In a 2010 New York Times column defending the humanities, David Brooks wrote, “when the going gets tough, the tough take accounting.” That is, in times of high anxiety in the face of rapid change and increasingly scarce resources, the broader social impulse is to fixate on the most obviously practical and utilitarian notions of higher education and to dismiss the rest as an intellectual luxury.

What is the future of the liberal arts? Across Emory’s intellectual landscape over the past year, conversations about the central and critical role of the liberal arts have been springing up almost organically, as well as independently of one another—in the Gustafson seminar, amongst a group of faculty in the Academic Leadership Program, via different examinations of the undergraduate and medical curricula, with new graduate programs taking shape, through emerging collaborations and interdisciplinary projects, around new uses of digital technology in both research and teaching.

Technology, globalization, the job market, the knowledge economy—they are a mere few of the powerful forces transforming academe today. In particular, the disciplines and interdisciplinary fields that constitute the liberal arts, including the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences, have been buffeted and shaped in a rapidly evolving environment. But other fields of study are not immune. The health sciences and professions are also responding to what some scholars have labeled “disruptive innovations” that suddenly change the dynamics and values of a particular milieu.
Over this academic year, Provost Earl Lewis has spoken frequently and passionately to many different Emory constituencies, including faculty, students, and trustees, about these issues. In a talk he gave to the Emory College faculty in September 2011, he described these questions in terms of a “whiteboard exercise”:

The chief opportunity for us at Emory is how we will own the liberal arts over the next half-century. How do we begin talking about the future of the liberal arts and liberal education? . . . Who are the designers of change in the ways we think about, present, and structure the liberal arts—Faculty? Students? Alumni? External stakeholders? Administrators? All? Lewis, who even questioned the practicality of the traditional fall/spring academic calendar, went on to ask, “What should a liberal arts education look like at Emory in 25 years?”

What should be included in liberal education going forward? Arts? Sciences? Humanities? Social Sciences? . . . A study of the created world? What about study of the professions? Writing and speaking, well and critically? Critical engagement with the digital world? As these and other major themes and questions have emerged, so has a growing sense of urgency that the university community must engage in a sustained, systematic inquiry to define the liberal arts for its own future. In March of this year, Provost Lewis charged a twenty-eight-member Commission on the Liberal Arts to lead our community in asking precisely that question: “I would like you to take a broad and deep look at the liberal arts education at Emory over the next quarter century,” he said in his charge. Over the next eighteen months, the commission will imagine and inquire, producing a set of recommendations to define the future of the liberal arts—in terms of content, structure, form, schedule, and innovation.

As this endeavor begins, this issue of the Academic Exchange sets out to capture the growing energy and excitement around these questions on our campus and examine the forces influencing the conversations. In the first two essays, David Nugent and Kevin Corrigan examine both the ancient and modern history of the liberal arts tradition, and they outline some contemporary responses to the forces of change in their own programs. Howard Kushner then uses his own current work to demonstrate the rich possibilities of bringing the liberal arts into conversation with medical research.

The next three essays, by Harvey Klehr, Nitya Jacob and Andrea Heisel of Oxford, and Brian Croxall, take a close look at undergraduate liberal arts curricula and teaching in light of questions of content, collaboration, and tools. Two interviews, with trustee Chilton Varner and art historian Sarah McPhee, explore the value and potential of the liberal arts undergraduate education from different perspectives. Then Steve Kraftchick, Jill Perry-Smith, Bill Eley and Carolyn Cleveenger, and Robert Ahdieh, from the realms of theology, business, health sciences, and law, respectively, each examine the ways the liberal arts have historically shaped and are now shaping anew their own professional fields.

—Allison Adams, Editor

FOLLOW THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION

The Commission on the Liberal Arts will be circulating periodic electronic updates on its work and progress. To receive Liberal Arts Forward, a one-page .pdf briefing from the commission, send an email to LISTSERV@listserv.emory.edu. In the text of the email, write SUBSCRIBE LIBERALARTSFORWARD [your first name] [your last name]. For example, SUBSCRIBE LIBERALARTSFORWARD John Smith.

Liberal Arts Forward, as well as additional materials and opportunities to comment, is available at the Commission’s blog, liberalartsforwardemory.com.
The future of the liberal arts is directly implicated. As new kinds of expertise seek to emerge from within the traditional structures of the academy, those responding to the forces for change find themselves in conflict with an established academic order—one that is skeptical of, at times even hostile to, the transformation of traditional knowledge structures. In this context, existing processes of academic legitimation, in which the liberal arts figure prominently, have become highly contested.

Emory’s new Master’s in Development Practice (MDP) Program in the Laney Graduate School exemplifies many of the processes pushing graduate education and the liberal arts in new directions. Offered by a global network of research universities, the MDP is committed to training students to devise innovative solutions to the most important development problems facing the world today. Made up of twenty-three leading schools from every continent, the network is unusually well positioned to tackle this task. The MDP draws on faculty from a wide array of disciplines—in the natural sciences, social sciences, health sciences and management. The program also involves students in field investigations of key development problems on an ongoing basis. It is also able to provide aspiring professionals with a unique form of graduate training in development practice.

The MDP was established in 2009 with funding provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The MacArthur Foundation originally selected ten universities (out of a pool of 144) to launch the program. Since then, the number of schools offering the degree has more than doubled. There is also a waiting list of institutions that have petitioned to join the MDP.

And there is a large number of bright young women and men who regard the program as central to their career goals. The schools that offer MDP training every year must turn down a great many highly qualified candidates. Applicants are fully capable of joining PhD programs in the liberal arts, but despite the large financial burden involved, they prefer a master’s degree in development practice. They do so because a career in development allows them to have a direct impact on what they consider key social problems.

What does the emergence of the Master’s in Development Practice suggest about the future of the liberal arts? Programs like the MDP are anything but the exception. Rather, due to student demand and unprecedented levels of institutional support (predominantly from the US government and foundations like MacArthur), they are growing rapidly.

Many academicians view these changes as a threat to the integrity of academic research and the strength of the liberal arts in graduate training. A historical perspective, however, suggests a different interpretation. This is not the first era during which graduate education and scholarly activity have been restructured due to forces beyond the academy. The last one hundred years have seen two periods of large-scale restructuring resulting from evolving geopolitical concerns of the United States and the changing position of the university in the life of the nation. During both periods, the place of the liberal arts in graduate education was reinvented.

The first of these periods of restructuring took place in the decades after 1900, and especially in the aftermath of World War I. At that time, as U.S. influence grew on the world stage, the great corporate foundations (in particular, the “philanthropies” associated with the Rockefeller and Carnegie fortunes) invested huge sums to restructure institutions of higher learning, including a wholesale reorganization of the professoriate and graduate training. The philanthropies created an entirely new social science infrastructure. They endowed sources of research funding, sponsored new journals and book series, created endowed chairs, and undertook a major expansion of graduate education. Their goal was to get academics out of the classroom and the library and into the field and the laboratory, something that had never before been possible. Freed from their classroom duties, academics were to conduct research the foundations considered relevant to the most pressing social problems of the era.

There is no question that the liberal arts benefited from this process. But their modest growth at this time was the by-product of much more wide-ranging changes in the organization of the university. The liberal arts were secondary to the main thrust of philanthropic reform, which sought to remake the social sciences so that they would serve the goals of social reform and social engineering.

A second period of restructuring occurred after World War II, when the position of the US in relation to the rest of the world underwent a second, seismic shift. This time the philanthropies and government expanded their support of the research university by embedding it within a new social science infrastructure that could address the security concerns of the Cold War era. Under the rubric of “area studies,” government and foundati-
A proliferation of articles and books that speak to a crisis in higher education in the past decade has brought increasing focus upon the bottom line of what is sometimes taken to be an almost exclusively corporate enterprise. This reflects, in part, the perhaps quite natural tendency of the modern research university to support specialization and give priority to functions that can command significant external funding.

