

Chapter 2

"Olivet Nazarene University . . .

university level liberal arts education . . .

high quality academic instruction . . ."

The purpose of this section is to . . .

- (1) review the liberal arts approach to higher education and
- (2) reinforce Olivet Nazarene University's commitment to providing academic programs of excellence within the Christian liberal arts tradition.

What is a Liberal Arts Education?

The term "liberal arts" is taken from the Latin phrase *liberales artes* (that which should be known by a free man). But the definition of liberal education has never been static.

The Greek philosopher Plato believed that education should focus primarily on civics and social responsibility in order to prepare the best and brightest for their roles as leaders in society. Enlightenment thinker Jean Jacques Rousseau, on the other hand, argued that learning should protect a child from civilization's corrupting influences and seek to bring out his natural instincts.

Today, views on the purpose of a liberal arts education still range wide and far. For some educators, a good liberal education teaches one how to see the world from a variety of viewpoints. "We need to give students the capacity to grapple with several competing versions of the truth," says Caryn McTighe Musil, a senior research associate at the Association of American Colleges and Universities. The purpose is not to turn students into relativists, or those who see all truth as variable, she argues. Instead, she says, it's about giving students the tools they need "to come to their own conclusions."

To Alvin Schmidt, a professor of sociology at Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois, the aim of a good liberal education should be knowledge. "Education is about freeing and liberating the human mind from the shackles of ignorance," he says. Schmidt is troubled by the thought that students can graduate without knowing a foreign language or acquiring a grounding in "core" subjects like philosophy, history and literature (Kramer, 1994).

On the other hand, many educators are more focused on skills. "Students should be able to write and communicate in English," says Yolanda Moses, president of City College of New York. In addition, she says, "It is important that they are able to think analytically." Many educators share Moses' concern that too many students leave college unable to draft a proper letter or give a short speech.

Others, echoing Thomas Jefferson, argue that while knowledge and skills are important, liberal education should also concern itself with turning students into good citizens. "Education should prepare us to live in a democratic society," says Robert Orrill, executive director of The College Board, by focusing on citizenship and social responsibility.

Above all, says Kenneth Pennington, a professor of medieval history at Syracuse University, a liberal arts education must give students the tools they need to spend the rest of their lives learning and thinking. "Most of the time," he says, "teachers don't convey well enough to students that college is only the beginning" (Masci, 1998).

A Quick Overview of Higher Education in America

1600 - 1700s American higher education develops slowly and is largely religiously based. higher learning and other trends in higher education

1636

Harvard College is founded near Boston to train ministers. It is the first institution of higher learning in America.

1693

The College of William and Mary is founded in Williamsburg, Virginia.

1740

The University of Pennsylvania is founded with an emphasis on the natural and social sciences rather than theology.

1795

The University of North Carolina is founded, becoming the first state university.

1800s Growth in the number of colleges and universities accelerates especially after the Civil War.

1862

Congress passes the Morrill Act, which grants property or money to states for the purpose of higher education and leads to the founding of scores of so-called land-grant colleges and universities.

1869

Charles W. Eliot becomes president of Harvard University and begins instituting reforms, such as elective courses, aimed at giving students more educational choice.

1870

Fewer than 15,000 Americans enrolled in institutions of higher learning.

1900s New debates over the purpose of liberal education emerge as the number of entering college skyrockets, fed by the growth of the middle class and government aid programs.

1900

Institutions of higher education are attended by 238,000 people in the United States.

1915

The Association of American Colleges and Universities is founded to promote liberal education.

1930

The number of Americans enrolled in colleges and universities hits 1 million.

1936

The Higher Learning in America by University of Chicago President Robert Maynard Hutchins calls for education to be a search for great truths.

1937

Educator John Dewey criticizes Hutchins' ideas, sparking a debate between the "pragmatists" and the "idealists" over the purpose of liberal education.

1944

Congress passes the GI Bill of Rights, which provides returning soldiers with financial support for higher education.

