IMTA – a generational impact

CEEMAN Champion Awards expand to include responsible management education

CEEMAN IQA gaining new momentum
Arts and Sciences and the New Educational Fusion

At a conference of the Council of Independent Colleges earlier this year college presidents in the US expressed their growing fear that liberal arts colleges are facing terminal illness.

This is disconcerting, especially since the Social Science Research Council claims that “students majoring in liberal arts fields see significantly higher gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills over time than students in other fields of study. Students majoring in business, education, social work, and communications showed the smallest gains...”

Those of us who believe that arts and sciences are crucial to the enjoyment of the good life and financial security need to recognize that American society is awash in diplomas and certificates. One page of parchment might have supplied you with a job in the past. But today the writing on the parchment is what matters. Arts and Sciences may not be enough.

In this new climate, the line between vocation and education blurs. Consumers of education demand a product with a measurable impact on their financial success. Many universities seem to be trying to hold back the red tide of vocation threatening the arts and sciences by building monuments to their memory.

For example, new humanities centers have recently been built at Brandeis, Carnegie Mellon University, and the University of Pittsburgh among others. Such centers are intellectually important. But they are not going to reverse long-term enrollment trends. We face a cultural floodwater in which these centers are merely the rooftops of disappearing structures.

Yet there is a way to keep the arts and sciences healthy and thriving - we must welcome the growing permeability between students’ professional objectives and education. The future of the arts and sciences depends on their integration into a curriculum in which they work in tandem with professional courses to provide a crucial educational fusion – in which professional education and arts and sciences each add value to the other.

The arts and sciences can continue to provide a wide range of culturally important knowledge, contexts of learning, critical thinking, complex reasoning, and communication skills offered alongside rigorous mentoring and training in professional thought and learning.

Bentley University provides just one example of this crucial educational fusion. Every Bentley student must major or minor in business while simultaneously enrolled in an innovative core of liberal arts courses that focus on expanding and inspiring traditional “business” thinking, writing, creativity, and reasoning.

Almost 800 of Bentley’s 4,000 undergraduates double-major in business and our uncommon Liberal Studies major, which students complete by combining writing, faculty mentoring, and general education courses in a themed environment without additional major courses.

And unlike perhaps any other institution in the US, this fused, forward-thinking curriculum is developed in a collaborative effort by the business and arts & sciences faculties.

In the future we will see deeper cuts in the liberal arts in higher education. Their continued health and essential contributions to society depend on new types of colleges and curricula, not on temples dedicated to their memory.

Once given a solid foundation in the humanities, professionals will go on to educate themselves and maintain their interest. The recent job placement rate at our university – 99% of the responding graduating class is employed or in graduate school six months after graduation – illustrates this substantially.

As a senior executive from one of the big four accounting firms told me recently over dinner, “The basic business skills are what get you a job at our company. But to advance, you need the broad background of the liberal arts”.

Colleges and universities should proudly provide both.

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