One unfortunate consequence, however, is that the inevitable fragmentation of knowledge, departments, and colleges jeopardizes the possibility of forming any coherent vision of what the university is, or should be, and casts a strong shadow over the liberal arts, which are thought to lie, as at Emory, somewhere at the center of the university. Can we no longer afford—in a vastly expanding technical universe—to educate our children in the shadowy liberal arts that have traditionally formed the basis of higher education? It is a timely question, and it makes sense for us to rethink the liberal arts and to ask how our Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts might respond to the challenges of our times.

To get a deeper sense of this question, however, and to see why Emory’s ILA is in a special position to respond, we need first to get a rudimentary outline of what the liberal arts are and where they have come from.

How does the ILA remain an intellectual commons for the twenty-first century university? How can it serve as an effective bridging force?

Contrary to the common view, the history of the liberal arts (or the arts that can make one “free”—“liberalis”) is not a relatively seamless account of the emergence of seven liberal arts (the trivium: grammar, rhetoric, logic; and the quadrivium: arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy), presided over by the meta-perspective of philosophy or “love of wisdom.” This account overlooks the importance of professional or vocational activities. It is also exclusively Western. In fact, this educational ideal emerged from a richer tapestry of learned traditions, of which I shall give here only two major examples.

From one perspective, the liberal arts might be said to have emerged from the dance of the nine muses (Daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus), whose circular movement will much later give rise to the “curriculum,” “enkyclopedia,” and “museum”—that is, a circling dance that brings to mind the rhythms of life in history and all the forms of knowing, from poetry through music to the stars. The much later trivium and quadrivium only emerge in late antiquity and the Medieval period. And if one looks at the range of education in antiquity from Cicero and Quintilian to the famous doctors Soranus and Galen, one can see that the so-called professional arts/sciences such as law and medicine were, in fact, an integral part of “liberal” training. Galen, for instance, learned his profession and to ask how our Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts might respond to the challenges of our times.

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Talent and Deficit in Left-Handedness
Discovery and partnering the liberal arts and medical science

A

approximately 10 percent of the human population is left-handed and probably has been since the beginning of our species. For most of human history, including much of the planet today, left-handedness has been stigmatized. Thus, the words “left” and “left-hand” in almost all the world’s languages have negative connotations—from “sinister” in Latin and Italian to “dishonest” in Mandarin. Despite the fact that males are more likely to be left-handed, left-handedness has been gendered female in most cultures. These prejudices are reflected and reinforced in practices aimed at restricting the use of the left hand to the most disdained, but necessary, human tasks such as cleaning oneself after elimination of waste. Yet for all the attention left-handedness has received, almost every basic question about its origin, extent, function, and consequences remains unanswered. Although numerous observers have attempted to uncover the cause of left-handedness, so far none have been able to solve the mystery.

Part of the reason for this failure is that the causes and consequences of left-handedness have been examined and interpreted within the confines of distinct disciplinary perspectives of science, medicine, and the humanities. Though examining similar issues, humanists and scientists rarely interact or even seem aware of each other’s existence. This divide is most apparent between those who have approached the problem of left-handedness from the perspective of (neuro)psychology and those who have examined it in the context of the history and culture.

Solving the mysteries of handedness, however, may require bringing humanities into conversation with the sciences and medicine. Because individual researchers generally do not possess the training or knowledge to cross disciplinary boundaries, collaborations are particularly useful. Although in science and medicine such collaborations are normal, they are less often encouraged in the humanities, and, in any case, rarely will humanists be included in scientific investigations. Indeed, external funding protocols often exclude humanists. Crossing the science/humanities divide is difficult, but its rewards, at least in handedness research, can be substantial, as I illustrate below. I begin with the findings of science and medicine and then place them in historical and cultural context.

In 1903, the influential Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso claimed that left-handedness was connected with feeble-mindedness, mental illness, and criminality. Lombroso’s views, repackaged to fit with contemporary scientific discourses, have had great resilience. The connection between left-handedness and illness gained renewed legitimacy in the 1980s with Harvard University neurologist Norman Geschwind’s studies connecting left-handedness with an array of disorders, including autoimmune diseases, psychiatric disorders, mental retardation, and learning disabilities. Following Geschwind, a number of studies claimed that left-handedness was either the cause or result of disorders such as schizophrenia, autism, attention deficit disorders, dyslexia, stuttering, and Tourette syndrome. These associations continue to be debated in current studies. If this connection is robust, left-handedness may be one of the greatest threats to the mental health of our planet’s population.

Like so many other human behaviors, the explanations for handedness have been divided between those that it is learned versus inherited. By the late twentieth century, a consensus had emerged that handedness was best understood from a genetic perspective. Investigations ever since have focused on which genetic model best explains the incidence of left-handedness. Given the combination of stigmatization and the putative relationship between left-handedness and learning disorders, why are there any left-handers at all? This question has led a number of researchers to assume that there must be a selective advantage to left-handedness. They point to persistent reports that left-handers display greater creativity and intellectual prowess than right-handers. So is left-handedness a deficit or an enhancer of creativity—or both?

Since the mid-nineteenth century, most researchers have assumed that left-handers are right-brained in terms of both motor and language function. That is, they have believed that given the contralateral nature of brain/side function—that the right side of the body is controlled by the left cerebral hemisphere and vice versa—left-handers would be right-brained for language. This is not so. Imaging studies reveal that only 18 percent of left-handers are localized to the right hemisphere for language and speech, while 12 percent are bilateral, having language in both hemispheres. Thus, for 70 percent, language and speech are located in the left hemisphere. Complicating matters, 5 percent of right-handers also have right-hemisphere language dominance, with 95 percent being left-hemisphere dominant.

This anomaly—that the majority of left-handers are left-brained for language and only 18 percent of left-handers are right-brained localized—must be taken into account in reexamining the claims that left-handers are at greater risk for learning disabilities than right-handers. Although the classification and etiology of learning disorders themselves remain contested, there is general agreement that autism, attention deficit disorders, schizophrenias, and dyslexias are neurological conditions that are intimately tied to language. While it is true that other disabilities, especially Tourette syndrome and stuttering, involve motor functions as well as speech and language, they too are understood and treated as neuropsychiatric conditions that at bottom are the result of cerebral malfunctions. The claims that left-handers also have an increased probability of being talented and creative are related to brain function.

Although the associations between handedness and learning disorders and talent lately have been viewed in a neurobiological frame, placing them in historical and cultural context provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between learning disorders and handedness. In 1909 the French anthropologist Robert Hertz insisted that whatever its biological substrate, the predominance of right-handedness ultimately was a cultural artifact driven by a primitive human urge to divide the world into binary oppositions in which the right was viewed as sacred and the left as profane. Influenced by the popular early twentieth-century British ambidextrous culture society, Hertz argued that ending discrimination against left-handedness would unleash the power of both hands and, thus, both cerebral hemispheres. The results, he insisted, would allow repressed talents and creativity to flourish. Hertz’s study and methods have influenced subsequent generations of cultural anthropologists and historians of handedness.

Among Hertz’s most enduring contributions, writes Chris McManus, one of the few neuroscientists who include historical and cultural contexts in his research, was Hertz’s confrontation with the age-old debate of whether the etiology of handedness was biological or cultural. Although, McManus writes, Hertz conceded that “the right is sacred because it is the stronger and more skillful . . . that did not mean the symbolism is merely biological.” Rather, Hertz demonstrated that “it is only the social system of which we are a part, with its dualistic views on almost everything, that provides the power and energy to transform the right to the sacred and left to profane.”

The work of Hertz and the cultural anthropologists and historians who followed him suggests that attempts to identify the risk for learning disorders based on hand preference alone probably cannot tell us
what we need to know about the etiology of learning disorders or, for that matter, of the causes of creativity and talent. Historical and cultural discrimination against left-handers has played an important role in the identification and perhaps even in the etiology of some learning disorders. For instance, many twentieth-century British and American educators, psychologists, and psychiatrists advocated forcing left-handed children to write with their right hands. These experts asserted that a child’s decision to rely on his or her left hand was a reflection of a deficient personality that could best be corrected by forcible switching. The methods used to “retrain” left-handers were often tortuous, including restraining a resistant child’s left hand.