1987

University of Chicago Professor Allan Bloom attacks relativism and other trends in higher education in his best-selling book, *The Closing of the American Mind*.

1988

After heated debate, Stanford University replaces its "Great Books" requirement with "Cultures, Ideas and Values," a program designed to broaden the required curriculum by including non-Western works.

1995

The Department of Education grants the American Academy for Liberal Education the power to accredit liberal arts colleges.

1996

Brooklyn College announces that it will reorient its core curriculum, prompting a well-publicized debate over the role of general education.

1997

Martha Nussbaum publishes *Cultivating Humanity*, which argues that the concept of multiculturalism is supported by the great writers and thinkers of the classical world.

1998

The Virginia Association of Scholars accuses that state's colleges and universities of "dumbing down" core curricula and urges a back-to-basics approach.

From: *The Congressional Quarterly/Researcher*, 1998.

What Others Say on the Subject

Howard Nostrand says that liberal arts education means the whole development of an individual, apart from his or her occupational training. It should include the "civilizing" of one's life purposes, the refining of one's emotional reactions, and the maturing of one's understanding about the nature of things according to the best knowledge of our time. John Buchan notes that we live in a distressed and chaotic world whose future no one can predict, a world where the foundations seem to be cracking and where civilization is in grave peril. Education must give us guidance in such a crisis or it is not much worth to us at all. Therefore, a liberal arts education must lead students to a strong sense of humility, humanity, and humor. Humility, as we come to realize how little we really know; humanity, in that we are players in the greater human drama for just a brief period of time; and humor, in that we must not take ourselves too seriously and develop the ability to laugh at ourselves.

Mark observes that a liberal education can be, in part, defined by looking at the effect it has on people who have been through the process. Some years ago, when Indira Gandhi was serving as prime minister of India, she entertained then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who was in India for a visit. The two women had a lengthy conversation, and after their meeting, they held a press conference. One reporter asked about the subject of their conversation, to which Mrs. Gandhi replied that it was simply a matter of two old Oxford girls getting together and talking about old times at the university. Both of them were students and received their liberal arts educations there. These two world leaders had come away from their college with a perspective on the world, a "common understanding" of civilization, which made it possible for them to function in their very important roles.

Mrs. Thatcher came from a lower middle-class background in Central England, and Mrs. Gandhi was a member of a most distinguished aristocratic family in India. Yet somehow, the university prepared both of them to assume positions of world leadership. Both of them were able to develop their individual talents and then acquire the common understanding that is so necessary for leadership (Winter, 1982).

Important to Olivet's liberal arts focus is the belief that one's academic experience on this campus should include two concepts that are keys to the future of the human race: (a) productive careers and (b) noble lives. We design academic programs and initiatives that unite these two powerful ideas and use them to transform our students' lives. Either concept, alone, is an orphan. Together, the two can become a forceful theme for general education on this campus in the 21st century. We must recall that the liberal arts, those abilities to speak and act thoughtfully and coherently, first evolved in ancient times, not as academic specialties but as the practical tools of the citizen. The liberal arts were designed as means for action (Roscovsky, 1990). Helping students achieve productive and noble lives continues to be a central theme of the liberal arts on this campus. Specific objectives for Olivet's academic program in the general education dimension, the academic professional dimension, and the socio-Christian dimension are found in the University catalog.

Commitment to Excellence

Any student registering at a college or university should expect that institution to take seriously its commitment to academic excellence. While most institutions would certainly testify to this commitment, it is important for you, as a new Olivetian, to understand what academic excellence is. In other words, how do you know that this university has made such a commitment?

Academic excellence at Olivet is characterized by:

- **Strong Academic Programs**

Olivet currently offers 62 areas of academic concentrations in which a student can major, minor, concentrate, and take elective courses. These programs are arranged across 7 academic divisions and 23 departments of study and are described in detail in the University catalog. Recognition and validation of these areas of study are evidenced in the fact that Olivet is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools as a four-year bachelor's degree-granting institution. North Central has also given accreditation for Olivet's numerous master's degree programs. The Illinois State Department of Education has approved Olivet as a teacher training college for baccalaureate and master's degrees.

