Importance of Liberal Arts Education

A liberal arts education gives a person a deeper insight into various areas of study instead of only focusing on his/her major. Manchester College’s course catalog states that as a liberal arts college “Manchester College seeks to graduate people who possess ability and conviction, and who understand truth as it is perceived from scientific, moral, philosophical, and historical perspectives” The catalog later affirms that, “a central goal of the College community is to create an environment which nurtures a sense of self-identity, a strong personal faith, a dedication to the service of others, and an acceptance of the demands of responsible citizenship” (Martynowicz and Hammer 7). Through my courses at Manchester College, my liberal arts education has broadened my knowledge base and has allowed me to grow as a person.

One requirement of Manchester College students is to obtain .25 semester hours of credit from the values, ideas, and arts (VIA) by attending a combination of at least 10 convocation series, public program series, or cinema series programs. The convocational and public program series expanded my knowledge through listening to speakers, musical and dramatic performers, and other gifted people. The cinema series plays “internationally acclaimed films to increase appreciation of artistic expression and cultural experiences in other nations and our own” (Martynowicz and Hammer 13). The VIA programs do an excellent job of bringing and promoting diversity to Manchester College by the topics chosen, the different viewpoints of speakers, and showing different culture through music, dance, and films.
Other requirements of my liberal arts education include taking a philosophy course as well as experiencing the arts. Experiencing the Arts exposed me to various periods, genres, and styles of art, cinema, music, and theatre. This course allowed me to understand the importance of the arts and how they are interrelated. I took introduction to philosophy for my philosophy course. This course involved “reflective thinking about life and the universe as a totality, critical examination of presuppositions, words, and concepts, examination of ways in which we gain knowledge, and the quest for criteria which determine our value judgments of the good and the beautiful” (Martynowicz and Hammer 121). Taking a philosophy course forced me to carefully examine my viewpoints, especially in religion, and make an educated decision to believe certain ideas instead of choosing other options. After completing this course, I feel I am more prepared to explain and justify my beliefs.

Some other courses I have taken to enrich my thinking include introduction to psychology, introduction to sociology, race, gender, and ethnic group relations, and cultural anthropology. These courses helped me to examine processes of the human mind and behaviors and acknowledge “the inequalities in American society and the institution of family, religion, politics, and economy” as well as intergroup conflict in the U.S. society. The purpose of the cultural anthropology course is for students to study “several related non-Western cultures to enable them to consider the relationship among the individual, culture, and society and encourage them to develop respect for other cultures and a better understanding of their own” (Martynowicz and Hammer 124-125). The sociology courses have exposed me to different viewpoints by studying other people’s life experiences. For example, I read personal stories about how women, people of color, and homosexuals have
been mistreated through stereotyping, violence, and so on. After completing these courses, I am now more careful about how I treat other people. I do not want to subconsciously exhibit discriminatory behavior or offend other people through what I say.

The teacher education department at Manchester College also requires education majors to attend the Celebrating Diversity Workshop on campus. At first, I was not looking forward to attending a six hour workshop on a Sunday afternoon. I thought it would be a waste of my time, because I had already been exposed to a lot of talks about diversity from other courses. However, professor Gary Zimmerman approached the topic of diversity in a different way that made it more applicable to anyone who would attend the workshop. Zimmerman described diversity as any difference between two people. Instead of just merely focusing on the most common differences, such as race, gender, and sexual preference, he looked at aspects like height, weight, and home life. He taught us why it is important to avoid stereotypes and how to teach other people not to use stereotypical speech. I need to avoid this type of speech in order to model correct behavior to my students and teach them what is appropriate speech. I will definitely use the techniques I learned in the workshop in correcting my students when they use stereotypical speech.

Receiving a liberal arts education has not only broadened my knowledge but also has changed my perspective of diversity and allowed me to learn how to accept and respect different people. This skill will become useful in the teaching field with differences among my colleagues as well as students. My liberal arts education has made my college experience a more rounded one, which is important in elementary teaching since I will have to teach all subject areas.

Works Cited