Liberal Education Articles

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Intro/General Liberal Education


This resource is a helpful infographic that outlines the value of a liberal arts degree. It includes statistics and facts regarding careers, income, the percentage of professional leaders with liberal education experience, and the skills that set liberal education graduates up for success.


“New research shows that a liberal arts degree is a great economic investment.” - *Universities Canada*

This article addresses a new research study by the Education Policy Research Initiative (EPRI) that found social science and humanities graduates earn similar salary earnings to math and science majors in the long run. It states that this is promising news and addresses those who are quick to judge the value of a degree right after graduation rather than tracking that value over a period of time.


“We educate for transformation, leadership, and community, not simply or exclusively for the development of instrumental skills.” - *Trusteeship Magazine*
An interview conducted between Trusteeship Magazine and Mary Dana Hilton, president of the College of Saint Benedict. Ms. Hilton discusses how liberal arts have changed over the years, why they are still sustainable, where board members play a part, and the skills that are absolutely paramount in a liberal arts education.


Agresto reviews the critiques and threats to liberal arts which have evolved over centuries of scholars in America, and asks what has created liberal education institutions as they existed before the mid-nineteenth century, linking the answer to the usefulness of liberal education. He then addresses the fall of liberal education following the 1960s, linking it to criticism, skepticism, ideology, and a move away from the traditional foundations of liberal education. He concludes by providing some thoughts on how to fix the errors of liberal education in order to prevent its decline.


Baker, Baldwin and Makker address the loss of liberal arts colleges by returning to a previous study done by Breneman. They provide context on a series of challenges to liberal arts colleges before replicating Breneman’s study. They find that while liberal arts colleges are disappearing, many are also redefining their missions to become more competitive and adaptive to demands. They conclude that the trends towards expanding, diffusing, and crafting new models of liberal education alongside the disappearance of liberal arts colleges, as pointed out by Breneman, is continuing, and they urge academics to pay attention to this alarming result.


Bennett seeks to redefine the way we think about teaching by using the metaphor of a conversation, highlighting a wide variety of ways this ties into liberal learning. Bennett references Michael Oakeshott throughout the essay but summarizes his points by stating that conversation as a metaphor for liberal learning and being human helps us to see that liberal learning involves cultural inheritance, a range of voices, active engagement, reflexivity, hospitality, and mutual learning.

Bourke, Bray and Horton explore the modern status of general education requirements in highly ranked liberal arts and doctoral-granting institutions. They provide context on both the history and role of general education before conducting their study using information drawn from the U.S News and World Report. They find that the most frequent form of general education used by these institutions is the distribution requirement and show differences among these institutions along the subsections of physical education, foreign education, quantitative reasoning and writing requirements. They conclude by stating that these institutions, while different in their focus, are similar in their goals to build the mind and develop guiding values.


The point of contention in this article is whether or not the ‘useless’ liberal arts contribute to skills needed for jobs. The article surveys a range of opinions on the liberal arts, looking for the right blend of these job-ready skills. Many arguments in this paper state that liberal arts are a big contributor and are often looked for by employers, but there are a few counter arguments.


This news article discusses the importance of mixing “soft skills” with technical skills for future job security in a world moving towards automation.


Falconer provides a historical overview of the development of post-secondary institutions across Canada. He focuses on institutions such as King’s college through to the University of British Columbia, providing insight into their curriculums, many of which had a breadth of courses consistent with liberal education when they were first established.
This article briefly discusses changes three higher education institutions made to their curriculum to better facilitate deep and practical learning. It has practical ideas and implementation strategies.


“Through the process of rigorous critical thinking and the use of the reasoning intellect, we push beyond received knowledge to further, new, and more accurate understanding, or to entirely new ways of thinking.” - Cecilia Gaposchkin

Gaposchkin examines why liberal education is so important to society by tracing it back to its roots, drawing inspiration from Peter Abelard who taught in Paris in the 12th century. She discusses the skills we learn as students by taking and studying the original seven liberal arts: grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy, even as they are transformed into new disciplines such as mathematics, english literature, and physics. Gaposchkin argues that by studying these subjects we learn to push boundaries, and in doing so we are able to create a new world beyond wisdom and practice.


