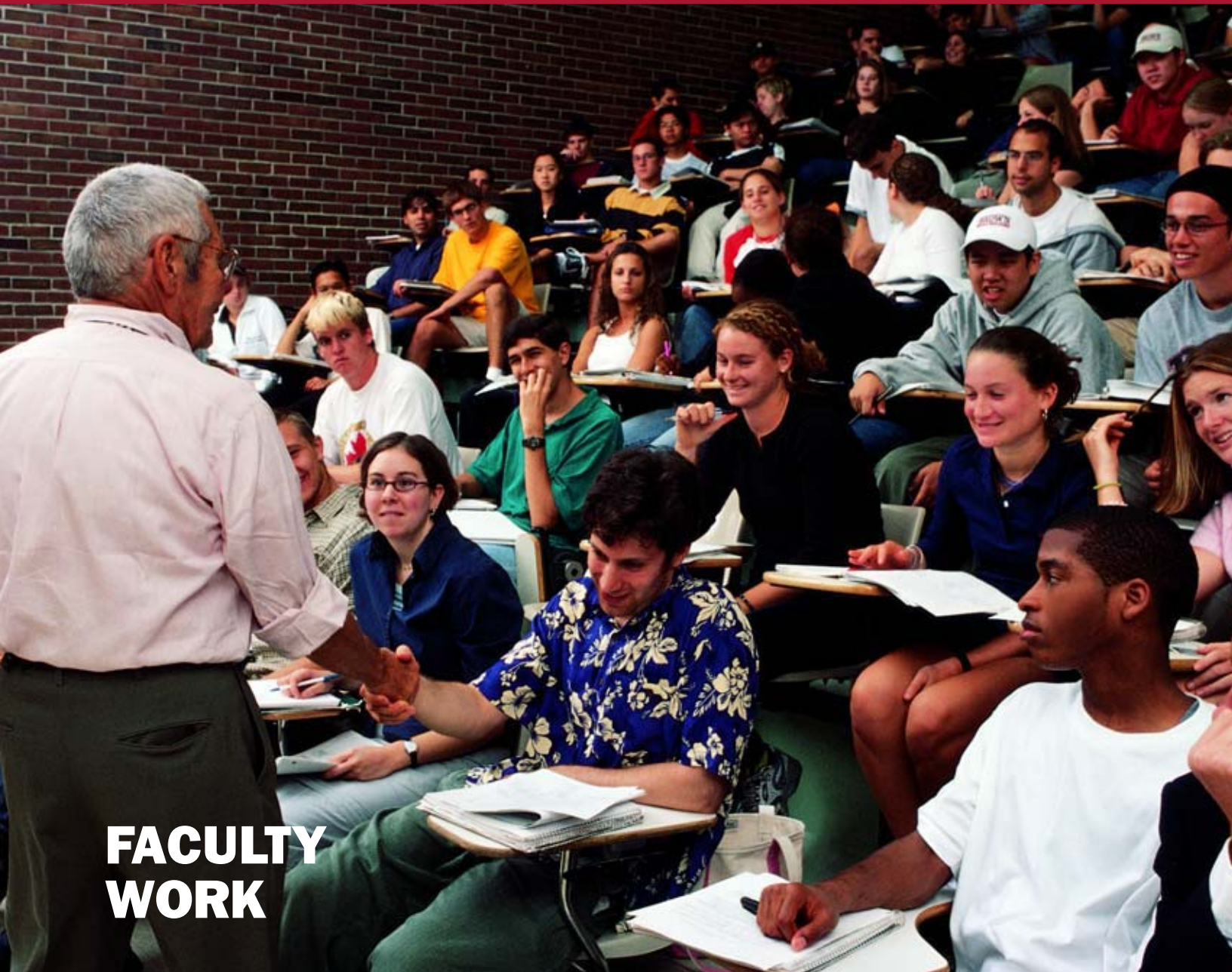


Liberal Education

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Liberal Arts Scholarship Competition



University of
Wisconsin–Milwaukee



as one of training students in their respective areas of inquiry, however, the emphasis should instead lie upon giving students broad tools of analysis and interpretation that enable them to function effectively across disciplines, regardless of what they happen to study while attending the university.

