

Ana C. Mejia
FYW 101 – A1
Unit Essay IV: Source Integration Essay
Professor Langford
5 / 2 / 2016

Liberal Arts and the Big Picture

As a student of political science, I often find myself having to defend my degree to others. Before changing my major to political science, I used to be a marketing major. People would congratulate me for choosing to pursue a business path. When I got to college, I found myself in an American Government class that changed my perspective on what I wanted to do with my life and what I wanted to contribute to the world. Along with my decision came countless looks, questions and not-so-friendly suggestions on rethinking other majors that are a better fit for the “real world.” As I was reading Sanford J. Ungar’s article I found myself relating to many of his points. In his article “The New Liberal Arts,” Ungar exposes seven misconceptions about people who choose to pursue a liberal arts degree. With his experience as the president of a liberal arts college, he presents his reactions to them. Ungar states, “Through immersion in liberal arts, students learn not just to make a living, but also to live a life rich in values and character” (232). I agree with Ungar that a liberal arts degree will provide you lasting skills involving values and character because my experience as a liberal arts student confirms it. Not only will the liberal arts degree give you expertise, but it will also sharpen your brain to think critically. A liberal arts education is essential to see the big picture.

Ungar presents counter arguments to misperceptions, like the belief that a “liberal-arts degree is a luxury that most families can no longer afford. ‘Career education’ is what we now must focus on” (227). He responds to this claim by saying that although people are struggling, the best investment would be, in fact, a liberal arts degree, since it gives you a deep understating

of the complex influences that shape the world we live in, which are essential to see the world as a whole, at looking at the big picture (Ungar 227).

The next misperception he tackles is that students with liberal-art degrees find it more difficult to get a job during a recession; he argues that the same happens to those in other fields. He also cites a survey conducted in 2009 that stated that the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that more than three-quarters of the nation's employers are looking for students skilled in writing, speaking and thinking critically, along with being innovative and creative (Ungar 228). The misperception I find most inaccurate is the one that claims that the STEM fields are the way to go. Ungar argues that there is no evidence assuring that success in the STEM fields will "be greater if it comes at the expense of a broad background in the other areas of the liberal arts" (Ungar 229-230). This background will be valuable in the long-run because in any field you will be exposed to the world and other cultures, liberal arts education will help you see it with different eyes and a better understanding.

In an age of apps and smartphones it is comprehensible that people will lean into the study of such topics. Nowadays, high school graduates dream of landing a job at Google or Apple, so much that they belittle those who choose otherwise. Often, those who choose to pursue the liberal arts. What most people do not realize is the fact that a liberal arts education is so much more than meets the eye.

Forbes contributor Jessica Kleiman writes in response to those who believe that pursuing a liberal arts degree is a mistake. She disagrees with making teens choose their area of concentration based on what fields are hiring more, rather than choosing based on personal interests. She mentions that students are trying too hard to get into technology corporations. Kleiman presents a question that encompasses the whole problem liberal arts majors face today,

“Are people who choose to pursue a liberal arts degree any less skilled or desirable in the marketplace?” I do not think so. A critical thinking mindset is a valuable resource no one can take away from you. One that is necessary for any career path you plan on pursuing.

I agree with Dr. Andy Solomon, a professor at the University of Tampa, when he writes about the importance of the liberal arts in his article, “Liberal Arts: The Heart of an Education.” In this article, Solomon emphasizes that we study sociology and political science to “learn how to organize and run societies effectively in ways compatible with human needs and happiness” (15). Students will learn about the organization of government and they will also get the full picture of why it is organized this way. He finishes by saying that people study the liberal arts to become the whole person they are supposed to be. The degree will not only make people earners of greater income, but fill them with far more to share with others.

In contrast, the STEM fields are gaining a lot of ground in today’s economy, so much that the common public is steering toward believing that the degrees that came before STEM are not worthy enough. In his article, “The Value of a Liberal Arts Education in Today’s Global Marketplace,” Edward J. Ray, president of Oregon State University, affirms that a liberal arts education provides “the critical thinking, teamwork, sensitivity to cultural, demographic, economic and societal differences and political perspectives,” the foundation required for most careers. It also provides the required grounding for adapting to new jobs and circumstances. To put it in another way, while some careers give you the knowledge to work in your field, only the liberal arts will give you the skills to duly manage yourself as a person in your workplace and at home. A liberal arts education will also give you the tools to see the world as whole, to see the cultures of the world not as something bad, but, instead, as something diverse.

What we sometimes tend to forget is that our societies were founded on the arts. Democracy, freedom and all the core values of our nations are derived from great liberal thinkers like Plato and Jean Jacques Rousseau. In relation to this belief, *New York Times* columnist, Frank Bruni, writes about the thoughtful experience that college education provides. He discusses how intellect is something you simply cannot put a price on. He states, “And it’s dangerous to forget that in a democracy, college isn’t just about making better engineers but about making better citizens, ones whose eyes have been opened to the sweep of history and the spectrum of civilizations.” I concur that Bruni’s insight is relevant because it shows us that we need more in life than just procedural skills and machine-driven workers.

Given these points it can be seen that a liberal arts degree is so much more than meets the eye. It will prepare you to learn, it will teach you how to really think critically. The world is in a constant flux. Living in three different countries at my young age has taught me that you need to be prepared for whatever life brings your way. A liberal arts degree does that. As a political science major I have learned so much regarding how the world works and the situations that brought us to our today. Technology is relevant, business is as well, but nobody challenges that belief. What people choose to challenge are those paths they do not understand. The skills you learn in college that really matter are those about learning efficiently and thinking critically. Once you master those, then you will understand why people choose to go on academic paths you will never dream of following.

Works Cited

- Bruni, Frank. "College's Priceless Value." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 11 Feb. 2015. Web. 28 Apr. 2016.
- Kleiman, Jessica. "Why Getting a Liberal Arts College Education Is Not a Mistake." *Forbes.com*. Forbes Magazine, 28 Apr. 2014. Web. 27 Apr. 2016.
- Ray, Edward J. "The Value of a Liberal Arts Education in Today's Global Marketplace." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 24 July 2013. Web. 27 Apr. 2016.
- Solomon, Andy. "Liberal Arts: The Heart of an Education." *The Minaret* 10 Sept. 2015: 15. Print.
- Ungar, Sanford J. "The New Liberal Arts." 2010. *They Say / I Say with Readings*. 3rd Edition. Ed. Gerald Graff, Cathy Birkenstein and Russell Durst. New York: Norton & Company Ltd., 2014. Print.