

# Globalized World and Emerging Requirements in Higher Education: Compelling Need for a Re-Defined Role of the Liberal Arts Education System

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The necessary intersection of liberal arts and professional education: Why liberal arts-education completes professional education

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## **Abstract:**

It is common to witness liberal arts and professional education being discussed as two far ends of the spectrum of higher education. This is the case at many levels—institutional leadership, policy makers, students, higher education accreditors, ranking agencies, and so on. The two are seen to share no common goals. Whereas liberal arts education is thought of as an intellectual superfluity with no concrete and measureable gains, professional education is misperceived to be the only route to the workplace. It also comes across as though professional education were the really serious and pressing concern, certainly the one more deserving of the attention of policy makers and state funds. This depiction has impeded liberal arts in many ways. Most importantly, it has inhibited decision makers at the levels of institutions and the government in supporting liberal arts education and thrusting it forward. The decision to preferentially treat programs in STEM and other technically-oriented disciplines taken by board members bears consequences on the choices that the final stakeholders—the students—make. It undermines the status of liberal arts education as an important and worthy model. Many students who might otherwise have pursued liberal arts do not opt for it, and those who must compulsorily complete some liberal arts-oriented courses in professional degree programs do so reluctantly, so that they may get on with what really matters—their core curriculum in medicine or engineering or whatever else they may be studying. It need barely be stated that, in situations of reduced state appropriations, the model that faces the brunt is the liberal arts one (along with the streams of humanities and social sciences). It is unwelcome indeed that the very system of higher education that gives students an edge in today's globalized world is being de-emphasized as a result of mis-perceptions and ignorance amongst institutional and governmental policy apparatus. As voiced encouragement and funds towards liberal arts diminish in policy statements, the popularity as well the quality of liberal arts programs take a hit. In order to restore the recognition that is due to liberal arts, we must begin at the top of the higher education hierarchy. The policy makers must first appreciate that liberal arts are crucial to shaping the outcome of the very endeavor of professional education. Further, they must be led by educationists to recognize that, although liberal arts courses are a valuable investment in and of themselves, aspects of the liberal arts education model must be valued as an indispensable complement to the study of STEM and other professionally-oriented disciplines.

**Keywords:** education, liberal arts, learning, career, professional education

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## INTRODUCTION

Liberal arts education has been beset with misperceptions and underestimation, and this has continued at many levels: amongst students,

educationists, and policy makers (Humphreys & Kelly, 2014). The root cause of this false representation is plain ignorance of this model of higher education (Olejarz, 2017). For instance, contrary to popular misbelief, liberal arts do not necessarily propagate the political ideology of “liberalism” or a free, unrestrained outlook in socio-cultural matters. Another mistaken belief is that liberal arts degrees are the same as a traditional honors degrees in disciplines from “general education” such as English literature, history, and political science. Yet another misunderstanding is that performing and fine arts are the main focus of the liberal arts model. The ignorance of this model could be a result of confounding how this model operates in the present with liberal education as it was practiced in the ancient and medieval times. It is indeed very common to come across this confusion (Summer, 2005). It is an easy confusion to make too: The liberal arts model was the first higher education system to emerge, in the ancient times; therefore, many researchers misperceive liberal arts education today to be similar to what it was in the past, and think of it as a *relic* with little relevance in the modern times. Historically, liberal education has been “[the] pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and to prepare learners for a future in leadership in positions of power and influence... [to further] understanding and democratic citizenship...broaden the horizons...develop skills in analysis, written and oral communication, and critical thinking” (Brint et al. 152, as cited in Summer, 2005, p. 24). In the ancient Western world, higher education rested on the three-fold foundation of logic, grammar, and rhetoric. The knowledge of these three liberal arts domains was considered a requirement before free citizens (called *liber* in Latin) could participate in civic duties. The study of classical disciplines

continued to be the mainstay in the medieval times. Later, liberal arts evolved and diversified along the lines of the four-year bachelors programs seen in American institutions (c.f. AACU, n.d.)<sup>i</sup>. In the previous century, liberal arts education was often taken to mean elitist programs that were removed from any occupational concern, and limited to institutions that depended on generous endowments. This is no longer the case. In the present times, such a system of education is a holistic training ground for future endeavors. No longer considered an intellectual luxury, liberal arts education has reinvented itself to emphasize essential learning outcomes that can be assessed at the level of the individual student (Nussbaum, 1998, as cited in AACU, n.d.). Liberal arts education is very popular in North America, and the American model is followed in many Anglophone and some European countries<sup>ii</sup>. Eminent institutions such as Harvard and Stanford reserve a place of great pride for their liberal arts programs. Liberal arts colleges that follow this model are four-year degree colleges, and many of the prestigious ones are private. Although hundreds of institutions are dedicated liberal arts colleges, many more offer liberal arts programs to add richness to their curricular offerings. The vast majority offers four years of full-time study, leading to a bachelor’s degree (in arts or science); a few have one-year associate’s degree in liberal arts, and still others offer masters and doctoral degree. Many institutions in the US have taken the lead in launching programs in STEM disciplines that combine features of liberal arts education by including courses in humanities and social sciences in their curriculum as well as other attributes of the liberal arts model, such as a focus on imparting “essential skills” (cf. Report on College Learning for the New Global Century, AACU, 2007). Definition and characteristics