“First, liberal education is multidisciplinary. It provides broad exposure to the arts, humanities, social and natural sciences (ideally, interrelating disciplinary ways of knowing and questioning). Second, liberal education has a “general education” component. That is, within a given program, the broad curriculum approach is required of all or most students. Finally, it strives to engender elemental skills that include critical thinking, problem-solving, analysis, communication, global
citizenship, and/or a sense of social responsibility.” - Kara Godwin, “The Counter Narrative: Critical Analysis of Liberal Education in Global Context.”

“The purpose of liberal education is for students to learn “how to think carefully and critically about political problems, to articulate one’s views and defend them before people with whom one disagrees”.” - Amy Gutmann, in “The Counter Narrative: Critical Analysis of Liberal Education in Global Context.” by Kara Godwin

“In this article [Godwin] analyze[s] the emergence of liberal education through a carefully constructed critical lens. Based on a 2013 empirical study and subsequent research, [Godwin] will define liberal education and provide an overview of its growing global presence. In reaction to a dominate economic narrative that rationalizes the development of new liberal education programs, [Godwin] will present several counter narratives related to history, students and faculty, learning and teaching, access and elitism, and culture in postsecondary organizations. Finally, in recommending critical analysis as an imperative framework for future research on this topic, [Godwin] will illustrate the implications for the global emergence of liberal education and suggest the possibility that as an education philosophy, it could both reinforce and resist neoliberal practices.


“Liberal education is the pursuit of human excellence, not the pursuit of excellent salaries and excellent forms of polish and sophistication. Liberal education is not even about excellent intellectual achievements. Its goal is more ethical than intellectual: It focuses on the development of individuals as moral agents, and it teaches students how to reflect both analytically and evaluatively on the fact that the choices we make turn us into the persons we become.” - Marshall Gregory

Gregory advocates that liberal education educators must challenge the trend of university being merely a place for job training. To make a difference, Gregory states that we can not be defensive and take the little that is given to us by universities and flawed proponents of liberal education, but that we are to make liberal education central to education. According to Gregory this will allow students to get the fullest out of their education and allow them to become who they were meant to be; as well as allow them to use and develop the skills they have had since birth.
Gutting, G. (2015, September 11). Why College Is Not a Commodity. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-college-isnot-a-commodity/233011?key=DVrR6Tv r_NDV04ddsC3ucj3nPf88vU1sc9Wg1rqBJz zBlvVQnIwOpZHuLPE84zQ1ZfaEZoa0cyeUN1YURweFloWmRwOUZsb0JmOXh1 UFQ1RHRyb2FrN2NTZw.

Gutting argues that the purpose of colleges is to serve as intellectual culture instead of job training. He furthers his argument by addressing issues such as developing K-12 to allow it to provide instrumental knowledge, and the raising of standards for K-12 teachers to that of professionals. He concludes by questioning the object of teaching, finding that it is not knowledge, but in opening students to possibilities beyond what capitalism has commodified.


Jaschik discusses new research which shows that humanities grads face a brighter future than popular rhetoric suggests. While data still shows some gaps; they’re much smaller than expected. Humanities grads have a higher-likelihood of being interested in their jobs than business and social science students and the research finds that many humanities majors find jobs outside of their degree.


Jones writes about the history and struggle of liberal arts education, starting during the World War I and continuing into modern day. He outlines the constant rise and fall in the popularity of liberal arts in America and gives reasons as to why it is important to keep liberal arts in postsecondary institutions.

“People who gravitate to . . . liberal arts schools value questions over answers.” - Kim

Kim writes a short essay concerning his hypotheses on why small liberal arts colleges are the best places for students to learn how to think. His theory focuses on three elements: conversations, culture, and the interaction between teaching and research.


McLean discusses the Living Room Learning program organized by the University of British Columbia (UBC), arguing that its demise did not lead to the withdrawal of UBC from liberal education even when it was cut due to economic efficiency. He addresses the program, the curriculum, its structure and its success in liberal adult education within his paper, while also focusing on two more critical observations: the governance technologies which seemed at odds with liberal content and the continuing liberal arts tradition at UBC.


