

HALE PHD COMPREHENSIVE EXAM: PART ONE (PhDSS17 – 14)

HALE PhD Comprehensive Exam: Part One

PhDSS17 – 14

3. In recent years, higher education has been challenged to help students make more effective connections with the world of work. Some scholars and practitioners regard this effort as essential to keeping higher education relevant to the needs of society, as well as individuals and employers, and to reforming the undergraduate curriculum. Others, however, have expressed concern about the possible threat of work-related learning to higher education's commitment to ~~omit~~ liberal education and cite the possibilities of an increasingly "vocalized" undergraduate curriculum. Using a higher education sector of your choice (e.g., community colleges, for-profit colleges and universities, minority-serving institutions, research universities, liberal arts colleges, comprehensive universities, etc.) and using suitable theory and research-based evidence write an essay that explores this debate. (1) Discuss three arguments that can be made for integrating work-related learning more into the undergraduate curriculum (consider what these efforts might look like and what you would anticipate as key outcomes associated with this effort; then (2) discuss three threats posed by integrating work-related learning more into the undergraduate curriculum (consider if the process of integrating work-related learning result in a vocationalizing of the curriculum, and if so, why it is considered to be an undesirable consequence); finally, (3) choose one of these two options and provide evidence to justify your position.

Introduction

Change is a constant in the history of higher education in the US. Changing values and aims (Bok, 2015; Geiger, 1999; Thelin, 2011) institutional types and missions (Bok, 2015; Geiger, 1999; Morphew, 2002 & 2009; Thelin, 2011), academic programs (Bok, 2015; Brint, Riddle, Turk-Bicakci, & Levy, 2005; Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Thelin, 2011), and undergraduate curricula (Bok, 2015; Boning, 2007; Fuhrmann, 1996; Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Thelin, 2011) are

all a part of this history. Liberal arts colleges (LACs), arguably one of the oldest institutional types in the US, have faced challenges to their traditional values, missions, academic programs, and undergraduate curricula (Baker, Baldwin, & Makker, 2012; Breneman, 1990; Neely, 1999). LACs are typically defined as institutions focused primarily on teaching undergraduate students. They tend to have small class sizes and foster close faculty-student relationships. Their curriculum and academic programs are based primarily on providing students a liberal education in the arts and sciences, and there has traditionally been little emphasis on preparation for or study in professional fields (Baker, et al., 2012). However, market competition among higher education institutions, financial woes, and a growing student interest in vocational education options have contributed to the erosion of a clear purpose for many LACs (Neely, 1999). Additionally, LACs are tuition-driven institutions, and as such, they are more easily influenced by these external influences like competition, economic cycles, and the preferences of students and their families than other less tuition-driven institutions (Baker & Baldwin, 2015).

Given these external influences, the debate over how higher education institutions should be connecting undergraduate students to the world of work is especially relevant to and of concern for LACs (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Baker, et al., 2012; Breneman, 1990; Freeland, 2009). On the one hand, there is the argument that in order for LACs to remain relevant to students, employers, and society they need to cater to the student as consumer (Saunders, 2014), which would mean including work-related learning in the curriculum. Additionally, some scholars note that integrating work-related learning into the curriculum may be an acceptable part of the natural progression of curricular reform (Freeland, 2009; Lang, 1999), as long as LACs stay true to other traditional characteristics like small class sizes, close student-faculty interaction, and a liberal education in the arts and sciences (Spellman, 2009). However, there is

another argument against the inclusion of work-related learning in the curriculum, including some scholars who are concerned work-related learning poses a threat to the traditional liberal education provided at LACs and amounts to vocationalizing the curriculum (Delucchi, 1997; Liu, Sharkness, & Pryor, 2008; Neely, 1999).

This paper will explore how LACs are responding to the debate over how higher education institutions should be connecting undergraduate students to the world of work. It will begin with a discussion of three arguments in favor of integrating work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum, followed by a discussion of three arguments against integrating work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum. Finally, I will outline my own stance on the debate over how higher education institutions should be connecting undergraduate students to the world of work.