Going by the conventional definition, liberal arts education is a system of higher education that encourages learners to transcend domain-specific barriers of disciplinary study, thereby *liberating* them to acquire knowledge in its most complex and

diverse essence. Smith (2003, pp. 14-18) defines liberal arts education as a “philosophy of education that empowers individuals, liberates them from ignorance, and cultivates social responsibility, characterized by challenging encounters with important issues, and more a way of studying than a specific content”. According to Humphreys (n.d.), liberal arts education is a “philosophy of education that empowers individuals with core knowledge and transferable skills, and a strong sense of ethics, values, and civic engagement. . . . Involving challenging intellectual encounters with important and relevant issues today and throughout history, a liberal education prepares graduates for socially valued work and civic leadership” (n.p.). Instead of limiting areas of study to a specialized or applied field, the student chooses courses from a wide spectrum of subjects, while still staying grounded in general education. Thus, the student’s gain is twofold: interdisciplinary knowledge and the ability to think individually and critically. At the end of a program in liberal arts education, the student is not necessarily armed with job-specific training, but with broad-spectrum education and transferable skills, all of which will go to ensure that he thrives in the realms of workforce, life-long learning, and civic engagement. The defining role of liberal arts education has been to prepare the student to engage with the world: “[liberal arts has been] concerned with important educational aims: cultivating intellectual and ethical judgment, helping students comprehend and negotiate their relationship to the larger world, and preparing graduates for lives of civic responsibility and leadership” (Schneider, 2004, p. 6). Generalist and diverse, rather than specialist and narrow in focus, liberal arts programs generally offer, in the first year, courses that are introductory in scope, so that the student is exposed to a wide range of disciplines and is able to select the areas that he would like to pursue for further study<sup>iii</sup>. “Liberal Education is an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world

(e.g. science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest. A liberal education helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings. . . a liberal education usually includes a general education curriculum that provides broad learning in multiple disciplines and ways of knowing, along with more in-depth study in a major” (AACU, 2017, n.p.). Humphreys (2014) notes that a successful liberal arts education ensures a “democratic and economic future for students” (n.p.), referring to the often-cited “economic” and “civic” cases that are made for liberal arts by AACU, discussed later. Very briefly, the economic case for liberal arts education rests on the argument that, in knowledge economy, field-specific knowledge alone will not be sufficient to either enter the global graduate labour market or to advance in it. It must be coupled with some degree of liberal arts education, which will endow students with broad-based transferable attributes and skills, to prepare them for their first job and, even more important, to ensure that they will remain employable. The civic case for liberal arts is based on the belief that liberal arts prepare the student to connect with the wider world—the local and global community and for global citizenship. Humphreys (2014, n.p.) lists these attributes as follows:

- “The Capacity to Envision
- Analytical Skills to Test Alternatives
- The Desire and Ability to Solve Problems Across [sic] Difference
- Wisdom to Consider Larger Contexts and Consequences
- Commitment to Devote Time and Talent to the Making of a Better World”

The decision to opt for liberal arts, as opposed to professionally-oriented programs such as engineering or medicine, at the post-secondary and higher levels, must be guided by the student’s long-term goals; and there are as many reasons as there

are students. Many students who enroll in liberal arts bachelors program decide to go for a masters degree that will allow them to acquire more specialized knowledge in an area of their choice. The liberal arts are unique in that they mould students to be lifelong learners, to build on the groundwork, and keep adding to their educational inventory—the capacity to continue to learn in life. There are other guiding circumstances too. Perhaps the student wishes to hone in specific skills such as business writing, gain personal enrichment by understanding the feminist theory or fine arts, or earn an edge in the global job market by learning the French language. In all these cases, the student would anyway have benefited from a strong foundational base of broad-based education and a wide spectrum of proficiencies such as advanced facility with words and critical thinking, which will stand him in good stead, regardless of the career or further learning he aspires to pursue. Liberal learning: defining property of professional education. The basis of the argument about liberal arts being important to professional education, indeed being the defining property of professional education—as opposed to vocational education—lies in a higher education system that is well differentiated. This line of thinking can be traced back to the origin of the concept of differentiation in higher education as we understand it today (cf. Vught, 2007). The emergence of “research university” brought with it an emphasis on the division of arts and science; it also brought along growing emphasis on professional education and the nature and goal of professional education as being a category all its own, not to be confused with technical education. As higher education systems in the industrialized countries grew more differentiated, liberal arts and professional education came closer together, whereas the lines that set professional education apart from vocational grew stronger. How did liberal arts become a crucial part of professional education, particularly in differentiating the latter from vocational education? A key factor was the emergence of professional codes of ethics for individual professions (Gardner & Shulman, 2005;

Grubb and Lazerson, 2005). These were guides on subjects such as ethical dilemmas that were likely to be faced by practicing professionals in a specific profession. The liberal arts have contributed generously to the development of professional ethics because the study of ethics, civic responsibilities, and global matters etc. has always been at the centre of liberal arts. Liberal arts, even if they do not offer the study of ethics individually, instill ethical sensibilities, which guide well-considered decision-making and responsible behavior and choices in the workplace and outside of it. The liberal arts model also helps foster values of civic engagement and global citizenship amongst students as they learn about issues related to international relations, social justice, sustainability, environment etc. Further, the liberal arts enrich professional education by creating learning communities that study not merely the “external aspects” of professional education such as “economics, acquisitiveness, and competitiveness” but also the internal ones: “values, beliefs—the human experience” (Astin, 2004, p. 37). Summer (2016, p. 23) concludes that liberal arts play an important role in distinguishing professional education from the vocational-technical variety. The inclusion of liberal arts widens the knowledge base of professional education, making it more true to the goal of higher education. Vocational education, which is focused on technical learning and training, does not have a need or basis for inclusion of aspects of the liberal arts: “This set professional education apart from vocational education. To be professionally prepared meant to be a thinker as opposed to being vocationally prepared, which meant to be a technician” (p. 23). Thus, an important distinguishing feature of professional education is that it includes aspects of liberal arts, unlike vocational education. Globalized world and emerging requirements in higher education: Compelling need for a re-defined role of the liberal arts education system. The Liberal arts education model has undergone many changes in the last several decades, and these must be seen in light of the other developments in higher education. The US,



where liberal arts education has developed in a systematic and policy-directed manner, is an interesting model in this regard. An important development is that, globally, professional education has grown by leaps and bounds. Enrolment in professional education has been growing in the last several decades and is projected to continue to grow in the future (Flaherty, 2017; Friedman, 2016). It is notable that, in times of economic decline, as a general overall trend, enrolment in professional programs increases but, in general education, decreases (Brint, 2005; Lagemann, 2003). As can be expected, a downturn in the economy—indeed any significant change in economic patterns—carries the potential to set off apprehension and insecurities related to career prospects. To the student, it may seem as though he might need to make changes in his curricular choices in order to keep pace with the changing economic environment: Often times, this results in “preoccupation with the immediate job market” (Deluchi, 1997, p. 414). This reactive “preoccupation” must not be *accommodated* at its face value by the higher education system; rather, it must be weighed with deliberation.

