

The Truth About a Liberal Arts Education

- ◆ Liberal arts students advance more quickly to middle and senior management positions than their colleagues who pursued other fields of study . . . these graduates become employees that are ready to learn (AT&T Management Study).
- ◆ The liberal arts are more effective in teaching communication skills, general knowledge and information, an understanding of people, an appreciation of ethical concerns, an ability to organize and prioritize, and vital leadership skills (Fortune 500 study).
- ◆ People in the professions will change careers two to four times during their working life and may change jobs every two to three years (Hersh, “The Liberal Arts College”).
- ◆ Business leaders value liberal arts grads for their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, strong writing and speaking skills, self-discipline, exposure to diverse ideas, and global perspective (Hobart & William Smith Colleges study).
- ◆ Strong communications skills are the single most important attribute a candidate can have – and also the one most lacking among job applicants (Poll of hiring managers by the National Association of Colleges and Employers).
- ◆ A broad liberal arts education is preferred for future CEOs – blending knowledge of history, culture, philosophy, and economic policy, with international experience and problem-solving skills (*The Wall Street Journal*).
- ◆ Employers focus on finding graduates with the right skills rather than the right major, as a new employee with the right skills can easily learn the specifics of an industry. Employers desire transferable skills, skills employees take with them to any job, such as written and verbal communication skills, the ability to solve complex problems, to work well with others, and to adapt in a changing workplace – and these are characteristic of a liberal arts education (Survey by National Association of Colleges and Employers).
- ◆ The most desired employment skills (in order of importance): Teamwork, Problem Solving, Interpersonal Skills, Oral Communication, Listening, Personal/Career Development, Creative Thinking, Leadership, Goal Setting/Motivation, Writing, Organizational Effectiveness, Computation, Reading (according to Fortune 500 Companies).
- ◆ Liberal Arts in Action: Carlton Fiorina, Former Chairman and CEO for Hewlett-Packard; Michael Eisner, Former CEO, Walt Disney Corporation; Alan G. Lafley, CEO, Procter and Gamble Company; Steve Case, CEO, America Online; Meg Whitman, CEO, E-Bay; Jill Barad, Former CEO, Mattel Inc.; Brian Lamb, CEO, C-Span; Steve Forbes, CEO, Forbes Inc.
- ◆ Research has shown that 50-81% of liberal arts graduates are employed in a professional or managerial position. Additionally, the earning power for these graduates rises an average of 78% from their 20s to their 50s. This outpaces non-liberal arts graduates’ increase percentage (Economist Robert C. Allen survey).
- ◆ A Harvard University report indicates that potential physicians need not insulate themselves from the liberal arts, and in some cases may hurt their chances by doing so. The report showed that although grades and academic honors are important for admission to medical school, a student’s choice of major has no bearing. Dean Whitla, director of Harvard’s office of tests, says: “It would be regrettable if some of our students who plan to become doctors felt that they must turn away from their interest in the liberal arts for fear of being rejected at medical school without a premedical major.” At Harvard Medical School, premed-prepared students do better the first year, but by the third year they fall slightly behind students who majored in the liberal arts.