In contrast, those who saw left-handedness as inherited but natural not only disapproved of forced switching, but also often warned of its putative negative consequences, especially stuttering. These claims were given credence in the 1930s and 1940s by University of Iowa researchers and their students who published detailed case studies of patients whose stuttering was cured by switching them back to their original dominant hand. Despite robust statistical and clinical evidence, the connection between forced hand switching and stuttering has largely been forgotten. Similar to the Iowa researchers, recent imaging studies have suggested that stuttering is tied to disturbed signal transmission between the hemispheres.

Finding answers to the most interesting questions about the connections between disabilities and handedness will require a biologically informed historical and cultural approach. My current book project, tentatively titled “Talent and Deficit, the Anomaly of Left-Handedness,” examines these controversies in an attempt not only to explore the mysteries of left handedness, but also to call on historical methods to help identify clues that will aid us in identifying the cultural impact, if any, of handedness on human disease, health, cognition, and behavior.

Understanding the Origins and Nature of Democracy

In search of a Western core curriculum at Emory

About once a decade the Emory faculty revisits the question of a liberal arts curriculum and asks what undergraduate students ought to know. Over the past forty years, the faculty has swung back and forth, sometimes virtually abandoning any effort to impose requirements. (When I arrived at Emory in 1971 students had to take three courses in the natural sciences and mathematics, three in the social sciences and three in the humanities. The only required course was Drownproofing, offered in physical education.) For a while, students were required to take, among other things, a course in American history and two on the development of Western civilization. Currently, we have gone back to minimalism, with courses required only in broad areas, along with a foreign language. Hundreds of courses are available to satisfy general education requirements in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and mathematics. It is now possible, indeed likely, that students will graduate from Emory without ever taking a course in history or on the ideas that have shaped Western civilization or the origins or nature of democracy.

The Program in Democracy and Citizenship is coordinating a group of courses to offer students the opportunity to experience such a set of courses by participating in a voluntary core curriculum beginning in the fall of 2012. The “voluntary core” will consist of four interrelated courses for freshmen based on readings from great works in the Western intellectual tradition. One, in political science, will examine the foundations of American democracy. A second, in history, will survey great books from the Bible to Adam Smith and Karl Marx. A philosophy course will examine various answers to the question of what is the good life for human beings. And an English course will have students read great works of Western literature from the Aeneid to Wordsworth. The courses will be supplemented by a speaker series, the Emory Williams Lectures in the Liberal Arts, that will bring outside lecturers and Emory faculty into conversations with students taking courses in the voluntary core.

This voluntary core is based on the belief of participating faculty that some students want guidance about a coherent, interrelated series of courses that can satisfy a significant proportion of their General Education Requirements and introduce them to some of the core questions that a liberal arts education should raise: what is the good life? What is the best form of government? What makes a great work of literature? At a handful of American colleges and universities, a core curriculum requires all students to take a series of courses, usually based on great works of the Western tradition. Whether at Columbia or Chicago, such cores were typically put in place decades ago; few have been instituted in recent years. There are many reasons. It has become increasingly difficult for faculty to agree about what should be in a core; growing specialization within disciplines has reduced the number of faculty interested in teaching in such a core; and suspicions have grown that such cores are efforts to advance a politicized agenda hostile to emerging disciplines or areas of study.

No matter what their backgrounds or countries of origin, Emory undergraduates are living in a world profoundly shaped by the Western tradition and in a country founded on democratic principles. By no means is the voluntary core premised on the idea that students should limit their studies to the history and foundational texts of the Western tradition. To the contrary, the faculty involved in this effort will encourage students to explore other traditions and texts as well. Nor is the voluntary core intended to impart any particular political or ideological viewpoint. A serious encounter with the great texts of the Western tradition requires students to think critically because the authors of these texts disagree on fundamental questions (take Adam Smith and Karl

Harvey Klehr
Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Politics and History

FURTHER READING


Continued on page 15
INQuiring Minds
A collaborative model of the liberal arts between the biology department and library at Oxford College

With the recently launched “Ways of Inquiry” (INQ) curriculum, Oxford College’s general education program in the liberal arts, freshmen and sophomores now learn through discovery. That is, in an INQ course, students learn and apply knowledge the ways that scholars and researchers in a particular discipline ask questions and create knowledge.

For a number of years, Oxford’s biology faculty have directly involved students in inquiry-based learning in introductory courses by working with the process of scientific inquiry. These courses were a natural fit for the new INQ curriculum. Inquiry-based learning also creates opportunities for creative partnerships among faculty—in this case, between biology faculty and librarians. Scientific inquiry requires critical thinking and information literacy—two essential learning outcomes of a liberal arts education, as noted in the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ 2007 report, College Learning for the New Global Century. Information literacy facilitates critical thinking, both while forming a research question prior to laboratory work, in the case of the scientific discovery process, and while analyzing results. Actively engaging students in researching and using appropriate resources to inform their own ideas is a significant element of biology INQ courses, but it necessitates a teaching partnership between biology faculty and librarians.

Through the sequential courses of Biology 141Q and 142Q, the biology faculty and librarians have collaborated for more than ten years to create inquiry-based research opportunities that build upon each other, allowing students to understand the research process and to develop meaningful experiments as freshmen and sophomores. Establishing working partnerships among faculty, staff, and students is an important aspect of implementing INQ in the classroom.

The success of our collaboration began with the realization that by breaking down the steps of writing a research study and performing research, students could develop a better understanding of the process as a whole. For example, in the first library instruction session for Biology 141Q, the professor and the librarian work with students on how to write an introduction for a scientific paper, using their own laboratory investigation as the topic. The co-teaching works best in this scenario because students hear their professor talk about writing a good introduction and then immediately learn how to locate appropriate resources for the assignment with guidance from the librarian. This method of assigning one part of the research process at a time allows the librarians to deliver information at the most relevant point and helps students retain what they have learned for future use. Throughout the rest of the semester, students learn how to write the other pieces of a study—the materials and methods, results, and discussion—and then are challenged to complete and write an entire research study on their own. Meanwhile, the librarian is involved throughout the semester as students later perform their own experiments and work together to create their own research study.

Biology 142Q, the following course, sets the stage for students to review the skills they learned in Biology 141Q while writing research papers. Biology 142Q begins with a short investigation and a corresponding research paper assignment. Students are given written guidelines and reminders of what they learned in Biology 141Q to fulfill this task successfully. Following this “warm-up,” Biology 142Q begins a semester-long research project that is separated into smaller parts over the course of the semester.

The librarians and faculty renew their co-teaching partnership in the third week of the semester, when students have to write a research proposal for their semester-long project. In this session, students review appropriate searching strategies and types of sources with the librarian, while the instructor helps them develop a research topic by searching scientific literature. At the end of the project, students write a final research paper to report their project, and again, the process is divided up into smaller parts. A draft of one part of the paper is due several weeks before the final paper. Along the way, students are keeping a laboratory research notebook to gather information for data analysis. In the last three weeks of the project, students work together on data analysis, which requires consulting published literature. Student research teams present their work in an oral presentation, also requiring external references. The librarian continues to participate in these intermediate steps and to help students acquire the necessary information.

One of the learning outcomes for these activities is for students to internalize skills in information gathering and finding appropriate resources for research. In 2008, our findings, reported in the Journal of College Science Teaching, demonstrated the success of this outcome and that “the involvement of the librarian, along with the instructors’ reinforcement of appropriate resources throughout the first semester, helped students transfer their knowledge skills to successive writing assignments into their second semester and develop improved research questions.”