Another important trend is that the wage premium for college graduates has been increasing and is expected to continue to do so in the future:

“[students] with four-year college degrees made 98 percent more an hour on average in 2013 than people without a degree. That’s up from 89 percent five years earlier, 85 percent a decade earlier and 64 percent in the early 1980s” (Leonhardt, 2014, as cited in Humphreys & Carnevale, 2016, n.p.) The increase in professional and vocational education is reflective of a broader trend—greater access to higher education. An increasingly broader segment of the socio-economic spectrum is projected to access post-secondary and higher education. This would include a bigger ratio of students from under-privileged backgrounds, students with learning disabilities, older students, students with active careers, and so on. To this emerging segment, education is not always easily affordable and therefore it must yield sufficient returns on

investment in time and money (“Falling Short,” 2015)<sup>iv</sup>. What does this trend have to do with liberal arts?

“As increasing numbers of people seek collegiate education . . . [we must] ensure them not simply access to college, but an education of real and lasting value. The unprecedented expansion of college enrollments creates an extraordinary opportunity to prepare the informed citizens and competent employees needed for the new knowledge-based society” (Ramley et al., 2002). Professional education, even if relatively limited to the primary goal of providing job-directed skills, must yet strive to provide a modicum of qualities that go beyond the technical knowledge: widening of intellectual horizons, critical thinking, communication etc. Thus, in addition to occupationally-directed training, students must have the “knowledge, skills and capacities” (Hermann, 2004, p. 46) to find their place in the workforce and contribute to the society.

An important contribution of liberal arts lies in lending the integrative and holistic component to professional education. Liberal arts must be woven into the academic rubric as a crucial component of cross-disciplinary and integrative curricula (Aubry, 2017)<sup>v</sup>. “If we want to prepare students to solve large-scale human problems . . . we must push them to widen, not narrow, their education and interests. . . we also need people who grasp the whys and hows of human behavior. . . What matters now is not the skills you have but how you think. Can you ask the right questions? Do you know what problem you’re trying to solve in the first place? . . . a true “liberal arts” education . . . [leads to a] A well-rounded learning experience . . . [and] opens people up to new opportunities and helps them develop products that respond to real human needs” (Olejarz, 2017, n.p.). Developments in the globalized world point to a future where higher education will have to push itself and yield more. As public funding shrinks, provision of higher education becomes more capital-intensive, and the spectrum of student demographic expands, higher education must drive more loads and deliver more than it has been used to thus far

(Flaherty, 2017). Anders (2015; 2017)<sup>vi</sup> and Aubry (2017) make a very important prediction based on current trends in the graduate labour market: “tech waves,” as Anders (2015; 2017) calls them, have created and will continue to create a huge, possibly difficult to meet, demand for jobs that would require creative and critical thinking. The future labour market will be characterized by massive volume of jobs that have been the result of “tech waves” but will require liberally educated—not merely technically trained—graduates to man them: “today’s tech wave will inspire a new style of work in which tech takes care of routine tasks so that people can concentrate on . . . generating creative ideas and actions in a data-rich world” (Anders, 2015, n.p.). Jobs in core computer science and technology that owe their origin to tech boom will create a whole array of jobs in communication, branding, fund raising, and human resources, to name some, that would require skills taught in the humanities: “To thrive in these [referring to areas that require creative and critical thinking] areas, one must be able to communicate effectively, read subtle social and emotional cues, make persuasive arguments, adapt quickly to fluid environments, interpret new forms of information while translating them into a compelling narrative and anticipate obstacles and opportunities before they arise. Programs like English or history represent better preparation . . . for the demands of the newly emerging “rapport sector” than vocationally oriented disciplines like engineering or finance” (Aubry, 2017, n.p.)<sup>vii</sup>. With the “Knowledge Revolution” afoot, a shift has occurred from occupations rooted in manufacturing to those that are fueled by knowledge and innovation. “Skills for the twenty-first century require higher-order thinking not just occupational skill” (Summer, 2005). Thus specific career-directed knowledge must be combined with skills that facilitate *adaptation* to many lines of work and many work-settings. As the present workplace environment becomes fast-changing, adaptability to a range of trades and workplaces becomes an important asset in a graduate’s portfolio. Liberal arts

fill in this gap by adding critical thinking and problem solving attributes, which complement technically-oriented skill set: “The old dictum of combining the ‘liberal arts and the useful arts’ has stood the test of time. Only now it is more applicable than ever” (Useem, 1995, p. 3). In order to keep step with labour market changes in the globalized world, higher education must aim to become more integrative and less fragmented (See Appendix 1 for more supporting data). An integrative approach would at long last bring the humanities to intersect with the sciences and technology, thereby combining the intellectual with the practical and the general with the specific: “Analysis and application . . . [will as a result] come together, where once they were presented as alternative educational pathways” (Schneider, 2004, p. 9). This would require, on the part of liberal arts, to become deliberately more practical so that students can apply classroom learning in the world outside (Lagemann, 2003; Shulman, 2005; Stone, 2004). Given that, in the globalized world, economic patterns are forever remodeling and newer arrangements define the prevailing state of things, institutions must keep step in order to better serve the emergent requirements of prospective members of the workforce. With reference to liberal arts, there have been strong voices to re-work this model of higher education, so that, in addition to the core values and proficiencies that it has always be associated with, such an education model also sharpen the focus on expertise, in particular, expertise in the professional domain<sup>viii</sup>. “Human work will increasingly shift toward two kinds of tasks: solving problems for which standard operating procedures do not currently exist, and working with new information—acquiring it, making sense of it, communicating it to others....today, work that consists of following clearly specified directions is increasingly being carried out by computers and workers in lower-wage countries. The remaining jobs that pay enough to support families require a deeper level of knowledge and the skills to apply it.” (Levy & Murnane, 2013, as cited in Humphreys, 2014, n.p.). An integrative