The economic competitiveness of the United States in the twenty-first century will greatly depend upon the ability of the secondary and higher education institutions of our country to produce citizens with the ability to observe, reason, analyze, criticize, understand, and act upon information from increasingly diverse sources, using integrated methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis reaching across the social and natural sciences and the humanities. The demands of the twenty-first century require the colleges and universities of our country to strive toward the development of globally minded, fluid, analytical citizens able to effectively function in the context of an increasingly complex, pluralistic world order.

Since the onset of industrial methods of production in Western Europe over two hundred years ago, technology has worked to weave human societies closer and closer together, for better or for worse. These technologies have enabled astounding leaps in human progress as well as numerous unspeakable horrors from which we do not stand far removed. Modern technology has enabled Western society to feed, clothe, house, and provide for more and more of its citizens, yet such improvements have also been produced through incredible denigrations of human life, including the displacement and extermination of indigenous American peoples, the institution of African chattel slavery in the United States, and the Euro-American colonization of Africa, Asia, South America, and the Pacific. Can the current level of material and technological prosperity enjoyed by so

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many serve as justification for such atrocities? Can our societies somehow work in the future to bring the nations of the “third world” into the material prosperity of the global marketplace? In order to work as students, citizens, and professionals to solve these and other questions of the new century, the educational institutions of this country must gear themselves to train citizens across a wide span of intellectual disciplines in order to answer these questions in the most comprehensive manner possible.

The same scientific revolution that brought about the onset of industrialization at the beginning of the nineteenth century has confronted modern society with changes that are reshaping it more quickly and fundamentally than is easily understandable. Information and communications technologies, such as laptop computers, cellular phones, ocean-spanning fiber-optic lines, satellites, and the Internet, have resulted in the decline in influence of even the nation-state, which once stood as the primary social institution on the global level, second only to perhaps the family. Multinational corporations now operate across national boundaries, increasing the difficulty of the state’s regulation of economic activity; the rise of global terror networks has redefined our enemies as well-equipped individuals not linked to any single country. These two developments represent examples of how technology is reshaping the world in profound ways; these changes demand citizens equipped with the ability to meet and respond effectively to these challenges.

By providing a broad, empowering liberal arts education pulling from many diverse areas of social, scientific, and humanistic inquiry, colleges and universities can give students the



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breadth of knowledge necessary for understanding the increasing complexity of our world. By developing the ability of students to analyze problems on both qualitative and quantitative bases, to continually test and re-examine what they know, colleges and universities can give students the tools to apply their knowledge to the world around them. By teaching students how to communicate—to discuss, to argue, to write, to debate—colleges and universities can arm them with the crucial capacity of being able to take action based upon their knowledge.

The goal of a liberal arts education in the twenty-first century must be to empower all citizens to make observations, draw conclusions, test those conclusions against the ideas of others, and use their knowledge to make an impact upon the world. From the beginnings of the European scientific revolution onward, this system of liberal scientific inquiry has revolutionized the process of truth seeking. A broad, liberal arts education represents the key to the richness of this tradition. By providing individuals with these fundamental capacities, a liberal education empowers individuals to act as fully effective citizens within the context of American democracy. The ability of the United States to adapt to the dynamic globalism of the twenty-first century greatly depends on the capacity of our populace to understand and adapt to the fluid context in which they live.

In addition to the social change brought about by the development of new, faster technologies, demographic and cultural changes also demand that individuals be equipped with the ability to respond to these changes. At the onset of the twenty-first century, our society has begun finally to listen to voices that have been silenced throughout our history, the voices of millions of African Americans, women, immigrants, LGBT individuals, and others. Overall, our country has worked continually to broaden the rights and privileges enjoyed by its citizens. Although some may claim that this has to do with some inherent quality of the American people, it only

takes place due to the concerted efforts of individuals to understand difference in the face of bigoted adversity. A desire for simple, easy answers to social questions continues to lead too many citizens into the trap of single-minded rigidity that prevents the synthesis of innovative interpretations of social questions leading to social change.