Merrett provides an overview which looks at both the history and modern context of liberal education in Canada through the inclusion of debates and theories. It is supplemented with current events relevant to the discussion, including the Quebec Student Protests in 2012 and the increasing corporatism which is affecting universities.


Mulcahy outlines the approach of Henry Newman to Liberal Education. He begins by describing Newman’s support and definition of liberal education. He then addresses Newman’s broader ideas of university education and of practical reasoning, which serves to contradict his initial statements. He highlights and discusses those tensions. He concludes that Newman himself raises
issue with the traditional ideal of liberal education, and that Newman’s theories must be further explored and valued.


“Here liberal education includes, among other accomplishments, creative thinking, teamwork and problem solving, civic knowledge and engagement, ethical reasoning and action, and synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies.” - Debra Humphreys, a vice president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities

Mulcahy begins by tracing the theories of a number of liberal education philosophers who address key aspects and points of departure during the modern development of liberal education, including Newman, Adler, Hirst, and Martin. These philosophers are present throughout the article as Mulcahy rethinks liberal education both from within, and from without—through critiques of liberal education. He then seeks a new direction and paradigm for liberal education, enlarging the debate through the addition of caring and service, empowering through pedagogy, and knowledge production and pragmatism. He then seeks the definition of an educated person and its implications for pedagogy. Mulcahy concludes by adopting his position to recast the educated person through the ideas of these philosophers and by challenging schools and colleges to do this as well on a more full and consistent level.


Mulcahy explores the continuing evolution of the term liberal education. He first reviews the historical and alternative understandings of liberal education, outlining a series of scholars and their discussions of liberal education. Following this discussion, he states that the integration of practical knowledge could enrich liberal education, even if it seems to be a departure from the traditional definition of liberal education. He concludes by advising colleges and universities to recast liberal education in order to integrate new approaches.

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“Sheer burden of homework in all disciplines makes it impossible for children to enjoy the use of their critical and imaginative faculties.” - Nussbaum
Nussbaum focuses on Tagore and Dewey through a connection of stories that encompass the lack of concepts Tagore and Dewey fought for in education. Nussbaum also connects her three crucial skills good citizens need with the actions Tagore and Dewey implemented. Furthermore, Nussbaum recounts endeavors Tagore and Dewey took in liberal education and the successes they achieved. As the article continues, Nussbaum shares her opinion on the lack of good liberal art schools in Europe and Asia and some of the efforts that need to be done to get to this ideal.

The discussion concludes mainly with points using Tagore’s work and school.


“This ideal [liberal education.] is only relevant to those who seek a self of their own.” - O’Sullivan

This article aims to address opposition towards liberal education as an elitist ideal. O’Sullivan does this by using Michael Oakeshott’s revision of the ultimate goals for liberal education. “The essence of this revision is the injection into it of a philosophical ideal of enlightenment somewhat akin to the one found in Spinoza’s short Tract on the Emendation of the Intellect (Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione). In that tract, Spinoza argues that the good for man consists in overcoming powerful illusions which inspire feelings of alienation (as we would now term them) from the world, and thereby achieving a sense of continuity with the whole order of being, in a way that assigns no privileged place to human beings.”


The hallmarks of liberal education – building an ethical foundation that values the well-being of others, strengthening the mental muscles that allow you to acquire new knowledge quickly, and developing the skills to apply it effectively in rapidly shifting contexts – are not luxuries but necessities for preparing professionals for the coming transformation of knowledge work to relationship work.” - Patel

Using his own personal experience and developing research, Patel argues that liberal education is the best route to secure employment in an age where jobs are increasingly being taken by technology. He highlights that the skills that cannot be replaced by robots are those taught in
liberal education: human interaction, creativity and good judgement. He further argues that liberal education has the infrastructure to create these “relationship workers” by including strong ethical foundations and an ability to adapt quickly to new circumstances. He concludes that while robots may be able to take technical skills, they will never replace the strong citizenship qualities produced by liberal education.