approach: Liberal arts for liberal learning. According to Humphreys and Carnevale (2016),<sup>ix</sup> the demand for college-educated workers will continue to grow. There is a growing trend towards the expectation that post-secondary education must make the students career-ready, so that the employer is relieved of the burden of dispensing additional training. This demand also includes a requirement for “. . . engaged and informed citizens, who are knowledgeable about themselves and the world”. [In a globalized knowledge economy, the] “capacity to drive innovation is the key strategic economic advantage. . . . Global interdependence and complex cross-cultural interactions increasingly define modern society and the workplace and call for new levels of knowledge and capability” (n.p.). As discussed earlier, innovations in technology and science will create need for newer and broad-ranging transferable skills and capabilities amongst *all* employees, both those whose core skills are technical and those whose core skills are creative. These abilities and skills will consolidate and enhance the total career-readiness quotient by adding all-round “high-skills” (Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2011) and building an array of proficiencies that will stand the student in good stead as he enters or advances in the professional world (Hermann, 2004; Humphreys & Davenport, 2005). “Trained to be flexible and adaptable, these students [trained in the liberal arts model] are well equipped . . . to navigate an unstable job market, where companies, fields and sometimes whole industries rise and fall at a nauseating clip, where automation is rendering once coveted skills redundant and where provisional short-term jobs, freelance assignments, part-time gigs, unpaid internships and self-employment are replacing long-term, full-time salaried positions that include rights and benefits protected by unions” (Aubry, 2017, n.p.). Professionally-oriented education shows a trend towards increasing specialization. Although disciplinary depth is irrefutably an asset, specialization and professionalization of disciplinary knowledge carry the risk of isolating domain-specific knowledge from

other disciplines. In order for education to serve goals of community engagement, civic responsibilities, and global citizenship, it must move towards a more integrative approach (Grubb & Lazerson, 2005). While still aiming at attaining domain-specific knowledge, programs in all fields—be it the degree programs in STEM disciplines or short-term diploma programs in specifically targeted job skills—must introduce students to a broader range of disciplines and modalities, even if to a small extent. The integration of liberal arts as a complementary modality into the traditional professional education model provides a ready answer. Liberal arts courses help students integrate varied content and perspectives across disciplines and apply it to solve contemporary global challenges (Hersh, 1997). Liberal arts, for its part, must continue to remain true to the *liberal learning* aspect so that, whether it be studied by itself or complementarily, it deliver on the promises it make: real-world applicability, contemporary problem solving, etc. (Bernstein, Marx, and Bender, 2005). Intersection of the liberal and the professional: aligning the general with the specific. Globally, many nations aspire to move towards a post-production, knowledge economy construct. This would imply that the skills that promote creativity, resourcefulness, curiosity, and awareness will have infinite opportunities for potentiation (Harrington, 2003): “[Liberal arts education provides universal and timeless skills] “that are neither job—nor place-in-time specific. They are skills that will not become obsolete” (Harrington, 2003, p. 51). “. . . individuals with liberal arts degrees are by far the sharpest, best-performing software developers and technology leaders. . . A well-rounded liberal arts degree establishes a foundation of critical thinking. . . Philosophy, literature, art, history and language give students a thorough understanding of how people document the human experience. Technology is a part of our human experience, not a replacement to it” (Kalt, 2016, n.p.)<sup>x</sup>. Globalization is all about relegation of physical-territorial boundaries to the past. Knowledge economy must traverse many

different new terrains, one of these is that the corporate world, indeed the labour market in general, must cross paths with other realms. Examples include giving-back to the society (CRS), or internationalization as multinational operations get under way, or cross-disciplinary focus as business expands and new fields become relevant (Astin, 2004; Carnevale&Strohl, 2001; Useem, 1995):

“broad societal mission and the employer’s more narrow economic interest are converging.” The “new knowledge-based economy needs the kind of graduates that liberal education provides— workers who have general skills, who can think outside the box, participate in team efforts, and flourish in interdisciplinary settings” (Carnevale&Strohl, 2001, as cited in Summer, 2005. p. 27). As the landscape of labor market becomes globalized, higher education must follow suit and ask of itself if there be a need for re-arrangement to better align with the career-readiness factor. A far-reaching trend in higher education is internationalization, and research on internationalization of higher education points to a need for understanding the “other,” which brings the liberal arts front and centre into the conversation (Brint et al., 2005). Liberal arts help students acquire what is called “cosmopolitan capital” in the lexicon of internationalization—the ability to navigate cultural and geographical differences as a result of awareness and acceptance of differences. Although passive tolerance of diversity is easily achieved, respectful acceptance of the same is the territory of a cultivated mind. The traditional binaries of “us” and “them” cannot be rooted out without an understanding of how and why other people have evolved the way they have—the bedrock of humanities and social sciences. The liberal arts education model is uniquely suited to benefit from internationalization of higher education. The historic goal of this model has been to prepare citizens who will lead and serve by solving societal-political challenges. Trained to balance multiple and conflicting perspectives in their mind, liberal arts students can be trusted to not miss the larger picture. The curriculum of this model is wonderfully well-

matched to weave in instruments of international education such as study abroad and semester exchange programs and global service learning. These offer students a formative opportunity to nurture an understanding of their own culture as one of many. A meaningful liberal arts experience initiates a global conversation by bringing to students those experiences that question closed-minded beliefs, break down comfort zones, and push towards out-of-the-box thinking. Liberal arts education must find place in post-secondary and higher education so that students benefit from *quality* education: “[there is] an emerging, if hidden, consensus among business and civic leaders, professional accreditors, and college educators on the key outcomes of a quality undergraduate education. This consensus underlines the importance of an engaged and practical liberal education for all students, regardless of their chosen institution or field of study” (Humphreys and Davenport, 2005, p. 36). While professional education operates in the specific context of the application of occupational skills, liberal arts are the very opposite of a specific context: It aims to create “students [who are] empowered, informed, and responsible” (Harrington, p. 50). Liberal arts complement professionally-oriented disciplines by equipping students with non-specific general attributes and skills that will complete the array of capabilities that will ready the students for the workforce. In this way, liberal arts are indeed part of professional training (Jaschik, 2016)<sup>xi</sup>. According to Humphreys and Carnevale (2016, n.p.), who cite a