The baccalaureate degree program in Nursing is accredited by the National League for Nursing, and by the Committee of Nurse Examiners of the Department of Registration and Education of the State of Illinois. The baccalaureate degree program in Dietetics is approved by the American Dietetic Association. The baccalaureate program in Social Work is accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. Olivet is also accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music.

Olivet is a member of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Midwest Association of Graduate Schools, Associated Colleges of Illinois, the Federation of Independent Illinois Colleges and Universities, the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, and the Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities. It is a member of the Associated Colleges of the Chicago Area, with the privilege of selective use of the Argonne National Laboratories for research and educational purposes.

- **Competent and Well-Credentialed Faculty**

Olivet's academic program is excellent primarily because of the outstanding women and men who comprise the University faculty. At Olivet, you have real professors from your very first semester until you graduate, unlike many larger institutions where graduate or teaching assistants staff most of the freshman- and sophomore-level courses.

Olivet faculty have earned degrees from nearly 100 different institutions throughout the U.S. and abroad, and well over 60 percent of them have doctoral degrees. These professors, each of whom knows Jesus as Personal Savior, feel called of God to be at Olivet and want to help students build strong bridges between the best of learning and the best of faith.

- **Appropriate Learning Resources**

Olivet's present campus includes 190 acres of contiguous land with 31 principal buildings. Major academic buildings are (a) Reed Hall of Science, a state-of-the-art science complex; (b) Strickler Planetarium, an impressive facility not often found on peer campuses; (c) Wisner Hall for Nursing Education, a spacious and well-equipped facility for Olivet's nursing program; (d) Benner Library and Learning Resource Center, a high tech facility housing traditional library resources as well as Olivet's ONUNet, the campus computer network; (e) Larsen Fine Arts Center, home to the departments of Music and Art; (f) Burke Administration Building, housing the Division of Languages, Literature and Communication, Department of English, Department of Modern Languages, Division of Religion and Philosophy, and Department of Computer Science; (g) Weber Center, a new 21st century learning environment, housing the Division of Social Sciences and the Department of Education; and (h) the former Memorial Library, home to the Department of Communication and studios for WONU (89.7 FM).

- **Off-campus and International Study Opportunities**

Olivet Nazarene University is a member of the Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities, which is comprised of more than 80 Christ-centered, fully accredited four-year liberal arts colleges, each committed to academic excellence and to the integration of the Christian faith with learning and living. The Coalition offers numerous off-campus study programs that are open to Olivet students who qualify. Each of the programs is administered by appropriate departments of the University, and coordinated through the Coalition offices in Washington, D.C.

Coalition semester programs are designed for juniors and seniors who demonstrate competence in the classroom and Christian commitment in lifestyle. Plans for these semesters off campus should be begun during the freshman and sophomore years. Students register for these programs through the normal registration process, and credit is assigned by the registrar according to the specific material covered in each program.

Programs available to Olivet students include the American Studies Program (Washington, D.C.), the Latin American Studies Program (Costa Rica), the Russian Studies Program (Russia), the Middle East Studies Program (Egypt and Israel), the Los Angeles Film Study Center, the Oxford Studies Program (England), the Oxford Honors Program, the China Studies Program (China), and the International Business Institute (Europe).

- **Successful Alumni**

Olivet Nazarene University's commitment to excellence can be evaluated to a large extent by the successes of its students while on the campus and maybe even more dramatically by what Olivet alumni do after graduation. Well over 20,000 alumni have gone forth from this campus to take their respective roles of responsibility in church ministry, medicine, law, education, nursing, social work, business, the sciences, as well as numerous other roles for which their Olivet education have prepared them well.

Admissions rates for Olivetians into leading graduate schools is high, and the number of ONU graduates to earn graduate degrees is well above the national average. Olivet graduates currently occupy important positions throughout our nation and serve as "salt and light" to a world that not only needs their skills and talent, but also their compassion and servant leadership commitment.

References

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