

MORE COMMENTARY INSIDE:**Intellectual Property: Page A44**

In a Cases in Point column, Abhik A. Huq, Daniel S. Goldberg, and Thomas F. Meagher urge caution in how colleges draft their licensing agreements.

Chicago's Baccalaureate Blues: Page A45

The failure of high schools has elicited much hand-wringing. But there should be equal anguish, writes Kevin Carey, over similar failures at the college level, in the Windy City, but elsewhere too.

Close the Gap Between the Liberal Arts and Career Services

RECENT ECONOMIC EVENTS have forced colleges and universities to streamline their academic offerings congruent with a more pragmatic cost-benefit approach, usually at the expense of their liberal-arts programs. When a foreign-language or philosophy department graduates only a few students per year, there is no financial argument to be made for keeping the department intact. Traditional reasoning about the enrichment of the “student as future citizen” can only go so far when parents who pay the tuition or students taking the courses can’t see a bottom line in the form of a lucrative job after graduation.

Reducing the liberal arts’ enrollment problems to a lack of career development is simplistic, and no silver bullet exists. But the absence of a clear career path is an important factor in declining enrollment in the liberal arts that hasn’t been adequately dealt with by most colleges. As things stand now, students are asked to take a leap of faith that what they learn will ultimately reveal its value. At what point, I wonder, will academic deans and faculties consider career development an integral part of a liberal-arts education?

Having worked in career services since the 80s at three institutions of higher learning, and consulted at many more, I have encountered dangerous mind-sets that solidify the chasm between liberal-arts education and career services. When I completed my doctorate, a professor congratulated me, then said, “So when are you going to find a real job?” I have consulted with deans who say they really want to improve their career-services programs—but no, they can’t offer career courses for credit, their professors aren’t interested in supervising internships, and they must tread lightly around anything that might be seen by the faculty as encroaching vocationalism. It quickly becomes apparent that career-related changes would be cosmetic at best, designed for admissions (i.e., to bring in students) or alumni (i.e., to get them to donate) purposes.

I’ve also heard from numerous professors, “Our good students go to graduate school. We don’t need to focus on those who are looking for jobs.” I have also been told, “The professors are too busy teaching to worry about how the students will use their knowledge. It’s not their job.” And I’ve had more than one faculty member confess to me that they really aren’t sure how what they teach applies in the nonacademic world.

In all fairness, it’s no wonder that professors look askance when careers are discussed. Some career courses are little more than strung-together workshops with no academic depth or integration into the curriculum. Such courses promise to teach needed professional skills but instead highlight the lack of real career knowledge provided in the classroom.

It’s time, instead, to provide the kind of integrated career support that will teach students to articulate the value of what they are studying and how that education applies to the workplace.

A liberal-arts education can actually be quite serendipitous in a job search. A student who took my freshman seminar, “Films of the Fifties,” found himself recommending a scene from *High Noon* to illustrate a “line in the sand” moment in a news documentary—instantly turning his internship into a job offer. A philosophy major scored a perfect 180 on the LSAT exam and credited his logic class. There’s no way to predict which moments of a liberal-arts education will be directly relevant in the workplace, but it’s imperative that students know such moments occur frequently, and that the skills and knowledge they’re learning are far from obscure and irrelevant.

I’ve been fortunate to work at two liberal-arts colleges where I’ve taught credit-based career courses that specifically highlight the value of a liberal-arts education. My “Major in the Workplace” classes focus on chaos theory as a metaphor

for the job search. Unlike traditional linear theories that presume you will work in the field in which you receive your degree, chaos theory in this sense holds that employment is too complex a system to be distilled to one factor like a major. We use visual-thinking techniques to help students connect the dots between their academic experience and the workplace. For example, students create “major maps” by writing their major in the center of a blank page, then surrounding it with everything they relate to the major: the various disciplines within the major; favorite researchers and theories; the skills they’ve acquired; related courses taken in other disciplines; key experiences such as research, internships, or work; and their personal traits and interests. Students then draw lines to connect these seemingly disparate topics, looking for themes and threads that tie them together.

