Student Essay

English 101 Final Essay

May 2016

The Necessity of Liberal Arts

The creativity that flows through the classroom air emits an ecstatic vibe. Energy bounces off the walls, and life bubbles with excitement. The atmosphere is not about emotion; rather, it is about knowledge: an unforgettable experience that lasts for eternity. This is the mission of liberal arts classes. In today’s day and age, the push is towards career programs. As a result, liberal arts courses are being dramatically cut within universities. What individuals fail to realize is that life is far more than a career; it is an experience meant to be lived to the fullest, an experience that is only attainable if individuals are enlightened and learn about the world in which they live (Kay 40). For this reason, universities should encourage students to take liberal arts courses even if students think that they are irrelevant to their future careers.

Some people argue that liberal arts courses should not be offered. Individuals who think in such a way, insist that students should only take relevant courses. Christopher Lasch, a historian and social critic, explains this concept of relevance. He mentions that educational instructors are pushed to change their material, in order to better suit students (qtd. in Kay 38). Certain teachers take such actions, thinking that without the direct application of information, individuals will not pursue learning. By noting these changes, Lasch emphasizes that selfish actions undervalue education (38). Instead of learning something that goes above what is needed, students aim specifically for that which helps them quickly enter the world of employment. Although employment is important, if that is the only thing students seek, the role of universities diminishes. Universities were created for the purpose of teaching others. This fact cannot be ignored. As Magdalena Kay, associate professor of English at the University of Victoria, states, “[There are] plenty of students seeking quality educations, plenty genuinely want to learn certain skills, and plenty are quite willing to be interested in the subjects they’re taking” (39). If liberal arts courses are not available or encouraged, how does one expect a student to thrive? Many students want a well-rounded education, and that is only possible if students take classes that are not solely based on career training.

Liberal arts courses have always been a standard for higher education; for this reason, students should continue to take such classes. These types of classes “have been taught since ancient times. In fact, until the 20th century, liberal arts was just about the only form of higher education available in the United States, or anyplace else” (Masci 315). Liberal arts courses teach students more than just facts and help develop a different way of thinking. Although these classes can be difficult, the long term benefits are worthwhile. As Magdalena Kay claims, “The feeling of fulfillment that comes from an incremental and rigorous course of study is bigger and better than the immediate feeling of relief” (42). In these cases, students often put in more effort and learn how to overcome difficulties. Life is not easy, and having challenges helps create determined individuals who are able to persevere. In the past, liberal arts courses were a part of the general curriculum. However, nowadays, these classes are being avoided. Many individuals do not notice that “The idea that higher education will make you an informed citizen grew hazy once most universities eliminated their universal course requirements” (Kay 39). If it was considered a necessity to take these kinds of courses in previous generations, why should these standards suddenly change? A higher education means going above and beyond. This includes taking classes that are not specific to a certain occupation. Therefore, individuals should take liberal arts courses because they support the principles of advanced learning.

Liberal arts courses are also beneficial because they tend to be more cost efficient than career program classes. One of the biggest reasons regarding the prices is the difference in hours. Time variations are present because career classes require clinical hours on top of class hours. As a result, students not only have to spend more time for a particular class, they also have to pay more (Fanelli 33). Additionally, class sizes have an immense impact on the cost of courses. With career programs, the limit applies directly to program size. Sean A. Fanelli, former president of Nassau Community College in New York, notes that “It is not uncommon for liberal arts courses to enroll 30 or more students in a single section, whereas in a nursing program 30 students would be enrolled in three clinics” (33). The additional cost to run such small sections might be felt in the increase of student fees or tuition, but it could also affect how quickly students complete their education. If students have to wait for an open seat in a small program like nursing, they might not earn their degree in the standard time and might instead have to take an extra year or two to complete their education, which would mean more money in tuition and less money earned in the work place. Another cause of high costs for career programs is the need for specialized equipment (Fanelli 34). Certain tools and technology are necessary to teach within career classes and these can drive up course fees and tuition as well. In the current economy where university tuition is close to an annual salary (Kay 36), it is important to think about cost and not overpay for a program that is not worth the extra money. Overall, liberal arts courses are less expensive and provide an important education that lasts a lifetime.