The practices we use for Biology 141Q and 142Q, in terms of information gathering and critical thinking, are skills necessary for students at the graduate level. What they accomplish in these courses provides a glimpse of how they will be expected to think in professional or graduate studies. Building a comfortable environment for students to experience this type of inquiry as early as their first two years is an important way in which the INQ curriculum can shape a student’s future.

From the liberal arts perspective, our goal is for students to understand the connection between what they learn in one discipline to another—in this case, performing research in the sciences and how a similar process may work in the humanities or social sciences.
The critics of the liberal arts are getting more vocal simply because of the economy and because of a marketplace where people who have jobs to offer want more specialized experience at the front end.”

Chilton D. Varner
Partner at King & Spalding Law Firm, Emory Board of Trustees Member Since 1995, Member of The Commission on the Liberal Arts at Emory

Sarah McPhee
Professor of Art History and Co-Chair of the Quality Enhancement Plan

As part of Emory’s reaccreditation process, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools requires the university to produce a “Quality Enhancement Plan” (QEP), which addresses a well-defined and focused topic directly related to the enhancement of undergraduate education and charts a course of action for its implementation. McPhee and Eric Weeks, professor of physics, co-chaired the effort through fall 2011. This semester, as Weeks is on leave, Rick Rubinson, professor of sociology, now serves as co-chair.

Academic Exchange: How did you decide on your approach to developing Emory’s QEP?

Sarah McPhee: Both Eric and I immediately responded to the possibility of making a difference at a fundamental level; we were excited by the idea that through the QEP you could potentially rebrand undergraduate education at Emory. We tried to engage everyone in the process and discussion. We wrote global e-mails to the entire Emory community and asked for everyone’s ideas. We received hundreds of e-mails from all constituencies—from alumni, law students, the business school, undergraduates, college professors, administrators, nurses, etc. Then with the help of a graduate student, we crunched the numbers and started to figure out what the various interests were on campus, where people thought problems were, where people thought unnoticed strengths were.

The Academic Exchange: Why did you agree to serve on the committee?

Chilton Varner: I graduated from a small-town Southern high school, and through a series of fortuitous events ended up at a women’s liberal arts college in Massachusetts. That experience to me was most unexpected and transformative. I believe in the liberal arts, and I’m eager to have an opportunity to help Emory explore the future of liberal arts.

AE: How has the standing of the liberal arts shifted over the last few decades?

CV: The liberal arts are under siege. That’s a function of many different things. Part of it is the price of higher education and the pressure to produce graduates who can immediately add value in a country that increasingly values productivity. The critics of the liberal arts are getting more vocal simply because of the economy and because of a marketplace where people who have jobs to offer want more specialized experience at the front end.

Some people consider a liberal arts degree self-indulgent and not of immediate practical value. I disagree. Looking at how fast and quickly the world operates and how decisions get made nowadays, people trained in the liberal arts learn to think more critically; they make decisions in a way that takes into account more constituencies. One of the greatest attributes of a liberal arts education is the variety you’re exposed to, which I think creates interests that are more diverse, broader, and deeper than...
to reframe the liberal arts in a very concrete and direct way. I believe those attributes will become more valuable, not less, as the days go by.

AE: How do you think liberal arts education needs to adapt to the times?

CV: The guardians of the liberal arts will have to continue to be flexible. The core curriculum in liberal arts colleges these days doesn’t resemble the curriculum that I had. I believe interdisciplinarity will be a hallmark of good education going forward, whether that’s in a research university or in a liberal arts college. Our provost, Earl Lewis, often asks if in the twenty-first century you can have a liberal arts curriculum that doesn’t include a basic engineering course because of the importance of engineering in the everyday lives of most people. We have to look for ways in which you take one discipline, for example music, and marry it to another, thereby informing both music and the other discipline in ways that would not be available were they to remain in separate silos.

AE: What impact has your liberal arts background had on your life?

CV: It has been pivotal in my life and my career decisions. I don’t think I would have gone to law school had I not had an outstanding undergraduate education at Smith College that taught me to think critically about things that matter. It taught me to be a problem solver. My writing skills are considerably better than they might have been, and writing skills are of paramount importance to a lawyer. In the past fifteen years, I’ve done a great deal of work in product liability litigation. Part of that is learning how things work, whether it is a pharmaceutical or an automobile or an artificial hip. I have to understand those products at a level sufficient to teach others—the jury—about them. I have to explain how these products work, and I’m better at doing that because I had a liberal arts education.

AE: What are your expectations for the commission?

CV: This is an opportunity for Emory to be a real leader in the field. We could play an important role by talking about how we should do, and do well, the liberal arts in this country and time. I hope the commission comes up with a number of responses to the assault that the liberal arts face. One small action that would be useful would be to incorporate a discussion of liberal arts into freshmen orientation. It would be terrific to have a panel of trustees, community leaders, and Emory graduates who make the case for the liberal arts. You’d be amazed at the number of people who have been exceedingly successful and who owe their success to a liberal arts education. I think it would be useful to get young people excited about the liberal arts in a world where lots of people say you need to major in business or focus on one profession. I believe there are folks who truly realize the value of liberal arts, and I hope that Emory can spread that view. We’ll be poorer as an intellectual community if we don’t.

HAVE YOU DONE YOUR THOUGHTWORK?

ThoughtWork is a weekly electronic newsletter on emerging knowledge and news in Emory’s intellectual community. Every Monday morning, subscribers receive news and updates of key relevance to Emory faculty life, short profiles of faculty winners of awards and distinctions and prominent faculty publications, brief quotes from campus events, valuable resources for faculty, new faculty profiles, and a detailed events calendar.

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An Experiment in Progress
The library, the Digital Scholarship Commons, and new tools for research and teaching

As the final exam began my students broke into groups, huddling around laptops, reams of numbers, and books of poetry. Low conversations rumbled through the classroom, punctuated by raised hands and urgent questions about what on earth we were doing. My job: demonstrating how the visualization software worked again, pushing them to think further about the emerging results, and reminding them that this was just another experiment.

“Experiment” had become a watchword in “Introduction to Digital Humanities,” a course that asked students to transform their interpretation of literature through the application of specific technologies. In the weeks prior to the exam, the students had read two volumes of poetry—Mean Time (1991) and The World’s Wife (1999)—by the British Poet Laureate, Carol Ann Duffy. Drawing on the collection of Duffy’s papers in MARBL, we had also read a letter in which she suggests that the latter volume “is not a ‘normal’ poetry collection by me.” Motivated by this assertion, the students read the volumes with an eye toward identifying any differences between them. When writing papers on this subject, the students drew on the themes, imagery, and language present in each volume to argue if Duffy’s own assessment was accurate.

The final exam asked the students to go beyond these typical avenues of inquiry and to engage with Duffy’s two books on a quantitative level: the average number of words per poem, the frequency of particular words, and what groupings words appeared near each other in the corpus, to name a few. The students collectively produced a digital transcription of the books and then set about their investigation using the text-analysis suite Voyant Tools and Excel. The task facing the students was not to reach a pre-conceived conclusion about what the data would reveal but rather to experiment and see how—or even if—such tools added to our already considerable discussion of Duffy’s poetry. By the end of the exam, each group had collaboratively written an explanation of the phenomena they observed and how such results related to the larger question of the uniqueness of The World’s Wife.

While this exam was an experiment, so too was the class itself: a joint endeavor of the new, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-sponsored Digital Scholarship Commons (DiSC), where I’m a post-doctoral fellow, and the English department to offer the first course at Emory dedicated to the digital humanities. My students were wrestling with the quantitative analysis of poetry, and Emory’s libraries and college were experimenting with the future of humanities research—and the liberal arts.

Libraries have been central to humanities research for centuries. They provide the raw materials for scholars’ investigations and often serve as the space in which these materials are painstakingly converted into original arguments and insights. It’s not whimsy, then, to compare the relationship between a humanist and the library to that between a scientist and the laboratory. For the last several decades, the library has turned to digital technology to augment the raw resources it makes available to scholars: books, journals, and archives have been joined by electronic catalogs, databases, journals, and books.