“database analyzing qualifications for 1,100 different jobs, there is consistent evidence that the highest salaries apply to positions that call for intensive use of liberal education capabilities . . . . These capabilities include (in no specific order): Writing, Inductive and Deductive Reasoning, Judgment and Decision Making, Problem Solving, Social/Interpersonal Skills, Mathematics, Originality”. Students with a narrow, specific set of skills are not readily or unconditionally attractive to employers. The present globalized world is rapidly



changing, and a student who has prepared himself for one trade alone may find that his craft has become obsolete in other times and places than the present. Indeed, in a shifting economy, where new career paths emerge every few years, technical skills alone may only go so far as to help secure entry-level jobs. There is no way of predicting if such skills will continue to be relevant a few years down the road. As part of the human resource base, those with technical skills alone will likely not have the resilience to evolve in new ways, as the nature of career opportunities changes. “A 2013 survey by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that 95 percent of employers agreed that “our company puts a priority on hiring people with the intellectual and interpersonal skills that will help them contribute to innovation in the workplace” and that 93 percent agreed with the statement that “candidates’ demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.” (Stross, 2017, n.p.) Hiring patterns, including campus recruitment, suggest that employers appreciate the broad knowledge base and widely applicable “high” skills that liberal arts education bestows, such as cross-cultural and global competencies. In addition to these skills, liberal arts education fosters core transferable attributes that hold good across the board: reflective reading, applied writing, evaluative skills (such as pattern-intelligence), information literacy (the ability to “learn how to learn”), problem-solving (applying classroom knowledge to solve real-world problems), knowledge-gathering and -synthesizing skills, analytical capabilities (extrapolating information in varying scenarios), and informed curiosity. These traits readily lend themselves to research acumen, talent for project management, and judgment of human psychology and behavior. The mis-thinking that professional education is all about job training and liberal arts has no relation to employment represents gross ignorance of the data on the graduate labour market: “in 2011 and 2012, . . . the unemployment rate for recently graduated majors in

humanities and liberal arts (8.4 percent) wasn’t all that different from the jobless rates for majors in computers and math (8.3 percent), biology (7.4 percent), business (7 percent) and engineering (6.5 percent)” (Pearlstein, 2016, n.p.)<sup>xii</sup> Unwelcome as it is, the misperception that professional education is the only path to jobs and economic development continues amongst policy makers, perhaps because the reality requires a thorough and in-depth understanding of the complex manner in which liberal arts education contributes to graduate labour markets across the globe: “Such [referring to the many ways in which liberal education is crucial for job-readiness] nuances elude policymakers, who can’t shake the notion that tech-centered instruction is the only sure ticket to success” (Anders, 2015, n.p.). Further, the belief that liberal arts majors (or majors in humanities and social sciences) earn less than majors in STEM disciplines is grossly exaggerated (Carnevale & Cheah, 2015).<sup>xiii</sup> Job markets in the globalized world tend to be unpredictable, as a result of which, employers prefer to hold on to a core of workforce with transferable skills, rather than continually re-invest in the human resource to top up individual talents. Many studies have proved that liberal arts education provides a safety net of assignable skills that offer steady protection in the face of a changeable job marketplace. According to a report titled *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society*<sup>xiv</sup>, published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), “literacy skills,” which are the mainstay of liberal arts education, provide rich dividends in any career path. The literacy skills that were referenced in the report are the ability to 1) comprehend and use prose 2) analyze documents 3) work with numbers. The report concluded that literacy skills go a long way in determining wages in the twelve OECD countries that participated, especially in the US and Canada. The report added that, whereas educational qualifications alone may help secure a job, it is literacy skills that help an employee hold onto the job and get promoted through the ranks. Further, those with literacy skills

were more adaptable to changing circumstances, and therefore less likely to lose their jobs. Another study by National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)<sup>xv</sup>, which compared job placement in 2014 with that in the year 2013, reported that the number of graduates who received at least one job offer increased by 2 percent in 2014 to reach nearly 48 percent, which was a result of improvement in job placement for liberal arts graduates (the percentage increase for math was 6.8, for communication 9.5, and visual and performing arts 15.4). Similarly, paths for career advancement are not the monopoly of STEM disciplines; humanities and liberal arts graduates succeed in acquiring positions of leadership and seniority to the same extent as professionally-educated graduates (Carnevale, Cheah, & Hanson, 2015)<sup>xvi</sup>. “Liberal arts colleges promise students a well-rounded education in core disciplines that will prepare them for a variety of careers and lifelong learning — not just a first job” (Flaherty, 2017, n.p.).

“Though it does not automatically land one in a particular career, training in the humanities, when pitched correctly, will ultimately lead to gainful and fulfilling employment. Indeed, by the time they reach what Stross terms the “peak earning ages,” 56-60, liberal arts majors earn on average \$2,000 more per year than those with pre-professional degrees (if advanced degrees in both categories are included)” (Aubry, 2017, n.p.). Thus, students must be encouraged to make post higher education choices based on what they see as a fulfilling role for themselves in the future, not on the misguided perception that they must fit into a small niche to ensure employability.