Courses, such as those found in liberal arts, also help enlighten students by teaching beyond expertise. As Jill Tiefenthaler points out, “A liberal arts education teaches students to learn how to learn--and inspires them to go on learning throughout their lives.” The liberal arts courses that are available are not specific to a single occupation. Instead, these courses emphasize values such as critical thinking and complex reasoning (Fanelli 32). These are techniques that are needed in all situations. Humans were created to learn: to sit, to crawl, to talk, to read, to write, and so forth. The development of acquiring information is never supposed to stop, and the available liberal arts courses help engage in this mission. Additionally, as Fanelli explains, “Beyond these skills the liberal arts also provide cultural education so necessary in today’s global society” (32). Without basic knowledge about other cultures, it is impossible to know anything about the world. Liberal arts courses open the minds of students by teaching about the various ways individuals live their lives. Learning about others is essential as it is important to be tolerant and accepting of everyone. This then causes students to be more understanding and appreciative of their fellow humans (Fanelli 35). Having this strong basis allows individuals to adapt in different situations. That is because, no matter what happens, individuals who have gone through liberal arts courses usually have various options. They can see alternatives as their minds are open to thinking beyond the situation in which they are (Masci 323). The ability to think of new solutions is needed in the current world, especially in the different branches of employment. Additionally, university courses are meant to deliver “long-term gains in intellectual health” (Kay 41). The growth in intellectual health is almost impossible with career courses because a needed skill is being taught. In liberal arts, the learning goal is not to learn something new but rather to transform the way of thinking. By doing so, individuals keep up with the growth of their well-being and allow their intellect to evolve. All in all, liberal arts courses assist students in life by allowing them to expand their minds through learning and by supplying a valuable asset for every career.

Furthermore, liberal arts courses act as a foundation by preparing students for all careers. This is because some of the available courses teach values which are needed in every job. As Tiefenthaler writes, “A liberal arts education educates the whole person and prepares students to excel in a range of careers and, even more importantly, live a life rich with meaning and purpose.” Knowledge, in general, is an essential component of life. Without factors such as diligence and rigor, individuals cannot get far (Kay 42). A liberal arts education also helps with career changes. David Masci argues that “a liberal arts education, with its broad fields of study and emphasis on communication and analytical thinking, will give graduates the ability to move from one job to another” (330). These types of skills are important in the American economy as needed professions change rapidly. Having the basics ensures many possible career paths because the knowledge that is learned in liberal arts courses lasts for a lifetime. Also, this helps solve a problem that many employers are having with recent university graduates: that students are unprepared for the workplace after their education (Kay 41). Although they teach what is needed for work, career program courses do not fully teach what is needed for a job. The necessary attributes come from additional training and life experience. Employers need more than skills; they need “people who are literate and can think analytically, and that's what you get with a good liberal arts education” (Masci 323). Having extra assets causes students to be more prepared for possible careers as they are able to make their own decisions and rise up to be leaders. Therefore, liberal arts courses help students get ready for the future.

Universities should encourage students to take liberal arts courses instead of cutting them out of their curriculums. This is because these classes are essential. Although career program classes are beneficial, they do not teach an individual everything they need to know. Every individual should continue to learn throughout their lifetime as “knowledge is a means and not an end” (Kay 38). Taking liberal arts classes can help ensure this kind of education. Not only are liberal arts classes part of the standard for higher education, they are also less expensive, help with the overall process of learning, and assist in future careers. Learning is something that must grow within an individual. It is a process that humans are born with and that accumulates throughout the years. As Fanelli illustrates, “a liberal arts education is one that leads one to a body of knowledge and frees one’s mind to be open to new thoughts and ideas”(38). With these skills, an individual is able to live a meaningful life where their education of liberal arts holds the key to infinite possibilities.

Works Cited

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