Today, academic libraries—and the Emory Libraries in particular—are seeking to support new technological methods for engaging with these materials. If digital resources are the equivalent of adding to the lab’s supply of chemicals, then such new methods are the equivalent in investing in a different microscope, which allows work that simply could not be done previously. The computational text analysis that engaged my class is one such “microscope.” Other new tools include using geospatial tools for visualizing historical data, topic modeling for identifying common subjects in textual corpora, and network analysis for displaying the relationships between ideas or individuals. Along with these new approaches, the Library has also furnished “lab assistants” in the form of its subject librarians, software developers, and the team working in DiSC.

Collaborations between faculty and the library’s team of scholars have already begun making use of these new methods. In the “Lynchings in Georgia (1875-1950)” project, Roberto Franzosi of the Department of Sociology is partnering with DiSC to visualize data from the records of almost 400 lynchings. Franzosi built a database of these events from newspaper accounts, and the library’s team is creating network relational maps that show how different actors in the events relate to one another. Such research should help answer familiar questions about historical events but do so through an entirely new, digitally enhanced fashion.

Other experiments underway in the library are connecting technology with Emory’s physical collections. The “Views of Rome” project draws on Pirro Ligorio’s 1562 map to create an interactive display for research. Not only will people be able to explore high-resolution images of Ligorio’s work, but students in Sarah McPhee’s and Eric Varner’s art history classes will be able to embed their research about Roman monuments into the map. They will augment this research with other images and texts from MARBL to show how the same locations have been depicted differently throughout Rome’s history. In this manner, the tools and materials in the library enhance not only faculty research but also the work of Emory’s undergraduates.

As was the case with the Duffy project in my class, deploying such new technologies in the libraries shifts not only humanities research but also what a liberal arts education means, putting a renewed emphasis on primary evidence. Undergraduates working on such projects—even within the context of a class assignment—make new contributions to a scholarly discourse as they deploy new digital methods. Further, students involved in such research broaden their understanding of professional scholarship; as a result, their liberal arts education prepares them for lifelong engagement with the work of academics, regardless of their ultimate career paths.

Yet as Emory creates new avenues for humanities research, we must remember that future scholars will want to engage with today’s scholarship. This presents a challenge, as the technologies that drive many innovations of the present will quickly become obsolete. What, in other words, is the future of the liberal arts if the output of today’s scholars becomes inaccessible? This question is critical for today’s libraries, which preserve the work of previous generations. One reason, then, to have the libraries and DiSC help develop new methods of research is that it provides us a chance to advise scholars on matters that will increase the longevity of their digital work. For example, a major goal of the DiSC project ‘Tracking Santhrace’ is devising a semantically enriched database that can continue to evolve over the coming decades of the ongoing archaeological excavation. Alongside digital scholarship, the Libraries are also preparing to launch OpenEmory, an open-access repository for faculty research. Providing Emory researchers the technological infrastructure for storing their finished work will also insure its continued availability for years to come.

Ultimately, the role that technology and libraries will play in the future of humanities research—and the future of the liberal arts—is a lot like my class’s final exam: an experiment in progress. We’re not yet entirely sure what we’ll learn as we implement new tools in traditional disciplines, but we do know that the collaborative investigation will leave us all the richer for having made the attempt.

RESOURCES

The Digital Scholarship Commons http://web.library.emory.edu/disc

Voyeur, a web-based text analysis tool http://hermeneuti.ca/voyeur/

Website for Introduction to Digital Humanities http://www.briancroxall.net/dh/
To Praise Technology But Not Worship It
The liberal arts and the shape of tomorrow’s academy

Twenty-five years ago, I took five hundred dollars—the extent of my savings—and made a foray into the stock market. As a freshly minted graduate who had used a Kaypro to portable (better “luggable,” as it weighed 26 pounds) computer to write my dissertation, I was sure that personal computing was the wave of the future. Using my critical research skills, I narrowed my choices to two companies: Kaypro and Apple.

Kaypro had been building electronic devices since 1952 and it was the fifth largest computer manufacturer in the world. Apple was barely ten years old. It had just ousted Steve Jobs, replacing him with a marketing wizard from Pepsi who knew almost nothing about computer technology. All the signs pointed to Kaypro, so, with full confidence in my capacity to see the future of technology, I invested in Kaypro. It would rule the campuses of America, and I would be touted as a visionary and be wealthy to boot!

In fewer than three years the company was in chapter 11. By 1992 my stock was worthless. Let’s not talk about what those fifty shares of Apple stock would be worth today. Be assured, the irony of my writing this essay on a MacBook Pro is pain enough.

Despite my evident lack of prophetic bona fides and because the future is upon us, I want to offer some predictions about the Emory of the future. Primarily, I wish to suggest two ways of thinking about technology and thus, two means of conceiving of a university. The first considers technology as the tools and techniques we use to negotiate the physical world. The second conception refers not to the tools, but to the worldviews that enable us to construct and use those tools. Technology in this manner is not obvious, but it may be more pertinent to our future as a university, because this conception has implications for achieving the university’s mission and goals.

Viewed as tools and techniques, technology is the extension and enhancement of human capacities. Just as hammers and pens extend what our hands can do, microscopes what our eyes can do, and stethoscopes what our ears can do, digital technology extends what our minds can do to collect, sort, and disperse data at speeds and distances heretofore unimaginable. In other words, technology blurs the boundaries that historically have defined the structures and placements of universities.

Universities were, and still are, repositories of knowledge—quite literally physical locations for books, artifacts, and lab equipment, where a cadre of people can create, criticize, and communicate collective knowledge. In this respect, a university’s actual physical spaces and buildings are reflections of, and limited by, the technologies available to it. As our technologies of storage and communication change, the boundaries between brick and mortar and virtual spaces will be blurred, and the physical and social structures of the university will change. Emory cannot but ask itself what this means for its libraries and laboratories.

A similar set of questions will arise for dormitories and classroom spaces. Consider that only a bit over twenty years ago the World Wide Web was developed for the scientists at CERN. In 1995 only 0.5 percent of the world’s population used the web. As of December 2011, 25 percent of the world’s population use it routinely. Of those users, 44 percent live in Asia, 22 percent in Europe, and 10 percent in Latin America. Taking this into account, where will Emory’s students dwell? Who will our faculty be, and how will we partner with other institutions in collaborative research, teaching, and, perhaps even granting degrees?

Current digital technology already allows us to “flip the classroom.” As it produces more intuitive forms of communication, we will find new ways to teach. For instance, at Candler we are experimenting with different forms of asynchronous teaching. In some classes we are providing lectures online, freeing our class time for discussion about the lecture. In other classes, we are using open source software to post class projects, create discussion groups, and allow students (and faculty) to create virtual discussions. Again, this frees our class time for other possibilities and allows us to extend our conversations beyond “when a class meets.”

Technology helps us comprehend most fully what we are, not because technology defines the human, but because the human must define technology.

“art of silence.” We must create forms for detachment from technology as part of the university’s expectations for students, faculty, and staff. Indeed, this may be what distinguishes a university from other institutions.

These reflective capacities are critical because the same technology that blurs institutional boundaries also blurs our sense of the human being’s boundaries. We already incorporate the mechanical with the human through devices like pacemakers, stents, sensory aids, and artificial joints. One cannot help but wonder what this will look like when forms of artificial intelligence are made complements to the human ones. Our notions of the human are destined to be challenged, and the university must be ready to engage this fundamental question.

To enable us to do so, the university will have to redouble its efforts to keep essential humanistic endeavors at the forefront of its reflections. This brings me to the second conception of technology, as a mode of discernment. Ultimately, universities have always been about understanding ourselves as human beings in relationship to other human beings, to our environments—social and natural—and with our selves. The technological blurring of the physical and mental boundaries of the human compels us to ensure that the study of the human as a relational being remains at the core of the entire university’s work.