Arguments in Favor of Integration

The following section outlines three main arguments in favor of integrating work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum. Changing student demographics have led to calls for curriculum reform that supports integration of liberal education and work-related learning to meet student demand, especially in light of increased competition for undergraduate student enrollment. The integration of general skills from liberal education and specialized skills from work-related learning will lead to greater employability for LAC graduates because such two-fold skill sets are what employers desire. Greater employability will increase graduates' ability to contribute to society through economic means.

Changing Demographics and Competition

The traditional liberal education curriculum found at LACs has roots in the type of education emphasized during the colonial period, one focused on the knowledge of Western

civilization and culture (literature, philosophy, history, religion, art, and languages) necessary to educate productive (male) citizens (Bok, 2015; Brint, Proctor, Murphy, Turk-Bicakci, & Hanneman, 2009; Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Thelin, 2011) with little emphasis on preparation for or study in professional fields (Bok, 2015; Baker et al., 2012; Collins 1977). However, “U.S. college and university curricula gradually changed from educational programs designed...to prepare a select group of young men for the ministry or gentlemanly status...to preparing students of different ages, genders, social classes, races, and ethnicities for work and life” (Lattuca & Stark, 2009, p. 26). As a result, in part, of massification of higher education, the diverse students now attending college have different learning needs and goals than those of the colonial period (Bok, 2015; Brint et al., 2009; Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Thelin, 2011). In fact, 84.7 percent of new students report that they are going to college to get a better job and 71.2 percent report that one of their primary motivations for attending college is making more money (Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Blake, & Tran, 2011). Those in favor of integrating work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum argue that, given student preferences, LACs must integrate if they are to continue to be relevant and competitive when it comes to college choice and student enrollment. However, this integration should not be at the expense of other core curricular components, such as “small class size, close faculty-student interaction, and an innovative and interdisciplinary common core in the arts and sciences” (Spellman, 2009, n.p.).

Two-fold Skill Sets and Greater Employability

In addition to meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, proponents of integration of general skills from liberal education and specialized skills from work-related learning argue that having both skill sets will lead to greater employability for LAC graduates. “Whereas state colleges use liberal arts education to buttress career programs, many independent

[liberal arts] institutions add professional and pre-professional majors to supplement liberal arts programs” (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). These two-fold skill sets, including both skills from a liberal education and work-related learning, are what employers claim to want from all college graduates (Hart Research Associates, 2015; Humphreys & Kelly, 2014). In addition to being what employers want, these two-fold skill sets are also beneficial to students in both the short-term and the long-term (Hart Research Associates, 2015; Humphreys & Kelly, 2014). For example, in the short-term students may be better prepared with the general skills and specialized skills needed to obtain entry-level positions, and in the long-term, students with a liberal education may have the critical thinking skills to adapt to changing and/or more challenging positions.

Financial Security and Economic Contributions

Finally, those in favor of integrating work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum see this as leading to a more positive future for LAC graduates and their employers, as well as the U.S. economy. “In an economy fueled by innovation, the capabilities developed through a liberal education have become America’s most valuable economic asset” (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2007). Students and their families are increasingly aware that attending college increases lifetime earnings potential, with a 20 percent increase in lifetime earnings for those with a college degree over those with just a high school diploma (Hout & Janus, 2011). LAC graduates with two-fold skill sets, who have greater employability in the short term and the long-term, will likely enjoy even greater financial security throughout their lives and increased ability to contribute to the U.S. economy. For example, greater financial security may mean increased ability to pay off student loans or to purchase a new car or new home, as well as the ability to make contributions to the federal

government in the form of taxes. As students use their purchasing power to buy new homes and cars and make payments to the federal government in the form of loan repayments and income taxes, they are contributing to the country's economic well-being as well as their own.

Arguments Against Integration

Not all scholars feel as positively about the integration of work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum. The following section outlines three main arguments against integrating work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum. Integration of liberal education and work-related learning will weaken the liberal education core of the traditional LAC curriculum, perhaps causing vocationalization of the curriculum and generally leading to curricular incoherence. A weakened liberal education curricular focus will decrease students' general skills, which employers highly value, while an increasingly vocationalized curriculum may lead to overspecialization. A weakened liberal education curricular focus will also decrease students' ability to contribute to society through civic means.