Institutional and academic approaches to embedding aspects of liberal arts education into professionally-oriented programs:

An integrative approach requires that liberal arts education be weighed and considered for its ability to serve professional education by providing students skills that will make them productive members of the workforce. An important factor to consider is that liberal arts courses must be designed

to be goal-directed and purposeful, outlined with clearly expressed objectives. It is important to move away from any path that is “directionless” (Carnevale&Strohl, 2001). With the increasing trend of higher tuition costs all over the world, students expect substantial returns on their investment in time and money in higher education; the foremost question is this: what is the payoff? (Schneider, 2004). How do we direct liberal arts education to a course that leads students to a wholesome higher education experience? In other words, how do we ensure that lessons from liberal arts are delivered effectively so that students “metabolize” and integrate them? According to Bernstein, Marx, and Bender (2005), instructors must utilize a pro-active approach to help students register the dilemmas, lessons, and takeaways in a way that is lasting and extrapolate-able. Liberal arts must be enriched with practicable qualities, which can be readily put to use as and when the opportunity presents itself: “Rather than expecting students ‘to connect the dots and see the larger figures that emerge from the units in our curriculum . . . we must show students the connections” (Summer, 2005, p. 26).

A proven-effective method is to introduce and draw insight from everyday common occurrences and events around the community—both local and global. A liberally-educated student must have developed the capacity for making linkages between the “life of the mind” and the “world of work”. He must therefore be able to judge the information he comes across by applying his cognitive, intellectual, and ethical filters—in other words, a life-long capacity for critical thinking, which can be called upon whenever there be a need. Indeed, the real-world presents with wonderful opportunities to apply and test out classroom learning. Student experiences outside the class are a reservoir of untapped potential for embedding liberal-thinking; therefore instructors must actively seek and seize chances outside the classroom for engagement (Carnevale&Strohl, 2001; Stimpert, 2004). Service-learning has also been suggested as an area that holds enormous potential to benefit from the liberal arts model. Service-learning

provides avenues for forging connections with the world by putting into action what the students are learning at the time when they are learning. Service learning ensures that opportunities for learning-through-connections are utilized when the time is just right and the student is the most primed for learning, and that these opportunities are not put aside for a later (Lagemann, 2003). It could be said that instead of aiming to teach liberal arts as an adjuvant subject, perhaps we must work with the goal of preparing liberally-educated students, regardless of their field of expertise. Another way to look at it is that, although the (liberal arts) subject that is being taught is important, we must be careful to work on how the student thinks and processes information: “[liberal arts education is not about] furnishing the mind” . . . [rather, it is about] “shaping, energizing, and refining the mind” (Lagemann, 2003, p. 11). Thus, a liberally-educated mind can be expected to have the ability to contribute to the community and the workforce through vocation and other engagements. For this to happen successfully, liberal arts education must reinvent some aspects of itself. As discussed elsewhere, a big part of this is to dispose of the “direction-less-ness” that it is sometimes criticized for:

“In the liberal arts, we need to protect against hiding behind canonical value. A subject should not be learned simply because it’s good for you. Faculty must make connections always to the human experience. Students should be required to explore what a subject means to them and their world today. A liberal education should “illuminate the human condition” . . . ” (Summer, 2005, p. 26). The present graduate labour market is changing so fast that graduates must anticipate in the present the changes that might occur in the future; they must be ready with the necessary skills for a job that they may not have in the present. They might even need to anticipate a scenario in the future where the job and the related skills might become obsolete. This is a case where liberal arts education and professional education intersect seamlessly since professional

education, on its own, would fail the student, but, if complemented with liberal arts education, will likely open unchartered avenues: “rigid specialists...are quickly left behind” (Hersh, 1997). In a study, it was estimated that, “by the year 2020, there will be a shortage of twenty one million skilled workers to fill jobs” (Jones, 2005, p. 34, as cited in Summer, 2005, p. 27). The study further estimates that this deficit of workers will be found in jobs that don’t even exist at present, which also implies that the skills that will be needed are not either not known, or worse, don’t even exist as of now. How do we prepare for such an unpredictable scenario? We prepare by arming ourselves with those attributes and proficiencies that will help us be adaptable and resilient: “the most practical education today is both “wide and deep,” one that is “transformative and liberating” (Hersh, 1997, n.p., as cited in Summer, 2005, p. 27). Liberal arts curriculum and pedagogy have responded to the growing needs of a global knowledge economy. The leading requirement is that liberal arts must be brought to intersect with professional education (Olejarz, 2017). Institutions incorporate this intersection in many ways. Recent research into North American institutions points that newer courses at liberal arts colleges increasingly combine practical fields with the traditionally popular humanities courses (Jaschik, 2016).

“A strong foundation in arts and sciences disciplines remains absolutely essential to a quality contemporary liberal education” (Humphreys, n.d., n.p.). A liberal education must include, to some extent, a general education curriculum so that students are provided with broad exposure to multiple disciplines and perspectives, while gaining from deeper insight in one or more area. Curriculum, the heart of academics, must be re-mapped to embed useful aspects of the liberal arts. This could include intentional curricular designs, more interdisciplinary work, problem-solution based work, real world application, assignments to inspire higher-order thinking and solve unscripted problems, and encouragement to document and calibrate development of essential skills (Humphreys, 2014).

Courses in core liberal arts such as creative and technical writing, foreign languages, and history must be placed in the first half of the period of study. These must be taught by faculty members who are grounded in the liberal arts tradition. If the period of study is brief, then, students must be offered, at a minimum, a sampling of the academic and intellectual tradition that is unique to the liberal arts. For instance, creative writing can be very useful for management studies because it can contribute to career in marketing and advertising. Similarly, students in engineering and technology can benefit from technical writing. Feminist theory can wonderfully complement a medical professional specializing in obstetrics and gynecology. An important way to incorporate the liberal arts model is to have the liberal arts faculty teach courses in professional programs (Hermann, 2004; Sharpe & Prichett, 2004). Another method that is successfully employed is “team-teaching between professional education faculty and liberal arts faculty” (Adams and Pugh, 1994, p. 64).