At the end of a lucid and thoughtful treatment of Heidegger’s The Question Concerning Technology, Richard Rojcewicz asks how are we to live in a technological age and yet not fall victim to the technological outlook? How can we become free of imposition? Should we oppose technology, curse it, and attempt to smash it, like the Luddites? Should rather doubt that face-to-face instruction will cease, nor do I think that it should, but these new forms will become more natural to us, and when they do, we will need to reconceive where our students can live, what types and sizes of classrooms we need, and how we will use our resources for non-classroom interaction spaces.

There are challenges involved with all of this. Many can be overcome, and others can be stimuli for new solutions. The trick is to remember that the university of tomorrow will not be based on the technology in front of us today, but that which will be created in the next five to ten years.

The growth of Internet usage is astonishing, but it is more than surpassed by the rate at which the world is producing and storing data each day. Computational scientists calculate that the total amount of the world’s stored data is 600 billion gigabytes (2 gigabytes will store approximately 20 yards of books on a shelf) or the equivalent of 2.4 billion standard-sized hard drives. These astronomical figures suggest that a major task for universities will not only be to amass and dispense information, but also to equip students with the intellectual tools to manage it. Indeed, the capacity to engage critically this enormous amount of information will determine the success or failure of our students in the modern world.

To attain the critical distance this requires, the university must cultivate habits and demeanors that encourage all of us to rediscover the

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Spring 2012

The Academic Exchange 11
Creativity and the Virtues of Difference
Integrating business and the liberal arts

“I think there should be more students from different schools and different backgrounds in this class to provide different perspectives. Would be interesting to have interdisciplinary participation.”

S

ometimes students have incredible insights about their learning experiences in the classroom.

Plenty of research suggests that people have a natural tendency to want to be around people like themselves. This partly is driven by proximity. We are simply more likely to know and form close relationships with people who share the same space. This natural tendency is also driven by the fact that it generally is easier to be around people who are similar. For example, we do not have to work as hard to understand someone who is immersed in the same paradigms, has similar values about what is important and what is not, and is concerned about the same problems. Although our natural tendencies regenerate, they may not be ideal.

This is why the anonymous comment above, made by an MBA student in a class I taught, struck me as very insightful. In contrast to what may seem natural, this student realized the virtues of something different.

The class was Leading Groups and Teams, a topic that one can imagine would be of interest to a wide variety of students across the university. After all, almost everyone has to work with others and will have to do so as part of any organization or firm. Yet not surprisingly, I expected to teach only business school students. This was primarily the case, but I was delighted to have a handful of students from other parts of the university, such as public health and economics.

From my point of view, these students tremendously enriched the discussion. Their comments and approach to the class nicely complemented the perspectives of the majority of students in the class. It was clear to me that the way students participated and framed their ideas differed by major, presumably because different subtle norms develop around classes. For example, we do not have to work as hard to understand someone who is immersed in the same paradigms, has similar values about what is important and what is not, and is concerned about the same problems.

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The discussion across majors. Importantly, though, these differences were subtle enough to be enriching. There was enough commonality around the topic that these differences were not problematic, disruptive, or uncomfortable.

I observed more concrete effects as well. For the final group project, I randomly assigned students to groups, which avoided like-majored students working exclusively with one another. One group, for example, studied a team within a non-profit public policy organization, the entry to which came from a graduate student in public health. From my vantage point, all students benefited from exposure to students from different schools across the university. Apparently, the student making the comment above agreed.

All of this speaks to the importance of integrating business and liberal arts education to some degree. Specialization and choice are important, and students should be able to pursue a professional major, such as business or law, or a liberal arts major, such as English or science. But some level of integration across these domains could be beneficial.

This perspective is consistent with my research on creativity and social networks. Creativity includes inventive solutions to problems, as well as new ideas about processes or products. Creativity also involves broad versus narrow thinking and interesting combinations of seemingly disparate elements. Of course, some people are more innately creative than others, and some are drawn to creative fields. Even people who do not naturally think of themselves as creative, however, or who do not identify themselves as being artistic, can contribute creative ideas, solutions, and thought processes. When it comes to learning, creativity provides an intangible element that can help students solve complex conceptual problems and integrate disparate knowledge and ideas.

In my research, I investigate how informal interactions, including brief conversations and weaker relationships, can facilitate creativity. One way that seemingly casual relations can improve creativity is by providing exposure to different perspectives, frames, and information. People with whom we interact frequently and with whom we are close friends tend to be similar to us. The weaker relationships, in contrast, are more likely to offer something different relative to what is familiar. Plus, we tend to be cognitively open to fundamental differences of opinion with our weaker contacts but come to expect similar perspectives from our stronger contacts. As a result, these seemingly less important social interactions—unimportant to a sense of belonging and closeness provided by stronger ties—provide exactly the cognitive stimulation needed to be creative. Interestingly, the helpful exposure that these ties potentially provide does not have to be in depth, detailed, or at face value considered rich. Instead, exposure to different norms, different frames, and different contexts is enough to spark interesting and creative thoughts.

One conclusion from this logic is that breadth of exposure may be important in a university setting. Of course, depth of knowledge is the primary goal of majors in a particular area, and even greater depth is necessary in graduate school. Taking one or two courses in other parts of the university, however, could provide just enough stimulation to help students become more interesting and creative thinkers. This demands that within liberal arts education, and the university setting in particular, we should encourage cross registration for classes at the fringes—mean-

We tend to be cognitively open to fundamental differences of opinion with our weaker contacts but come to expect similar perspectives from our stronger contacts. These seemingly less important social interactions provide exactly the cognitive stimulation needed to be creative.
The Liberal Arts
An integral component of health professions’ education

The artful caregiver must be an astute student of science and humanity. Whether they are recommending increased exercise, administering a vaccination, or performing an organ transplant, those providing help to the sick or attempting to prevent illness are interventionists. The goal of medical intervention should be to alleviate suffering, so that individuals may experience lives of quality, meaning, and enjoyment. In practice, the cure or amelioration of disease allows an individual to pursue activities and engage with others—through words, visual arts, or music, for example—in ways that define quality of life.

Each individual defines quality of life according to her or his culture, family, and experience. The best medical practitioners assess each individual life situation to be of the greatest help, especially given the increasing gravity of medical intervention—miraculous benefits as well as serious side effects.

To make optimal, patient-centered decisions, the caregiver must partner with the patient. For the practitioner to achieve such a partnership, also referred to as a “therapeutic” relationship, he or she must seek to understand both the personal and the broader contexts of the patient’s life. The physician or nurse with a deep knowledge of a patient, family, and community, born of a long-term caring relationship, is the greatest ally in times of health and illness. The appropriate medical interventions should ultimately support individuals and communities as they seek to live moral lives that are appreciative of beauty.

From the above, it should be clear that the liberal arts (including the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities) are foundational to the effective practice of medicine. By basing modern medicine firmly upon the natural sciences, extraordinary progress has been made. Yet the other disciplines of the ancient and modern liberal arts are equally important. The liberal arts help define the very meaning of the lives we hope to prolong or improve by describing beauty, interpreting suffering, and explaining the biology and chemistry of life. The art of communication, study of ethics, and understanding of probability (logic and math) are rooted in the classic liberal arts; each of these disciplines is critical to the generation, understanding, and application of medical science. Sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, and political science are essential to our understanding of humans and society. This is the rationale for the place of the liberal arts as historically required for admission to formal programs of health professions education.

Currently, an undergraduate nursing degree at Emory includes requirements in the liberal arts, both in the natural sciences and the humanities, to be achieved during the first two years of nursing education, prior to clinical nursing training. Likewise, the prerequisites for admission to the graduate programs in nursing and medicine include coursework in the natural sciences and humanities. As in the undergraduate program in nursing, there are no clear requirements for the explicit study of the humanities, arts, or social sciences in the graduate programs. Thankfully, the accrediting bodies and the curricular objectives of nursing and medical programs are full of references to the importance of the understanding of the human condition broadly and in context of community and culture. In fact, the education of both nurses and physicians has seen a resurgence of interest in including the humanities in the education of the caregiver.