Mission Creep and Incoherent Curriculum

Opponents of the movement to integrate work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum fear that adding another curricular focus, in addition to liberal education, will lead to mission creep (Aldersley, 1995; Morphew, 2002), weakening of the liberal education curriculum, and perhaps increased "vocationalizing" of the curriculum (Neely, 1999). While LACs have traditionally focused on student preparation for life, not just work, they have struggled with incoming students' perceptions of the purpose of a college education. In 1966, more than 80 percent of students reported "develop a meaningful philosophy of life" as the purpose of college, but by 1990, that number dropped below 50 percent. Also in 1966, about 45 percent of students reported "be very well off financially" as the purpose of college, but by 1990,

that number rose to more than 70 percent (Dey, Astin, & Korn, 1991). Confusing the purpose of college further with the introduction of work-related learning into the LAC undergraduate curriculum would only serve to make that curriculum incoherent and confusing to students. Some scholars argue that in order for LACs to remain true to their mission and coherent in their curricular offerings, they must adhere more closely to their roots in liberal education based on Western civilization and culture (Bennett, 1984; Cheney, 1989).

Weakened Skill Sets and Overspecialization

Others fear that weakening of the liberal education focus at the core of the LAC curriculum will lead to a decrease in student learning outcomes in “areas of familiar liberal arts goals as thinking critically, communicating effectively both orally and in writing, acquiring a sensitivity and concern for ethical issues, and learning to understand and work effectively with people of different cultures, backgrounds, and races” (Bok, 2015). These goals are what employers claim to want in all college graduates, regardless of the technical skills required for a job (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009; Carnevale & Desrochers, 2001; Oblinger & Verville, 1998; Useem, 1989). Additionally, opponents fear that integration of work-related learning may result in overspecialization in one specific occupation, disconnected from students’ personal development (Wong, 1996). Students who have a weak liberal education and who are overspecialized may ultimately be unable to adapt to changing career paths or the changing demands of the job market (Bok, 2015).

A Vulnerable Democratic Society

Finally, a liberal education at LACs has traditionally focused on preparing students for life in a democratic society, and opponents to integrating work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum fear that weakening of the liberal education focus at the core of

the LAC curriculum may actually threaten our democracy (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). “[S]ociety has a natural interest in preparing [students] to vote in an informed manner and to participate in the political process and the civic life of their communities...heightening their awareness of ethical issues and the reasons for respecting ethical principles...and foster[ing] greater tolerance and an ability to live and work effectively with a wide variety of people” (Bok, 2015). However, Astin (1993) found that students in some majors that focused more on work-related training reported negative effects on learning outcomes like civic engagement and understand of other races and cultures. Such evidence supports the arguments of opponents of integration of work-related learning who fear its adoption may result in reduced learning outcomes in other important areas of the curriculum, such as civic engagement, moral development, and tolerance of diversity (Lang, 1999).

Personal Stance

My personal stance is that LACs should focus on integrating work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum, as makes sense on an institution-by-institution basis, because there is a natural connection between some of the goals of a liberal education and those of work-related learning, as well as the instructional and curricular strategies that can support these goals.

Case-by-case Basis

Depending on the external and internal environment LACs face, not all LACs may need to adopt a strategy that integrates work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum. Those that do will each need to determine the extent to which they will adopt this strategy. Each LAC should attempt to find the right balance, given its particular external and internal environment, as did three LACs in a recent study by Baker & Baldwin (2015). Kenyon

College is the most traditional of these three LACs and does not offer any pre-professional programs. Both Albion and Allegheny Colleges offer “pre- professional” programs; however, the majority of their majors/degrees are in the traditional arts and sciences fields. Both Albion and Allegheny Colleges reported needing to “embody their brand more concretely and discussed the need to communicate their mission more clearly both internally and externally” (p. 259). Kenyon College reported “a strong handle on its mission and brand and has been successful at cornering a segment of the market and attracting a specific type of student” (p. 259). Baker and Baldwin (2015) report that “[i]n each of these cases, the colleges are making key adjustments to achieve a viable balance among the varied forces and factors that shape what they are and what they will become” (p. 259).