“A liberal education demands that you decide — agree or disagree? Find the nuances in the issue, and voice them. Challenge authority. Argue forcefully — and with wit and reason. Write clearly and persuasively about your research, ideas, conclusions, interpretations.” - Hunter R. Rawlings III

Rawlings presents five essential components of liberal education throughout the article. These are liberation, irreverence, pleasure, provocation, courage. Rawlings uses a humanities lens to convey these essential components and accentuate their prominence in liberal education. The use of poems and short phrases create a deeper meaning for these essentials and their importance. Rawlings also crafts thoughts about our role as educators in liberal education.


Rossing explores the opportunities and limitations of iPads for liberal education learning. He argues that one cannot just repackage traditional education into these devices, but must incorporate them to foster skills such as cooperation, collaboration and critical thinking. Technology can be used in liberal education, but liberal education can also be used to approach and responsibly use technology in an increasingly globalized world. He concludes that these new technologies cannot naturally foster liberal education skills but can be born out of liberal education skills and used in collaboration with them.


Saavedra and Opfer advocate the need to develop 21st century skills in students, through teaching, to meet the requirements of an increasingly globalized world. They outline nine ways...
to do so, including lessons related to: relevancy, connections, critical thinking, transferable skills, metacognition, addressing misconceptions, teamwork, the use of technology, and fostering creativity. They conclude by stating that implementing these changes will be key to solving the challenges faced by humanity in the 21st century.


“...what changed public favour against smoking wasn’t mounting data from the health sciences linking smoking to cancer, he said. It was effective communication of that research to the public, improved regulation of the industry and a new taxation scheme on cigarettes that led to a decline in smoking and smoking-related illnesses. It was a wide-ranging and life-saving public health strategy ‘driven by disciplines in the social sciences and humanities,’” - Samson

Samson writes a compelling journal article on the importance of bringing back liberal arts, as discussed at a conference hosted by Universities Canada. Many social science and humanities programs are being cut at various institutions, possibly due to a PR problem. The speakers at this conference discussed the importance of emphasizing liberal arts’ strength in experiential education. That is, making programs more enticing by teaching transferable skills, and communicating that value to potential students and employers. The most important item needed to bring back the liberal arts? Good stories and a renewed effort to communicating the value of a liberal education.


This Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) resource provides a guide to frequently confused terms regarding liberal arts, the Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs), statistics on the wants of employers regarding the ELOs, AAC&U member institutions learning outcomes for all students, high impact educational practices and relevant graphs and charts.

This Association of American Colleges and Universities resource provides an overview of the achievement of liberal education students in college. The report highlights a set of learning outcomes and provides assets to the cultivation of liberal education outcomes. It includes the liberal education outcomes, support for them from outside the academy, faculty reports on fostering the outcomes, students’ reports on liberal education outcomes, and national assessments of these outcomes. It then provides campus assessments of student gains over time and powerful elements for the continued liberal education effort in schools.


“With a liberal education, ‘students can prepare for both responsible citizenship and a global economy by achieving the essential learning outcomes.’” - Rodger A. Scott, The meaning of liberal education

Scott comments on: “the philosophy of liberal education and its structure; the goal of general education in fulfilling the goals of liberal education; and four key elements.” The four elements are the: “‘liberating’ aspects of liberal education; the need for an emphasis on questions more than on answers; the meaning of a global perspective; and the connections of each of the above to extra-curricular experiences and engaged citizenship.” Finally, Scott, discusses “the value of liberal education in careers and in life, and the future of liberal education in a job-focused world that gives more value to what can be immediately counted and useful.” Scott’s compelling paper grabs the attention of the reader within a page.


Shorris founded the Clemente Course for the Humanities, a ten-month-long academic program designed to provide college-level literature and philosophy classes to low-income students in New York City. In this essay, Shorris tells the story of the program’s first two years. This story is touching and shows the incredible potential that each human has.


Sternberg begins with a little background information about his beginnings as a university student and the progress that took him to be a leader for multiple organizations and universities.
Through his background, Sternberg found that the assessment process for recruitment of students into colleges and universities was inadequate and therefore began researching and modelled WICS. Wisdom, Intelligence, and Creativity Synthesized (WICS) was tested on a few high school and first year college students and relevant results came out of it. Not only does this improve assessment, but the model can be used in teaching as demonstrated by Sternberg.