Recognition of the biologic underpinnings of medical care has been and should remain strong; this is an inextricable link between the liberal arts and medicine. The importance of the humanities in the training of caregivers is increasing. The American Academy of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), the accrediting body for nursing education, clearly states that nursing education is based in a liberal arts education. Unfortunately, this has been traditionally achieved through pre- or co-requisite courses, so that learners understand the liberal arts and nursing education to be separate entities. The inclusion of both the arts (literature, music, sculpture, dance, and theology) and sciences (physical, life, mathematical, and social) places these subjects as the cornerstones for cultural competence and clinical reasoning. Finally, the analytic skills developed in the liberal arts education build the intellectual and innovative capacities needed for the much-needed reform of healthcare delivery.

Recent reports on the education of the professions have recommended significant overhaul of medical and nursing education. In Educating Physicians (2010) and Educating Nurses (2009), the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching specifically calls for a deeper integration of the liberal arts in the professional education. These reports have ignited change and strong policy statements from licensure, accreditation, credentialing, and educational bodies. Many of the AACN statements are derived from these reports. They also advocate for a move to a more conceptual learning styles, and away from an information learning style. The medical college admission test of 2015 will broaden its scope to include social sciences. New models of patient care are being introduced to once again emphasize the importance of a long-term relationship with a practitioner who appreciates the complexity of the human condition in improving care and medical decision-making.

Curricular reforms at Emory in both medicine and nursing have emphasized the value of the mentoring relationship and the understand-

The liberal arts help define the very meaning of the lives we hope to prolong or improve by describing beauty, interpreting suffering, and explaining the biology and chemistry of life.
The place of law in the liberal arts curriculum—and of the nature of law as a liberal art—are not new questions. More than fifty years ago, the late Harold J. Berman, Robert W. Woodruff Professor at the Emory University School of Law, saw in the study of law in the liberal arts curriculum “an opportunity and a challenge . . . which will serve not only scholarship in many fields but also the inner strength of our social order.”

In universities across the United States, courses in law are today a staple of the undergraduate curriculum. Consider the rich legal offerings of Emory College across an array of departments: American Legal System; Communications Law; Constitutional Law; Economics of Regulation; Greek and Roman Law; International Law; Islamic Law; Jewish Legal Thinking; Law and Biodiversity; Law and Economics; Law, Discipline, Disorder; Philosophy of Law; Psychology and Law; Sociology of Law; U.S. Legal and Constitutional History; and Women and the Law.

Relatively few universities, to be sure, offer the opportunity to major in legal studies, especially among the nation’s most elite institutions. Yet even among the latter, the place of law as a subject of systematic undergraduate study has increasingly been recognized. Perhaps most strikingly, consider the program some have (erroneously, although Princeton has recurrently explored the possibility of establishing a law school) called “Princeton Law School.” Princeton’s Program in Law and Public Affairs (LAPA). From 2007 to 2009, I was part of the LAPA community—variously as an undergraduate professor, research fellow, and visiting scholar. I was able to see firsthand the ways the systematic study of law in a liberal arts institution—in the hands of visiting professors of law and other disciplines, of permanent faculty members from the humanities and social sciences who specialize in the law, of graduate students exploring legal questions, and of undergraduates learning the law—could foster a community of legal analysis and thought with tremendous potential.

Something of this dynamic was once common at American universities generally, at a time when the study of law, even for legal practice, was an undergraduate course of study. It remains true in Europe, where law is still one of the most common undergraduate majors—alongside history, economics, and other staples of the liberal arts curriculum.

Against this historical backdrop, what can we understand law and the liberal arts to contribute to one another? In what ways might the systematic study of law be essential to the nature of the liberal arts university? And what might the framework of the liberal arts add to the foundations of legal study? Let us consider each pattern of influence, in turn.

Austin Sarat, professor of jurisprudence and political science at Amherst College, has suggested various reasons for law’s integration into study of the liberal arts. First, he points to the centrality of law in our culture and society. Law is among the most important media for the articulation of a community’s values. Even more, it is central to the resolution of its conflicts. This is not merely a question of lawyers as what Tocqueville described as “arbiters between the citizens.” More fundamentally, it derives from the “human tendency to engage in normative argument as a regular part of social interaction and to interpret social action in the language of right and wrong.”

The utility of law for the liberal arts may also be counseled by its place as perhaps the most active setting we know for developing the skills of reading and interpreting—and of rhetoric more broadly. There may be no better vehicle, in fact, for teaching critical analysis. Consider some of the questions that legal inquiry engages as a matter of course:

- What constitutes a community?
- What are the mechanisms for the creation, preservation, and dissolution of such communities?
- How—and with what force—do moral and ethical demands bear upon us, as we shift our attention from the individual to the communal?
- What is the effective—rather than purely rhetorical—force of claims of “right”?

As Sarat summarizes it, “Legal study provides a useful and engaging way to sharpen students’ skills as readers, as interpreters of culture, and as citizens schooled in what Aristotle would have regarded as a kind of practical wisdom, a knowledge that extends beyond theoretical understanding to civic and moral action.”

That law could play, as it has in the past, this central role in study of the liberal arts requires no great feat of imagination. Paul Kahn, my professor of constitutional law at Yale but at least as much a professor of philosophy and the humanities, has suggested an analogy to religious studies in the United States. While once directed exclusively to practitioners—to aspiring clergy of one faith or another—the study of religion has come to stand at the heart of a liberal education. As went the church, so perhaps should go the law.

To that end, Emory Law School today stands at the forefront of efforts to address the need for legal study among a broad universe of professionals, students, and scholars. With its new one-year Juris Master degree—and in partnership with Emory College, the Goizueta Business School, the Medical School, and Georgia Tech—the law school is working to re-establish law as something not just for lawyers.

Turning the tables

What, then, do the liberal arts bring to the study of law? Most fundamentally, the foregrounding of questions of justice and social welfare can be credited to the study of law within the liberal tradition. Though staples of legal rhetoric, the substantive demands of justice and welfare might more commonly be avoided but for the place of law as a liberal art.

Notions of law as worthy not merely of practice, but of challenge, might also be credited to its study amidst the liberal arts. The very best lawyers know not only what the law is but likewise what it might be. Let there be no confusion: Such lawyers do not stand up in small claims court to demand a fundamental rethinking of the social contract. But in shaping their arguments, in pressing their case, in seeking relief, and yes, in arguing for legal change, they must be constantly attuned both to where the law is, and where it should be.

In that effort, the liberal arts offer lawyers a rich set of tools, as evident in the strong interdisciplinary tradition that has taken hold in legal education over the last thirty years. Emory’s own experience is suggestive: Of Emory Law School’s eight most recent entry-level faculty appointments, six arrived with their PhDs—in economics, philosophy, political science, and social policy. The law school offers joint degrees...
possibilities. This new set of institutional arrangements draws extensively on traditional academic expertise, but it focuses that expertise on non-academic kinds of problems. As with each of the previous periods, built into the new set of arrangements is also a powerful incentive structure for those who choose to investigate those problems.

What, then, does the emergence of programs like the MDP suggest about the future of the liberal arts in graduate education? We appear to be living through the third major period of university restructuring within the last century. The signs, one might argue, are everywhere. On the one hand, we face dwindling numbers of positions in the traditional liberal arts disciplines, a widespread shortage of research funds (especially from traditional sources), shrinking departmental budgets and work speedups for faculty. On the other hand, there is the rapid expansion of interdisciplinary programs like the MDP, generously supported by the very corporate, philanthropic, and governmental sources that formerly sponsored the traditional disciplines. We may view these changes as positive or negative, but they are transforming the university as we speak. How we respond to these new forces will have much to do with the fate of the liberal arts in the years to come. 

