

The Value of a Liberal Arts Education

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### The Value of a Liberal Arts Education

According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (1998), “[a liberal arts education] is an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change”. I firmly believe this definition explains the liberal arts education at Manchester College. When beginning my college search I knew the topics I wanted to study but did not consider the importance of having a diverse experience while in college. Through my experiences at Manchester College I have learned about new, exciting topics while growing as a person and working towards becoming the best mathematics teacher I can.

Upon beginning my education at Manchester, I knew there were courses I would be required to take and understood that I had some input in which classes I chose. My freshman year, I started off with courses that made me question my thinking and develop a new perspective. In Introduction to Sociology I researched the impact of social class on education. I found evidence to support the idea that the United States education system is focused towards the middle class. It is designed to keep most children in the class they are born into while letting few move to a different social ranking. With this knowledge, I gained new insight into teaching. I found that I wanted to ensure all students had the same chances to succeed in school and in life. I feel all students can learn and should have the option to do so in a setting that meets their background.

While learning about the sociological impact I was also being taught how to communicate on many different levels, on an interpersonal basis, in a small group, or when speaking to a large group. The course was Foundations of Human Communication and it taught techniques for better communication in various settings. Within the realm of education this will be useful as I work with students one-on-one, in groups, give lectures and work with parents.

When teaching children you must remember that you are working with someone's pride and joy so it is important to have discussions with the parents about their student's progress. Through the course I learned about working through interpersonal conflict and developed a short script of a conflict and how it could be worked out in an appropriate way.

I continued on my chosen path of education while thinking about all of the things I had learned and would love to study more in depth. I gained knowledge about thinking through Introduction to Philosophy where twice a week we had online discussions in a cyber classroom. These discussions made me question my own beliefs while also defending those that I firmly held. We discussed God and religion, Socrates, Plato, and Descartes. I found myself intrigued with the thinking the class brought out while becoming curious about the beliefs of others around me.

In many places you will come across families that have different customs and beliefs. Understanding just a little bit about what they believe will help me when speaking with these families. My Judaism, Christianity, and Islam class has helped me gain an understanding of how religious beliefs affect the actions of people. I also have a better understanding of groups that belong to varying religions. For instance, just because one small group within a particular religion is causing problems it does not mean everyone that belongs to a religious sect has the same beliefs.

After better understanding the importance of religion, I took a course known as Cultural Anthropology. This class focused on the field of anthropology and how cultures impact the lives of those within them. While discussing the differences between many different types of cultures, the book and professor seemed to point at the idea that the way of life many of us are accustomed to, does not seem to be fitting of the rest of the world. At the same time I was taking

Principles of Macroeconomics which seemed to push towards a society that promotes free trade. These courses as well as many others on campus have made me question my personal beliefs. Is free trade good? Should we live in a world where hunting and gathering is the main source of living? I found these and many other questions plaguing my mind while working through the liberal arts curriculum.

While these courses made me realize the importance of looking at something from every side, especially in the case where one book seemed to think capitalism was in a sense ruining the world while the other seemed to say capitalism is the way of the future, I found my thinking challenged even more in a course called Disney and American Culture. Since I was a child, I have been fascinated with Walt Disney and the company he has turned into a household name. In one month this course made me realize that we see what people want us to see most of the time. By looking at something from another perspective we may find something we do not want to know. I found that Walt Disney may not be the man I once thought him to be. In the eyes of so many he is a famous man that with one large dream and some hardship was able to develop a spectacular company that affects the lives of many children. This was what the company wanted everyone to see. By looking at the company from other perspectives, we can see how our culture has developed and changed over the years, how one man may not have had quite as much impact, and how being able to look at things from more than one perspective and thinking critically may help you in life more than anything else.

Through the courses I have mentioned here and many other general education courses on history, art, language, and science, I feel that I have been prepared for my position as a teacher. I am ready to help my students learn to think critically about what they are being told and find ways to engage them in their learning. These courses also allow me to gain knowledge in other

fields where, while I may not be strong, I may be able to help students with small assignments based upon what I do know.

These courses and the people in them have helped me realize we live in a diverse world where people do not believe the same things and that is acceptable. It is not appropriate to force what you believe on another person if they hold a position and are capable of explaining their beliefs. My time at Manchester was well spent learning about other cultures, critical thinking, and adapting to new ideas that are proposed. I know that in my future endeavors I will be ready to teach my students who come from a variety of backgrounds and are at many levels.

References

Association of American Colleges and Universities. (1998). *LEAP/ What is Liberal Education?*

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