

What are colleges for in this technical, specialized world?

What is the best use of the time and money spent acquiring a college education? More and more we hear today that higher education on the undergraduate level is overspecialized and compartmentalized. Alternatively, we hear that, given its high cost, higher education must be career oriented. "Spending time and money in college preparing for a job is an excellent investment," writes Clara Jennings, dean of School of Education of DePaul University in Chicago. Ernest Nolan, vice president for administration in Madonna University in Livonia, MI, writes, "Technical skills might give the graduate a foot in the door in terms of entry into the work force, but liberal arts education provides staying power, serves as a foundation for continuous growth and development, and leads to the kind of success that really matters."



Clara Jennings—*Clara Jennings is dean of the School of Education of DePaul University in Chicago*

Professional Career Preparation is of the Essence By Clara Jennings

Students spend a great deal of time and money pursuing a college education. After graduating, they expect to find a job that increases their standard of living. New graduates must be able to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to be successful. Adequate college job preparation can only be accomplished through professional education study, an idea supported by higher education experts for decades.

What is a professional college education? A workable definition is: "any program for which colleges typically require four years or more of education to gain basic career entry in a specific occupational field" (Stark Lowther, Hagerty, and Orczyk).

Students, as whole persons, have minds, hearts, and hands, and professional education recognizes that students need all three to prepare for life and a career. Professional schools offer a true experimental education where theory and practice are valued and respected equally.

Rather than offering a broad—often vague—curriculum, professional schools offer an in-depth understanding of limited subjects. Students analyze, synthesize, and manipulate new information as they construct this knowledge.

For future teachers, the professional curriculum includes the study of professional and pedagogical knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Both are essential for job preparation:

- Professional knowledge covers a discipline's history and its economic, sociological, philosophical, and psychological understandings, as well as knowledge of technology, professional ethics, legal, and policy issues, etc.
- Pedagogical knowledge covers the interaction of subject matter areas and requires a thorough understanding of how theory and practice connect.

Having a college degree signifies that graduates have acquired a specific set of competencies and can skillfully blend the technical and human relations abilities that employers seek.

Professional schools in education and other fields are held to high standards, often regulated by licensing and accrediting agencies. In addition, through internships and other on-site job training, students learn to connect theory and practice.

As students go through programs in professional schools, they develop expertise in their chosen careers. And in learning the values and skills needed to communicate effectively within their field, they learn to be reflective (Schon).

Their on-site, practicum experiences allow students to make decisions, solve problems independently, manage teams, participate in cooperative projects, and assume flexible assignments; students are evaluated not only for their knowledge, but also the skills they've acquired and put to use.

A productive, contributing citizen in a democracy needs literacy, problem-solving skills, and the ability to bring good judgment to bear on complicated issues to society. So an education in career preparation, in the end, offers positive choices for students while satisfying their idealistic urge to make the world a better place.

An education allows graduates to enter the work force at managerial levels. Also, performance portfolios that record one's demonstrated proficiency enhance the possibility of finding a job. And an education that includes skills applicable to the real-world environment contributes significantly to creating the flexible, adaptable workers needed today.

Spending time and money in college preparing for a job is an excellent investment.



Ernest Nolan—*Ernest Nolan is vice president of academic administration in Madonna University in Livonia, MI.*

The Liberal Arts Lead to the Success that Matters By Ernest Nolan

Success in the future workplace requires more than technical training. What we often refer to as “liberal arts education,” will remain the most practical preparation for lifelong employment.

Liberal arts education promotes intellectual and personal growth, and equips the individual to cope with change by being able to adapt to the workplace as it continues to transform.

Eighty percent of children beginning kindergarten this year eventually will enter jobs that don't even exist today, a recent US Department of Labor report projected. That startling projection has the ring of truth when we consider changes in the workplace over the past 10-15 years: cell phones, E-mail, text messaging, the Internet.

Like me, you probably spend more than half your work time at a computer, even though your schooling didn't include a course on computer technology.

Today we are witnessing radical changes in the entry-level skills required for jobs as they evolve, especially the skills of analytical thinking, problem solving, communication, computation, and working in teams.

The liberal arts foster our capacities for analysis, critical reflection, problem solving, communication, computation, and synthesis of knowledge from different disciplines.

The liberal arts are to provide the intellectual, historical, and social context for recognizing the continuity between the past and the future, to hone our capacity to understand human experience, to question values and weigh the moral and ethical dimensions of what we do as individuals and as a society—and to articulate all this.

A liberal arts education does this, first, by introducing the individual to the greatest ideas, the most transforming concepts, and the most powerful works of the imagination that human beings have produced. This isn't important because it is useful for cocktail party conversation; it is the framework within which to understand and evaluate human events and interactions.

Liberal arts education frees us from the limitations of our own experience and opinions by proffering alternative views, scenarios, and explanations. It helps us to appreciate the fact that neither the easiest nor the most complex solution to a problem is necessarily the correct one. We learn to think, marshal evidence, and weigh the merits of different factors before committing to a plan of action.

Liberal arts education imparts a set of values necessary for human beings to live together in harmony. The concept of “good citizenship” is embodied by individuals who understand and take their responsibilities seriously, who vote, who actively work for society's betterment, especially by serving others. Civic responsibility is a necessary byproduct of liberal arts education.

Liberal arts education, by embracing concepts of diversity and inclusion, helps people work together despite their differences. It also prepares the individual to recognize the interdependency of all our global partners and to appreciate the differences and similarities among world cultures.

Technical skills might give the graduate a foot in the door in terms of entry to the work force, but liberal arts education provides the staying power, serves as a foundation for continuous growth and development, and leads to the kind of success that really matters.

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