It is not enough to merely hire instructors from the liberal arts; rather it is more important to ensure that all faculty members, whether adjunct or tenure, are encouraged to teach in a manner befitting a liberally-educated person.

“Liberal education has always and continues to introduce and examine diverse perspectives on any subject and to teach students how to evaluate competing claims and different perspectives while they form their own judgments . . . Today’s liberal education focuses *both* on important content *and* on teaching the arts of analysis and argument that can be carried to any field of study or endeavor.” (Humphreys, n.d., n.p.). This would require two approaches: one, aspects of the liberal arts education be embedded into faculty development programs; two, faculty be encouraged to use scholarship (for instance, additional reading and research) as a means to introduce liberal-thinking:

“. . . facilitate the development of faculty for whom teaching comes first, yet who can integrate scholarship as a tool to stay current and further fuel

their enthusiasm for teaching. This challenge is not only important with new recruits. It is just as important for those well on their way or through the promotion and tenure process. The challenge is not simply to offer faculty development. It is to find ways to facilitate faculty participation and even ownership of the revitalization of liberal arts ways of thinking and knowing in the classroom—both the professional education one and the liberal education one” (Summer, 2005, p. 28). Instilling genuine enthusiasm for teaching and service learning amongst faculty members is important for bringing the liberal arts into professional education, even if this comes at the cost of pulling resources away from research. This is so because devoted time for teaching and service learning is integral to the liberal-thinking mindset, which focuses on critical thinking (Grubb and Lazerson, 2005): “This emphasis on teaching and service allows the time and focus to work with students to integrate professional and liberal thinking . . . [and] connect classroom to the workplace in mutually beneficial ways” (p. 20). Liberal education must help students identify linkages between what they study and the wider world, so that they make “clear connections between what they are learning and the lives they will lead as workers, citizens, community and family members” (Humphreys, n.d., n.p.). This could be achieved with the help of case studies from other disciplines (Shulman, 2005). In all these approaches, the intersection between liberal arts and professional education comes about through greater student engagement and “communal questioning and learning” (Shulman, p. 2005, p. 20) related to professional scenarios. In general, it has been observed that the level of active student participation is higher when aspects of liberal arts education are added: “In such [referencing liberal arts model] learning experiences, accountability in class is high—students participate in risky, anxiety-ridden discussions that are safely navigated by teachers who teach for the interpersonal engagement as much as the content to be learned” (Summer, 2005, p. 26).



Requirements for liberal arts, even if modest, must be clearly stated in terms of workload and credits. This is important because it will allow students to explore their interests while having enough opportunities to follow multiple areas of interest. Students, when given ample time to figure out their course of pursuit, are more likely to make more useful and imaginative choices. Institutions must ensure that liberal arts students are offered opportunities to develop transferable capabilities because these are associated with essential learning outcomes and the job marketplace requires and rewards the achievement of these outcomes. It is important that, in designing liberal arts programs, institutions identify and articulate learning outcomes. Unless these outcomes are outlined in advance, there is a risk that liberal arts education lose direction and purpose, and that it not add to the employability factor in the graduates.

“By coupling a field-specific skill set with the soft skills that form the foundation of a liberal education, liberal arts graduates can nearly double the number of jobs available to them....These additional occupations offer a \$6,000 annual salary premium over the less-technical jobs traditionally open to liberal arts graduates.” (“The Art of Employment: How Liberal Arts,” 2013, as cited in Humphreys & Carnevale, 2016, n.p.). The skills mentioned include promotions and marketing, social media, sales, computer networking, communication, to name some. Responding to the need for strengthening students and institutions’ confidence in the value of liberal arts education, researchers have emphasized the need for articulating and assessing learning outcomes from liberal arts education (see Appendix 2 for more on learning outcomes related to liberal arts). Assessment results go a long way in boosting public confidence in the quality and value of liberal arts degrees primarily because they address the policymakers’ demand for institutional accountability. In order for assessment results to achieve this important goal, they must be concretely outlined, easily communicated, and calibrated to pre-determined learning outcomes

(Levy & Murnane, 2013). Embedding liberal arts education: Difficult track. It is not easy for institutions to drive home the point that liberal arts are essential to professional education because the reasons are complex and not easily understood by the layperson. However, institutions must yet make the attempt by utilizing as many pathways as needed to get the message out that liberal arts education is indispensable to professional education because the values and attributes that it results in are many and life-long. This can be done through institutional publications such as annual reports, promotional material, Websites, and so on (Hersh, 1997; Schneider, 2004). The significance of such an education model must find place in “institutional identity” itself. The institution must make the effort to uphold the value of such a system of learning, beginning with the mission statement (Delucchi, 1997; Stimpert, 2004): “Ideally, a statement of identity will also educate prospective students, their parents, and the public about the purposes and value of a liberal arts education more generally” (Stimpert, 2004, p. 45).

In a nutshell, liberal thinking has to become the institutional ethos before the liberal arts model becomes embedded in professional education, indeed higher education in general. Unless the institutional leadership realizes the far-reaching advantages that accrue from the liberal arts system of education, the liberal arts will fall prey to the misperception that they have no real value in the students’ repertoire.

“Harrington leaves two questions for us as we ponder the issues: “In what kind of world will our students live? And, what kind of education will best equip them to lead productive lives” (50)? In the end, the professional-liberal pushme-pullyu is mythical. The compartmentalization of the higher educational world is false. Breadth and depth are possible to achieve in four years and actually can be “complementary if neither is relied on as an end, but rather a means” (Harrington 51). We must continue to strive for the intersection and to guard against leaving too much of liberal arts education behind. If

we do, we risk becoming “fragmented and inauthentic...where we act either as if we are not spiritual beings, or as if our spiritual side is irrelevant to our vocation or work (Astin 38)” (as cited in Summer, 2005, p. 28).

