

“For the Individual, the Community, and the Nation”

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I hereby affirm that this is my own work, an original essay.

Our success as an individual, as a community, and as a nation depends on the merits of a liberal arts education. As an individual, we reap a successful career and personal economic benefits. As a community, we improve the lives of those around us through our greater understanding of different perspectives. And as a nation, we collectively make the best decisions for all as a result of our understanding of diverse concepts.

As stated on the Associated Colleges and Universities website, a liberal education “prepares [individuals] to deal with complexity, diversity, and change” (1). This form of education is realized in today’s centers of higher education through general degree requirements and in depth studies of majors and minors (1). These general degree requirements provided a broad education of many different disciplines (1). Our success as an individual, as a community, and as a nation depends on our liberal education.

A liberal education is important for individual economic growth and personal career success because of the current job market in which we live. According to a September 2010 statistical release by the US Department of Labor, people born between the years 1957-1964 held an average of 11 jobs between the ages of 18 to 44 (2). A wide base of education facilitates the ability to change careers in this competitive job market. General Motors values employees with a liberal education: “Those are exactly the types of persons we want running our global business—better learners and more effective citizens” (3). Technology is also a factor that is creating great change in the labor market. In 2002, David Kearns from Xerox stated, “The only education that prepares us for change is a liberal education. In periods of change,

narrow specialization condemns us to inflexibility--precisely what we do not need" (1). Warren Mass, from *The American Magazine* online, sums up the reason employers search for workers with a liberal education: "Most employers would prefer to train an applicant who has already learned to think and analyze problems the specific technical skills pertinent to an industry than to teach a new employee who has technical skills — and nothing more — how to think" (4).

Scott Seefeldt earned a Bachelor of Music from the University of Wisconsin – Madison (5). While pursuing this degree, Scott taught private studio voice lessons, and interned as the music and worship coordinator for his hometown church in Wausau, Wisconsin (5). He also student taught kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade general choral music (5). After exploring these career options, Scott felt a call to join the priesthood; he realized he cared more for people than the music (5). He enjoyed performing more than teaching (5). When asked, Scott feels that his liberal arts education has benefitted his current career (5). Giving his weekly sermon, Scott draws on many different areas of interest to portray the weekly message (5). He needs to know a little about a lot of things (5). Secondly, Scott finds that his liberal education helps him to relate to different people in the parish (5). A priest that possess the merits of a liberal education not only is able to better understand the diversity of his parish; he is able to help others better understand the message of the Lord.

According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities website, a liberal education results in "personal and social responsibility... anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges" (6). An education such as this will benefit not only the individual, but also the community they

are involved in, be it their neighborhood, work environment, or religious gathering place. Through taking a diverse set of courses, one learns about different cultures, ideas, and values. This, in turn, helps the community through the understanding gained of those with different perspectives and backgrounds.

I am majoring in the Spanish language, not only because I see the economic benefits for myself with having the ability to speak Spanish as a teacher, but also because I am fascinated with the Latin culture. I am very much looking forward to my opportunity to travel abroad to Spain; I cannot wait to immerse myself in a new culture. During my junior year of high school, I had a small taste of this type of culture immersion. I was able to travel to Peru for a week with fifteen other of my fellow Spanish students in October 2008. As I embarked on this journey, I was apprehensive as to what to expect. Up to that point, I had only traveled within the continental United States and Canada. Places I had visited previously didn't have people living in abject poverty on a large scale. Our first day spent in the capital city of Lima was met with many objects of grandeur, from the Plaza de Armas to the colonial period cathedrals. But, as we headed out of town to the Incan ruins of Planchacamac, we could see a giant sandy hill covered in small multicolored homes. Our tour guide explained to us that the people on this hill don't own the land. They build tiny shacks on the hill, that have no running water or electricity, in hopes that the government will provide these basic needs to them when there is a high enough population present. I could not imagine living in such conditions.

Despite these hardships, the Peruvian people were so kind and joyful. This trip made me realize firsthand that material things are not what make us happy. In

addition, this trip gave me a sense of the great diversity of the world around me. I experienced personally how we are all very different from one another, but yet similar on the human level. My time in this beautiful country was my first step in my journey of a liberal education. I was exposed to a new culture, and because of this I am less willing to pass judgment, and more ready to consider new ideas.

A liberal education benefits our national community as well. On February 20, 1961, President John F. Kennedy addressed the United State Congress with a special statement about education.

*Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. Our requirements for world leadership, our hopes for economic growth, and the demands of citizenship itself in an era such as this all require the maximum development of every young American's capacity. The human mind is our fundamental resource (7).*

The American form of democracy, laid out by our Founding Fathers, is reliant on the education of the American public. To be effective citizens, we must be knowledgeable of a variety of topics. We must have the ability to think logically through political issues, and make informed decisions. The success of our nation depends on our ability to make logical and ethical decisions; our voices are heard through the voting process. Our ability to be responsible citizens is achieved through a liberal arts education. Yann Dupuy, a French Language professor at the University of Maine, states, "Education makes good citizens; instruction makes good servants" (8).

A liberal education is vital to success for the individual, the community, and the nation. An education of diverse subjects lends the individual to be a more employable worker, a more understanding community member, and a more informed citizen.

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