

General Education and Liberal Arts: Pillars of Undergraduate Education

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Purpose of Education

The ultimate objectives are for students to have:

1. **A Successful Career** – money, power, status, physical pleasure
2. **A Significant Life** – happy, meaningful and worthwhile

Undergraduate education plays a crucial part and the pillars are:

1. General Education curriculum design
2. Liberal Arts Education approach to teaching and learning

Determinants of a successful Career

Today's ICT New Economy is characterized by:

1. Computerization, Digitization and Big Data emphasizing both economies of scale and scope; from Ford to GE to Alibaba & Ten Cent; *multi-skilled and trans-disciplinary, insights more than information/knowledge*
2. Disruptive Technological change: pervasive and continuous; *coping with change and grasping life-long education*
3. Globalization (real and virtual) of goods and services, capital, information, and human and natural resources; *creating comparative advantages*, not dependent on natural comparative advantages

Implications for Education

A change of emphases:

1. From Specialists to *Renaissance/Whole Persons*
2. From training to *nurturing*
3. From imparting knowledge to developing *insights/wisdom*
4. From the level of education to the *type* of education
5. From higher education to *basic* education

What is a Whole Person

A person who possesses **A B C**:

A – Adaptability **B – Brainpower** **C – Creativity**

And is equipped with **three ‘C’s**:

Cognitive, Communication, and Community skills

What type of education will achieve these – **Liberal Arts Education** through its distinctive teaching and learning processes focussing on **generic skills** rather than professional expertise, **nurturing** rather than training, developing **insights** more than imparting knowledge

What is Liberal Arts Education

Liberal Arts is not just arts, but **Arts and Science**. It was originally the *trivium* (grammar, logic and rhetoric) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy) taught in medieval universities.

Liberal Arts is not defined by discipline or curriculum (except less profession and vocational-oriented) but by its **distinctive teaching and learning processes**.

The prerequisites of liberal arts colleges:

1. **Small, an optimum of 1000 to 1500 students**
2. **Residential, at least 80%**
3. **Student-oriented (attention and resources)**

Distinctive Teaching and Learning

The Five 'I's:

1. **Interactions** not just knowledge imparting
2. **Individualization** not class orientation
3. **Inter-disciplinary/Trans-disciplinary** not Multi-disciplinary
4. **Intra-curricular/Co-curricular** not Extra-curricular
5. **International Exposure** not just Study Abroad

For career development in the 4th Industrial Revolution, a preferred approach is liberal arts education with its distinctive teaching and learning processes for nurturing whole persons.

A Significant Life

A happy, meaningful, worthwhile life:

Sean Kelly (2010): *“To see the events of our everyday lives in terms of a greater cultural inheritance that will make us feel connected to our history and invested in our future”.*

Lloyd Blankfein (Goldman Sachs, 2017): *“To develop breath, to be interesting to yourself and other people”.*

General Education programmes play a key role in this:

A mandatory part of the core-curriculum, inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary, issue-based, problem-based, adopting liberal arts processes; beyond civility, humility, empathy.

The Harvard Report (2007) on GE

For first-year undergraduates, in addition to writing and speaking, the following should be mandatory:

1. Aesthetic and interpretive understanding
2. Culture and belief
3. Empirical reasoning
4. Ethical reasoning
5. Science of living systems
6. Science of the physical universe
7. Societies of the world
8. The United States in the world

The NUS-Yale Common Core

1. Comparative Social Inquiry
2. Foundations of Science
3. Historical Immersion
4. Literature and Humanities
5. Modern Social thought
6. Philosophy and Political thought
7. Quantitative Reasoning
8. Scientific Inquiry

STEM versus HELP

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics,
is not almighty!

HELP: History, Ethics, Literature, Philosophy[®]

STEM without HELP is helpless![®]

A successful career perhaps, but life is not necessarily significant.

Examples of my own experience

Issues

1. Strong support of the senior management, GE Office under the President's Office.
2. Participation and commitment of faculty and staff, in particular senior professors; cross-department cooperation.
3. Assessment and examination; should it be different?
4. A common understanding of and standards for GE; transferability of courses among institutions and upon articulation; the role of FSTE.

Thank You and Best Wishes