute pleasure of attending the Addictions Counselling program at Saskpolytechnic in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. The program incorporated liberal education to its students. This diverse education produces counsellors who are more equipped to handle jobs right out of school than many other graduates from Sociology or other degrees in the humanities.

The program incorporated the sciences essential to be credible. We learned pharmacology, human development, concurrent disorders and much of the literature involving neurotransmitters and illicit drugs. We discussed cultural aspects of addiction as well. Residential schools, the struggles of northern communities, trauma and problems immigrants may face, such as culture shock and isolation. We discussed the

psychological aspect of what causes addiction and different treatment modalities, along with ethics. But what really sets this program apart from the rest is the practical learning. The program does extensive one to one, group and intervention labs. Hours and hours are spent technically learning the art of counselling. As a small class we counselled each other and through practice and building rapport we began to understand empathy, emotions, fears, grief, guilt and self-esteem. We

learned the human aspect of counselling and it created awakenings to the most important part of counselling. Empathy. Our course was diversified in science, culture, emotion, humanities, ethics and schooled with a hands on approach. This makes for a more complete counsellor who is a multi-faceted facilitator.

We have many polarizing views in today's society and most people do not seem willing to acquiesce to even entertain another opinion. An example of this is our energy sector. Oil and gas has been a hotly debated topic for decades in Canada. There are many opinions based on emotion, financial stability, environment, pollution, economy and the future. There really does not seem to be a holistic approach or opinion to this contentious subject matter.

On one side we have a cross section of people who view big oil as corrupt corporations who pollute, lie, contribute to climate change and CO2 emissions all while destroying Indigenous treaties and lands. All the new innovation that reduces carbon is fake and is unproven. The other view is that big oil is paramount for the well-being of Canadian citizens, has little if no impact on the environment, global warming is a myth, all other forms of renewable energy is unreliable. They view people are hypocrites because everything is petroleum based and they use it all the time whether they know it or not.. We have two very different views and there does not seem to be any medium ground. Now if both sides gathered a little more diverse education and let emotions and opinions fall by the wayside to holistic education they could see that there are indeed two sides to this story,

Oil and energy companies do provide billions of dollars to Canadian citizens. Shutting down big oil and energy in haste would create a financial backlash and would be detrimental for the Canadian economy. Many First Nations support these projects because it provides much needed opportunity for employment and careers. Oil and gas companies are putting forth new engineering that creates a safer, cleaner technology for fossil fuels. On the other hand, carbon emissions are a problem, spills will continue to happen and effect the land that Indigenous people rely on to sustain life. Many people have not given other sources of renewable energy any thought because they believe it will ruin their livelihood; while many people do not realize that newer green technology could create millions of jobs in manufacturing, installation, maintenance and transport.

This is a complicated issue with complex solutions but there will be no middle ground to be shared if liberal education and willingness to learn other views and opinions is not practiced. Scientifically, there is multiple options for other sources of energy as well as safer ways to burn fossil fuels. Culturally there are options to employ Indigenous communities and have them play a role in the protection of their bountiful land. Economically it would be disastrous to shut down fossil fuels in haste. A slow transition is possible and we can make it safer and cleaner in the meantime. But few want to hear that. One side says now, the other says never.

Liberal education is vital to creating a more inclusive and eclectic society. A wider base of knowledge is vital for society to come closer and create a utopian habitat. In the digital era, the using technology with accuracy, ethics and an open mind could lead to a generation of Renaissance men and women capable of diverse skills, empathy, and constructive problem solving. Let's hope we all get onboard.