Excelsior College degree programs in liberal arts, business, technology, nursing, and health sciences provide very different educational opportunities and offer contrasting career paths. However, there are two important similarities among them; they are all equally exceptional educational investments, and each curriculum includes a strong underpinning of liberal arts requirements. It’s important for students to recognize that this universal foundation of liberal arts subjects is more valuable today than ever before. Not only are there boundless benefits to an education that is well grounded in the liberal arts, your future employment may depend on it.

What Are the Liberal Arts?

The liberal arts encompass a variety of disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and mathematics. It offers a broad approach to learning through subjects such as literature, history, philosophy, government, sociology, psychology, criminal justice, music, biology, mathematics and many more. Knowledge gained through study in the liberal arts promotes personal and intellectual growth, provides strong practical and transferable skills for the workplace, and prepares students to be informed, socially responsible citizens.

Who Needs a Liberal Arts Education?

Everyone! Even if your passion lies in more specialized areas of computer science or nursing, you will need to fortify your degree with liberal arts coursework. Why? In a world of rapidly changing technology, the technical skills you acquire today, although important, may become quickly obsolete within a few years. Conversely, the transferable skills mastered though the liberal arts will remain longstanding, and are valuable assets that will enhance your employability.

Obtain Skills That are in Demand

Research by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) shows the skills employers desire most today are the exact ones that are developed through study in the liberal arts. Some of these top ranked skills include: interpersonal communication, oral and written communication, cross-cultural communication, analytical and critical thinking abilities, teamwork, integrity, flexibility, and a strong work ethic.

Each of these coveted skills is highly transferable because they can be applied to virtually any career. These attributes are not only extremely attractive to employers across industries, but are also fast becoming necessary competencies to secure employment and succeed in the workplace.

Cultivate the Connections

The interconnection among the liberal arts and other disciplines is another tremendous valuable resource. You may ask: Why take biology when I am really interested in business? Do I really need a history class when my main interest is computer programming? The answer lies in the interdisciplinary nature of life itself. Stop and consider—most of your endeavors in your personal life and work settings require knowledge in more than one field. For example, a doctor does not just treat the disease, but rather, the whole person. How will he/she address the patient without prior knowledge in the areas of biology, sociology, or even theology? An architect must consider the human element when designing a structure. What amenities do people value in their dwellings? A background in the arts, history, sociology, or psychology will surely assist with the architect’s vision.

A Passport For Your Career

A broad knowledge base in the liberal arts equips you with the tools needed to meet and exceed employers’ expectations. Changing demographics, increased technology and a global economy will continue to impact the worker in the 21st century. If you prepare yourself too narrowly to fit a certain career slot, your qualifications may not meet future job requirements. With the eclectic preparation provided through a liberal arts degree, your skills will remain relevant and become a mainstay.

Think about it: almost every profession requires that you communicate, write, solve problems, embrace changes, and interact with a variety of people. Through a liberal arts curriculum, you are taught how to view and study everything from research and writing...
techniques to philosophical ideologies. For example, you are asked to read extensively, draw conclusions and share perspectives. This is exactly what employers insist they need; individuals that can read lengthy reports, listen to varied opinions, and effectively communicate the results. Through exposure to an interdisciplinary perspective, you are able to evaluate a situation from a variety of viewpoints. Employers are seeking new hires that have the flexibility and willingness to embrace change and adjust as needed. Liberal arts trains you to analyze, research and evaluate solutions. These are just the problem solving skills that will help immensely when surmounting the learning curves and challenges encountered in any new job or career. In short, acquiring an array of skills and experiences will place you at a competitive advantage in the job market. Both private and public sectors will continue to need individuals who can think independently and are trained to work in more than one mindset.

Employment Awaits

One of the hallmarks of a liberal arts education is the solid foundation it provides for lifelong learning and career mobility. Although it may not prepare you for a specific occupation, a liberal arts degree does offer many possibilities for successful career paths. Have a specific major? It may prepare you for more occupations than you think. For example, history majors can work in the areas of government, journalism, or law. Psychology majors may consider jobs in public relations, counseling or advertising (see Related Resources). Completed a more general liberal studies degree? You have a wealth of coveted skills that employers demand. Your personalized package of skills will transfer to a variety of work settings. Some of the many accessible career fields for liberal arts grad are: administration, banking, communications, counseling, public relations, government, education, law, social services, systems analysis, health care, marketing, financial analysis, media, retail, and sales.

There are career fields that may require an advanced degree. Should you choose to pursue a post-graduate degree, you will discover that a liberal arts background has effectively prepared you for that next step as well.

Did you know that some very prominent people began their careers with an undergraduate degree strongly rooted in the liberal arts? The following are a few of the many successful individuals who graduated with liberal arts degrees: John F. Kennedy, 35th president of the United States — history degree; Sally Ride, first American woman astronaut — English literature degree; Steve Case, CEO and co-founder, America Online — political science degree; Brian Lamb, CEO, C-Span — speech and communication degree; and Meg Whitman, CEO, eBay — economics degree.

Put Your Liberal Arts Degree to Work!

A liberal arts education can translate in wide range of options. However, just like any degree, you will need to market your credentials. With diligent preparation, career exploration and perseverance you can blaze your own career path. To make the best use of your liberal arts degree and establish a successful job search, be sure to increase your career awareness by taking the time to glean more information about yourself and the world of work. This includes identifying your skills, interests and values through self-assessment, investigating career options, gaining relevant experience, creating action plans and mastering job search techniques (see Related Resources — EC Career Center). Set the process in motion. Don’t wait for missed employment opportunities to become career savvy. You can also augment your academic experience and develop even more marketable skills through work experience, volunteer, and community service. When you do land a job interview, be sure you convey the significance of the educational experience and skills you have achieved.

The Liberal Arts Can be Your Lifeline

Ensuring that a substantial selection of liberal arts courses is included in your degree plan will benefit you personally and professionally. The subjects you study allow you to strengthen all facets of your mind and provide you with intellectual agility. Throughout your life and career, you can draw upon your diverse, extensive knowledge and be able to discuss a variety of topics with just about anyone in almost any setting.

Whether you aspire to be a journalist, counselor, computer analyst or CEO, a well-rounded liberal arts education can prove to be a most practical kind of education in today’s society. It empowers individuals to be autonomous, critical thinkers who can address important issues in the workplace and in their communities in a collaborative, creative and constructive way. These abilities, coupled with a strong desire for lifelong learning may well be the best preparation for life and career that you can possess.

Questions or comments about this article?
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Related Resources

Excelsior College Career Center, www.excelsior.edu/career
Skills Employer Seek, M. Gunner Pulliam, https://www.excelsior.edu/SkillsEmployersSeek
Liberal Arts Course Listing, Excelsior College, https://www.excelsior.edu/lacourses
Choosing a Major: Discovering Who You Are, Purdue University https://www.cco.purdue.edu/Student/Series_Major.shtml

Enrolled students and alumni can access the most current version of the links for this article, as well as many additional career-related links on the Excelsior College Web site. Go to www.excelsior.edu/career; for graduates, click on the Alumni Connection.