To praise technology

we perhaps offer passive resistance, benign neglect? Or should we fully enter into the technological world and attempt to reform it from within?" Rojciewicz does not recommend any of these approaches, but, following Heidegger, he suggests instead that we begin thinking. Not thinking as calculation, but as contemplation, by which he means "attending to what is closest, that which, 'heeds the meaning of things' and not just the things as objects." Thinking as contemplation enables us "to put technology into perspective, to relativize technological things . . . which amounts to detachment from them . . . putting them in their place . . . under-stood in the sense of demoting them, dismissing them from their highest place. But it also means to put technological things in their proper place; i.e., it involves the recognition that they do have a legitimate place."

In other words, the future of the university is not an either-or with regard to technologies definitions, but a relationship between them. The use of technology helps us comprehend most fully what we are, not because technology defines the human, but because the human must define technology. Our pursuits in understanding the human being must fully will enable us to determine how we want technology as a tool to function at our university. This is the blend I predict Emory will seek in the coming decades: an appreciation of technology not simply because of its instrumental value, but for what it discloses about us as human beings, an appreciation that will enable Emory to praise technology, but not worship it, and in so doing allow Emory to embody its highest goals. 

Law & liberal arts

with the business school, graduate school, school of public health, and school of theology—and is exploring new possibilities with the ethics center, the medical school, and even the college. A range of programs—from conferences and speaker series, to cross-listed courses and the new Juris Master degree—offer yet further opportunities for interdisciplinary engagement. Yet Emory is hardly unique on these counts. Today, no program of legal study would be complete without the opportunity to engage the liberal arts.

Ultimately, the shift of law from technical to integrative—and from trade to profession—can be linked in significant part to its place among the liberal arts. The profession of law requires not merely knowledge of law’s content and skill in its use, but understanding of its place in society, its moral and ethical dimensions, and its rhetorical force. It is the practice of law in this light that is grounded in the place of law in the liberal arts, and the nature of law as a liberal art. 

Knowledge

research and teaching collaborations? How can we together find a way to build upon departmental strengths and yet break down university divisions in order to create living conversation and collaborative thinking that are surely characteristic of the best of any liberal arts tradition?

If education is really an intrinsically risky enterprise, because it is about the need for transformation, then we need to be open to the discourages of constantly changing times and the unexpected conversations that threaten to turn everything we thought upside down. We should not give up music, insight, conversation, or public scholarship. We should leave the free state of education, the liberal arts, better for our having been here. 

Western core curriculum

Marx, for example). The underlying premise of the new voluntary core is simply that in order to understand and think critically about themselves and their world, students need to be exposed to the foundational texts that created and shaped that world.

The “voluntary core” is an experiment. The Program in Democracy and Citizenship has obtained foundation support for a three-year trial period. Each of the four courses will be offered once a semester. The courses will be limited to twenty-five students to encourage discussion. While we will encourage students to take all four courses, preferably during the freshman year, they have the freedom to take fewer. Thanks to a generous gift by Trustee Emeritus Emory Williams ’32C, the students will also have the opportunity to hear talks by and hold discussions with speakers both from the Emory faculty and outside, who will supplement the formal courses.

Our hope is that this program will demonstrate the value and interest in what has traditionally been at the core of a liberal arts education—student engagement with great books and great ideas as a foundation for a life of learning and engaged citizenship. 

Health sciences & liberal arts

arts and the health professions were clearly elucidated; the potential to advance professional medical education and care was limited only by our time together and our imaginations.

Finally, there is an additional role for the liberal arts and the fine arts in healing work that should be emphasized. The liberal arts do play a critical part in our understanding of what it is to be human and to live a “good” life. It thereby serves as the bedrock of why we give care. However, the arts also represent the greatest expression of the human spirit. Literature, music, art, architecture, and dance lead all of us, patients and caregivers alike, to greater understanding and joy. The arts are often the best treatment, an elixir for the soul and spirit as we grapple with the challenges of life and caregiving.

We have described four fundamental roles for the liberal arts in the education of the medicine and nursing professional: 1) The natural sciences as pre-requisite to the medical sciences; 2) the humanities, social sciences, and fine arts as essential to being an artful practitioner; 3) the practitioner’s understanding of the human condition, through which he or she is able to share interests with a broad range of people and strengthening the therapeutic relationship; and 4) the humanities and arts as they provide all of us with greater understanding of the human condition.

While it is clear that the current university structure of centers, schools, and departments can be a barrier to collaborative efforts, it is also heartening to have participated in the successful collaborations to date and the ongoing efforts by the faculty to better define the role of the liberal arts at Emory and beyond. May our collaborations continue to move our uni-versity forward for the benefit of all. 

www.emory.edu/acad_exchange
Endnotes

Smear Tactics in the Early Republic

Joanne Freeman
Professor of History, Yale University, from her talk “Dirty Nasty Politics in the Early Republic,” February 9, 2012

A great way to destroy a man’s political power and influence is thus to attack his reputation, his character. So character attacks are a very powerful and extremely popular political tool in this period [the Early Republic], and the press was all too happy to help spread character attacks. In their efforts to obliterate their opponents, partisan newspapers went to extremes and were willing to do or say almost anything to save the fragile new republic by, of course, promoting their own cause and crushing the living daylights out of their opponents. This example is one of my favorite newspaper tricks of the period, used to very good effect, temporarily at least: In the presidential election of 1800, when Federalists were panicked that Thomas Jefferson would become president, some Federalist newspaperman came out with a really brilliant ploy to defeat Jefferson. They announced in their newspapers that Jefferson had died.

Reconsidering Problems

Melissa Harris-Perry
Professor of Political Science, Tulane University. New Orleans, MSNBC columnist, and from her talk “King’s Legacy and the New Civil Rights Frontiers,” January 17, 2012

I do want to acknowledge that right now, everybody has problems. Everybody. Being white does not insulate you from having problems. Right now, being straight does not insulate you from having problems. Being married certainly doesn’t insulate anyone from having problems. Living in supposedly suburban communities does not insulate you from having problems. Even being fabulously wealthy does not necessarily insulate you from having problems. Everybody has problems. But here’s the distinction I want to make: This [a photo of an African-American woman sitting on a chair with a large American flag wrapped around her] is a survivor of the Katrina storm, sitting outside the Superdome awaiting rescue. If you ever wondered how it is that people of the Lower Ninth Ward, people of New Orleans East, people of Central City, how they had large American flags to wave while they were waiting for rescue. . . . Those flags are not Fourth of July flags. You know what these flags are? These are the flags that come from the caskets of veterans. The reason that working-class people in the East, the Lower Ninth, Central City had big, enormous flags that they would wrap themselves in when they were on the roofs of their house while waiting for rescue is because they were related to people who gave their lives for the country in military service, and they had the flags from the caskets. I want to remind us of that, because typically what we think of as the ultimate responsibility of citizenship is the willingness to give your life for your country.

Language and the Brain

Lauren J. Harris
Professor of Psychology, Michigan State University, from his talk “We Speak with the Left Hemisphere: The Story of Paul Broca’s Discovery that Changed Our Understanding of the Human Brain,” February 14, 2012

At this time [Paul Broca] was ready to stop and go back and join his father’s medical practice, but he was also becoming ready for the comforts of domesticity. He was still single, but he had said a couple of years earlier that private practice and marriage were “the two extinguishers of science.” He later assumed one of the risks and married. But he’d come to realize that research appealed to him more than medical practice. . . . Finally we come to 1865, when he wrote, “The facts are presented in great number and nearly all are the same. The cases where the lesions of aphemia [an inability to speak, now called aphasia] was found on the right are only very rare exceptions.” He presented twenty more aphemic patients, all with left-side lesions, and now he was emboldened to say we speak with the left hemisphere. And soon after, F3 [an area of the brain linked to speech] became known as the convolution of language, and thereafter as Broca’s convolution, and as Broca’s area. He himself did not call them that.