In order for this diversity to serve as a source of national strength and social greatness, and in order for individuals to gain a fuller understanding of the richness of manifold human experience, citizens must be exposed to the diversity of individuals and their lives. Racism, bigotry, sexism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and homophobia represent forces inimical to the maintenance of a healthy, functional society. Educated citizens must strive to understand the differences that exist between themselves and others in order for the expansion of individual freedom implicit in American ideals to continue. Only through the inculcation of tolerance for diverse peoples can we hope to build the bridges of understanding necessary for successful, meaningful citizenship in an era of increasing national diversity and global integration.

Toward the end of the twentieth century and at the dawn of the twenty-first, the establishment of global communication networks has worked to radically alter the nature of physical space on this planet through the progression of globalization. To face the challenge posed by this information revolution, American educational institutions must maximally strive to provide citizens with the skills they need to face these challenges and triumph over them. The challenge posed to our country in this century is not only to produce highly-educated doctors, lawyers, and college professors. The challenge, rather, is to empower the bulk of the American public with the tools of a liberal arts education. By empowering all people, professional and non-professional alike, we can work to ensure the continued economic competitiveness of the United States in the global economy of the twenty-first century. □



**By double-majoring in
two liberal arts I am still
taking an intentional risk
with my future**

with fighting our own causes. We the American working population hate the nine to five day in day out while we'd rather be supporting ourselves by being paid to perfect the pastimes we have harbored based solely on the fact that it makes us smile.

Imagine a world where we got paid for our interests, not stigmatized for studying whatever our passion may be. Imagine a world where we lived primarily for our minds and spirits and not just merely for the security of material wealth. In an economy dominated by the greater good of the employer instead of the individual, preserving the liberal arts is that much more vital.

Fortunately, some in the business world view the liberal arts as important in developing individuals. In a paper subtitled "The Most Practical and Professional Education for the Twenty-first Century," author Richard Hersh (1997) states that CEOs and human resource managers are looking for three things: intellectual flexibility, skills in self expression, and a universal understanding of diversity. A degree in liberal arts would certainly guarantee the above qualities. Success in the world depends upon more than an understanding of how "things" work; it requires an understanding of how people work. Gadgets and whistles will change, but the ability to understand and connect with people will not. In fact, Philip Lewis and Rosemary Liegler claim that liberal arts "reflect the breadth of human culture," which is considered "the foundation of the American democracy" (1998, 47). With the very basis of our government rooted in the liberal arts, society ought to be praising the liberal arts instead of eliminating them. However, this is sadly not the case.

Apparently, our current education system feels that if the budget needs to be cut, liberal arts are the first areas to be neglected. Schools all over the country have been "trimming" their music classes, art classes, and even the gym classes where dance is taught. Ms. April Swick, principal of Clement Avenue Elementary School in the Milwaukee Public School District, states that the full-time staff of art, gym, music, and library has been decreasing steadily

over the past ten years. As a result of the budget, she explains, "we can't cut regular classes, so we had to cut everything else . . . our librarian left, and we have not been able to replace her." It is now the teacher's responsibility to integrate the humanities into the curriculum. However, teachers are preoccupied by teaching mandatory "subject matter" that will no doubt be measured by standardized testing, allowing little extra attention to be spent focusing on the liberal arts. At the elementary schooling age a child's unique creative genius should be celebrated and cultivated, not repressed. A child's ingenuity is precious and should not have to be sacrificed to school budgeting.

As we know, once the core of a system is eradicated, the entire structure is bound to collapse. If, instead of being taught global responsibility, social awareness, and self-development, we are taught materialism and careerism, we will lose the very essence of our humanity. □

To respond to this article, e-mail liberaled@aacu.org, with the authors' names on the subject line.

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