In doing so, my students move from superficial to elegant observations about their majors. English majors, who previously said they read literature and wrote papers, come to understand that an English major is also about perspective, and is simultaneously classical and progressive. History majors, who initially discussed reading and research skills, discovered that a prerequisite to the major is being “audaciously curious” and on a search for “truth,” despite its elusive nature. They ponder how different the nightly news would be if newsrooms were fully staffed with history majors instead of communication majors. Most important, my students consistently tell me it’s the first time they’ve ever focused on their education—what they’ve learned and how their majors have influenced their mind-sets, perceptions, and ways of thinking. Once they’ve had that epiphany, it’s amazing how simple it is to teach them to articulate their knowledge to an employer or graduate-school admissions officer.

BUT THE OPPORTUNITY to teach a career course that directly draws from a liberal-arts curriculum is not offered at many institutions. Instead, if courses are offered at all, they typically focus on basic job-finding skills like résumé writing and networking, serving to reinforce professors’ worst beliefs about career advising: that it distracts and detracts from the educational process.

Some colleges have developed creative programs integrating the liberal-arts curriculum with career-related topics. Indiana University’s Liberal Arts and Management Program integrates management training and career planning into a certificate program for liberal-arts students. Hartwick College’s Humanities in Management Institute teaches leadership to students by juxtaposing case studies of classic literature and film with current business practices. But such programs are few and far between. For the most part there is still a disconnect and lack of respect between the liberal-arts faculty and the career center.

So how can your institution develop a career program that respects the curriculum while serving the career needs of the students? Some recommendations:

Professors, academic deans, and career-center staff members must work together. Learn what is happening



JOHN KRAUSE FOR THE CHRONICLE

in each other’s shops. And don’t have just a superficial conversation about services—instead, engage in a conversation about what is truly distinct about the curriculum, what students are learning, and how to make employers care.

Career-center personnel should find out what employers are seeking and what they say about your students. Then have a discussion with the dean and the faculty. Not, mind you, for the purpose of changing classes or curriculum, but rather for seeking the common ground between what happens in

the classroom and what happens in the workplace. A career-center staff that understands the education their students are receiving will be better equipped to market that education to potential employers.

Academic departments should evaluate their career-development efforts to ensure that students understand and can articulate the value of their major. Departments can offer credit for internships, career classes, or programs tailored to the major, and reflective classroom discussions that thoughtfully integrate the major into the students’ lives. Faculty members who convey the relevance of what they’re teaching give their students an invaluable gift.

Academic deans should support and reward faculty members who participate in career-development efforts. Many professors would support integrating career development into the curriculum—whether in the form of creative new classes, service learning, volunteering, or internships—if they received financial support, release time from committee work or other obligations outside of class, and tenure-track advancement.

This is not a call to change the liberal-arts curriculum: Let’s keep its breadth and depth intact. But we must help students find the relevance of Greek mythology in 2009 (Wall Street, anyone?). And contrary to fears that a career class will detract from the educational mission, my experience has been that students approach their other liberal-arts classes with newfound enthusiasm when they understand why they are there.

Never underestimate the power of liberal-arts graduates who know the value of their degrees. I have worked with too many disgruntled and frustrated economics majors who wished they were business majors—an attitude I immediately tackle in my “Economics Major in the Workplace” course. By the end of the course, I usually receive numerous comments about their newfound appreciation for an economics major, how they no longer feel like second-class citizens, and, oh, by the way, they just landed great jobs in their fields of interest.

If more liberal-arts faculties and career experts get together, watch out—the results could be amazing. Philosophy departments might just have to limit their enrollment and send their rejected students, disgruntled and frustrated, to the business schools.

*Katharine S. Brooks is director of liberal-arts career services at the University of Texas at Austin. She is the author of *You Majored in What? Mapping Your Path From Chaos to Career* (Viking, 2009).*