Connections between Liberal Education and Work-Related Learning

In addition to supporting the types of institution-specific approaches found in Baker and Baldwin’s (2015) study, I generally support integrating work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum for the following reasons. A liberal education is valuable to students, employers, and society, both for the general skills and civic skills it imparts on students (Bok, 2015; Freeland, 2009; Lang, 1999). These skills also overlap with the skills many employers desire of recent graduates, like critical thinking, effective communication, ethics, and working with people from diverse background (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009; Bok, 2015; Carnevale & Desrochers, 2001). However, students need the opportunity to apply these general skills and civic skills outside the classroom (Freeland, 2009). At the same time, they may be able to experience work-related learning through these outside the classroom activities. Employers report that valuable outside the classroom activities might include “an internship, a senior project, a collaborative research project, a field-based project in a diverse

community setting with people from different backgrounds, or a community-based project” (Hart Research Associates, 2015). These recommendations are also known as high impact practices or HIPs in higher education, some of which include: collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, study abroad, service-learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects (Kuh, 2008). These high impact and work-related learning activities are complementary to a liberal education and help students apply the valuable skills they are learning inside the classroom to life outside the classroom (Freeland, 2009). If implemented well, these activities should not lead to mission creep or curricular incoherence, nor should they decrease either the general skills or the civic skills gained from a liberal education. In fact, those general skills and civic skills may be enhanced by students’ understanding of and ability to apply them in the contexts outside the classroom, both in their job (vocationally) and in their life (civically).

Conclusion

The debate over how higher education institutions should be connecting undergraduate students to the world of work is one of many debates that have shaped the higher education landscape for the past century (Altbach, 2001). When it comes to the influence of this particular debate on the undergraduate curriculum at LACs, some scholars argue in favor of integrating work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum due to (a) institutional needs related to changing student demographics and increased market competition; (b) student and employer needs related to a job market that demands graduates with both general and specialized skills; (c) societal needs for well-employed graduates who can make work and financial contributions to the economy. Others argue against integrating work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum due to (a) institutional needs related to avoiding mission creep and maintaining a coherent curriculum; (b) student and employer needs related to a job

market that values a strong general skill set and does not value overspecialization; (c) societal needs for not only well-educated workers, but also well-educated citizens.

Both sides of this debate have some merit, but ultimately I believe the choice whether or not to integrate work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum will depend on the external and internal influence unique to each LAC. Each LAC should decide for itself whether or not integrating more work-related learning into the LAC undergraduate curriculum will be beneficial for them, as well as the extent to which they should pursue this integration. I also do not believe that work-related learning is inherently an anathema to a liberal education, as there is overlap between the two in terms of goals for undergraduate learning outcomes, as well as effective instructional and curricular practices to help students achieve those desired learning outcomes. In the end, LACs that do desire to integrate work-related learning more into the LAC undergraduate curriculum should do so carefully and with consideration for the most effective means of doing so, given their own particular internal and external characteristics.

References

- Aldersley, S. F. (1995). "Upward drift" is alive and well: research/doctoral model still attractive to institutions. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 27(5), 51-56.
- Altbach, P. G. (2001). The American academic model in comparative perspective. In P.G. Altbach, P.J. Gumport, & D.B. Johnstone (Eds.), *In defense of American higher education* (pp. 11-37). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Association of American Colleges & Universities. (2007). *College learning for the new global century: A report from the national leadership council for liberal education & America's promise*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2009). *The LEAP vision for learning: outcomes, practices, impact, and employer's views*. Washington, D.C.: Author.
- Aronowitz, S., & Giroux, H. A. (1985). *Education under siege: The conservative, liberal, and radical debate over schooling*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.
doi:10.4324/97802032222034
- Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college?: Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Baker, V. L., & Baldwin, R. G. (2015). A case study of liberal arts colleges in the 21st century: Understanding organizational change and evolution in higher education. *Innovative Higher Education*, 40(3), 247-261.
- Baker, V., Baldwin, R., & Makker, S. (2012) Where are they now?: Revisiting Breneman's study of liberal arts colleges. *Liberal Education*, 98(3), 48-53.
- Bennett, W. (1984). *To reclaim a legacy: A report on the humanities in higher education*. Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Humanities.

Breneman, D. W. (1990). Are we losing our liberal arts colleges? *College Board Review*, (156), 16.