## Appendix 1

Excerpt from Humphreys and Carnevale (2016)

The following are some outcomes of survey conducted by Hart Research Associates, 2013, published in “It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success” (as cited in Humphreys & Carnevale, 2016, n.p.)

“Employers Continue to Raise the Bar and Hire for Innovation

- 95% of employers “put a priority on hiring people with the intellectual and interpersonal skills that will help them contribute to innovation in the workplace”
- 93% of employers say that they are asking employees to “take on more responsibilities and to use a broader set of skills than in the past”
- 95% of employers say that “a candidate’s demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major”
- 91% of employers say that “the challenges their employees face are more complex than they were in the past.”

## Appendix 2

Excerpt from AACU (2016, p. 4)

According to the AACU (2016, p. 4), the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AACU) has divided learning outcomes from liberal arts education as follows:

Intellectual	skills:
Writing skills	
Critical thinking and analytic reasoning skills	
Quantitative reasoning skills	
Oral communication skills	

Intercultural skills and abilities

Information literacy skills

Ethical reasoning skills

Integration and Application of Knowledge and Skills

Research skills and projects

Integration of learning across disciplines

Application of learning beyond the classroom

Civic engagement and competence

Humphreys (2014),

## References

1. *How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment: A Report on Earnings and Long-Term Career Paths* SEE AACU WEBSITE FOR MORE INFO  
<https://www.aacu.org/nchems-report>
2. <https://hbr.org/2017/07/liberal-arts-in-the-data-age>
3. <https://www.aacu.org/leap/what-is-a-liberal-education>
4. In India, the expression liberal arts education is often used loosely and incorrectly—at times, to refer to any or all of the performing-visual-fine arts, and, at other, to , mean programs in the humanities and social sciences, such as English literature and sociology. It is important to point out that, although all of these subjects feature front and centre as areas of study in liberal arts programs, a curriculum that focuses on one discipline alone, such as an honors degree curriculum, does not qualify as liberal arts education. A liberal arts programs is, by definition, multi-disciplinary in nature. The number of Indian institutions offering liberal arts programs has been steadily increasing in the recent past—there are about five institutions at present. Although Indian institutions have their own way of structuring courses, the curriculum is generally designed on the basis of

academic workload as the following: foundation (mandatory courses to be taken each semester), major/minor (specialization courses: majors are core courses and minors are complementary), and elective/co-curricular (exploratory or introductory).

5. [https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/GlobalCentury\\_final.pdf](https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/GlobalCentury_final.pdf)
6. [www.siue.edu/UGOV/FACULTY/LEAP %20Overview%20Powerpoint.ppt](http://www.siue.edu/UGOV/FACULTY/LEAP%20Overview%20Powerpoint.ppt)
7. At the level of undergraduate degree in liberal arts, in almost all cases, the first year is the year of exploration and discovery of interests. After which the student can put in place a course of study that is a good match for his interest and goal. Students are offered courses from within the key categories within liberal arts: social sciences (political science, sociology, economics, geography), humanities (literature, philosophy, classical studies), the sciences (math, physics, biology), and creative and performing arts (communication, drama). The students then generally opt for a modest degree of concentration by enrolling in courses that are grouped on the basis of a common or related theme—or major(s), as they are called in America. This allows the student to gain an in-depth understanding of core areas in a subject.
8. Vocational education, too, has grown exponentially, an evidence of which in the US is the expansion of community colleges (Associate degree-granting institutions) in the last several decades: “While at the turn of the 20th century only 5 percent of high-school graduates (nearly all men) received a “classical” bachelor’s degree, today over 70 percent of high-school graduates attend

postsecondary institutions. Thus, today, 25 percent of America’s workforce has a bachelor’s degree, and 40 percent has earned at least an Associate’s degree” (Shin, 2014, n.p.).

9. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/02/21/liberal-arts-students-fears-about-job-market-upon-graduation-are-increasingly>
10. <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2015employerstudentsurvey.pdf>
11. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/21/books/review/you-can-do-anything-george-anders-liberal-arts-education.html>
12. [https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01NAI5Q6H/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?\\_encoding=UTF8&btcr=1](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01NAI5Q6H/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btcr=1)
13. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “by 2022 some 1 million more Americans will enter the workforce as educators. Another 1.1 million newcomers will earn a living in sales. . . Each wave of tech will create fresh demand for high-paid trainers, coaches, workshop leaders and salespeople. By contrast, software engineers' ranks will grow by 279,500, or barely 3% of overall job growth. Narrowly defined tech jobs, by themselves, aren't going to be the answer for long-term employment growth, says Michael Chui, a partner at McKinsey Global Institute” (Anders, 2015, n.p.).
14. Summer (2005) lists two important American publications that lend credence to the argument: the 2002 Greater Expectation National Panel Report and the report of the Liberal Education and America’s Promise: Excellence for Everyone as America Goes to College.

15. <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/EconomicCase2016.pdf>
  16. <https://blogs.wsj.com/experts/2016/06/01/why-i-was-wrong-about-liberal-arts-majors/>
  17. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/11/14/research-paper-suggests-liberal-arts-colleges-are-offering-more-courses-outside>
  18. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/09/02/meet-the-parents-who-wont-let-their-children-study-literature/?utm\\_term=.190b725a2094](https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/09/02/meet-the-parents-who-wont-let-their-children-study-literature/?utm_term=.190b725a2094)
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  20. <https://sites.uni.edu/reineke/whystudyla.htm>
  21. <http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A32828>
  22. <https://www.usnews.com/news/college-of-tomorrow/articles/2014/09/22/there-is-value-in-liberal-arts-education-employers-say>
  23. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/WIW2-FullReport.pdf>
  24. [https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2015\\_Survey\\_Report3.pdf](https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2015_Survey_Report3.pdf)
  25. <http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/Presentations/SAWHumphreys.pdf>
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