Brint, S., Proctor, K., Murphy, S. P., Turk-Bicakci, L., & Hanneman, R. A. (2009). General education models: Continuity and change in the US undergraduate curriculum, 1975–2000. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(6), 605-642.

Brint, S. G., Riddle, M., Turk-Bicakci, L., & Levy, C. S. (2005). From the liberal to the practical arts in American colleges and universities: Organizational analysis and curricular change. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 76(2), 151-180.

Bok, D. C. (2015). *Higher education in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Boning, K. (2007). Coherence in general education: A historical look. *The Journal of General Education*, 56(1), 1-16. doi:10.1353/jge.2007.0008

Carnevale, A. P., & Desrochers, D. M. (2001). *Help wanted...credentials required: Community colleges in the knowledge economy*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Community Colleges.

Cheney, L.V. (1988). *Humanities in America: A report to the President, the Congress, and the American people*. Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Humanities.

Collins, R. (1977). Some comparative principles of educational stratification. *Harvard Educational Review*, 47, 1–27.

Delucchi, M. (1997). “Liberal arts” colleges and the myth of uniqueness. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 68(4), 414-426.

Dey, E. L., Astin A.W., Korn, W.S. (1991). *The American freshman: Twenty-five year trends, 1966-1990*. Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute.

- Freeland, R. M. (2009). Liberal education and the necessary revolution in undergraduate education. *Liberal Education*, 95, 6–13.
- Fuhrmann, B.S. (1996). Philosophies and aims. In J.G. Graff & J.L. Ratcliff (Eds.), *Handbook of the undergraduate curriculum* (pp. 86-99). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gasman, M., & McMickens, T. L. (2010). Liberal or professional education?: The missions of public black colleges and universities and their impact on the future of African Americans. *Souls*, 12(3), 286-305. doi:10.1080/10999949.2010.499800
- Geiger, R. L. (1999). The ten generations of American higher education. In P. G. Altbach, R. O. Berdahl, & P. J. Gumport (Eds.). *American higher education in the twenty-first century: Social, political, and economic challenges* (pp. 38-70). Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Hart Research Associates. (2015). *Falling short? College learning and career success*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Hout, M., & Janus, A. (2011). Educational mobility in the United States since the 1930s. In R. Murnane & G. J. Duncan (Eds.), *Socioeconomic inequality and educational disadvantage* (pp. 165-186). Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.
- Humphreys, D., & Kelly, P. (2014). *How liberal arts and sciences majors fare in employment: A report on earnings and long-term career paths*. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Kuh, G.D. (2008). *High impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Lang, E. M. (1999). Distinctively American: The liberal arts college. *Daedalus*, 128(1), 133-150.

- Lattuca, L. R., & Stark, J. S. (2009). *Shaping the college curriculum: Academic plans in context* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Liu, A., Sharkness, J., & Pryor, J.H. (2008). *Findings from the 2007 administration of your first college year (YFCY): National aggregates*. Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute.
- Morphew, C. C. (2002). "A rose by any other name": Which colleges became universities. *The Review of Higher Education*, 25(2), 207-223.
- Morphew, C. C. (2009). Conceptualizing change in the institutional diversity of US colleges and universities. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(3), 243-269.
- Neely, P. (1999). The threats to liberal arts colleges. *Daedalus*, 128(1), 27-46.
- Oblinger, D. G., & Verville, A. L. (1998). *What business wants from higher education*. Phoenix, AZ: American Council on Education.
- Pryor, J. H., Hurtado, S., DeAngelo, L., Blake, L. P., & Tran, S. (2011). *The American freshman: National norms fall 2010*. Los Angeles, CA: Higher Education Research Institute.
- Saunders, D. B. (2014). Exploring a customer orientation: Free-market logic and college students. *The Review of Higher Education*, 37(2), 197-219. doi:10.1353/rhe.2014.0013
- Spellman, B. (2009). The resilient liberal arts college. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2009/07/30/spellman>.
- Thelin, J. (2011). *A history of American higher education*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Useem, M. (1989). *Liberal education and the corporation: The hiring and advancement of college graduates*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, A Division of Walter de Gruyter, Inc.

Wong, F. (1996). The search for American liberal education. In N.H. Farnham & A. Yarmolinsky (Eds.), *Rethinking liberal education* (p. 48). Oxford: Oxford University Press.