LIBERAL EDUCATION: NEW CHALLENGES

Note GVSU’s commitment to lib ed. ... Here's one quote from the website:

“... A strong liberal education serves as the foundation for Grand Valley State University’s wide array of undergraduate and graduate programs, fostering critical thinking, creative problem solving, and cultural understanding.”

- [http://www.gvsu.edu/libed.htm](http://www.gvsu.edu/libed.htm)

Grand Valley’s Liberal studies major contributes some specifics: The liberal education tradition includes the integration of theory and practice ... learning HOW as well as learning about... becoming an independent learner... and the integration academic disciplines.

But for the next couple of minutes, let’s share some personal definitions from local sources. This video was shot in 2007 but the speakers still resonate I believe. (Brief, warm, enthusiastic comments about lib ed from retired psychology Prof. Paschke, local employer Samrick, adjunct faculty Nelson, advisor Moore, and retired engineering Prof. Garrett. The sequence runs for two minutes.)

A final set of positives, before we get to possible problems:

I’m here today as an opportunity to deal with what I feel is a growing problem, or call it a challenge, or maybe even call it a “danger.” In my distant youth was I received what was then called a “progressive education.” Then I participated in the nation-wide era of “alternative education” in higher ed.- here at GVSU, that meant William James College and Thomas Jefferson College. In between, I spent a decade producing programs for public media – and what that meant was that I got to go “behind the scenes” culturally, institutionally and across academic disciplines in order to research, produce and write TV programs for PBS.

But recently I’ve really felt challenged to rethink liberal education in the changing context that surrounds us now. Here are four of my questions... and please add your own in a few moments... I’m going to stop talking very soon, I promise, and open the floor to our discussion:

• How does a lib ed approach really work as the amount of available information explodes around us. Too much, too many sources, maybe uncertainty as to it veracity – lib ed used to focus on the study time-tested classics (an oversimplification, of course).
• Have escalating changes in technology, both in the professional world and also in academia (extreme example: Mooches), also changed the role/nature of liberal education? If so, how?
• Developments in distance education. Lib ed is about community. There’s evidence good – and bad -- about the effects of social media defining community.
• Can we trust this traditional approach as a life-long skill in our globalizing cross-cultural context? Developed historically in the context of western civilization, is lib education basically ethnocentric ... another form of intellectual colonization?
• A final kind of challenge and maybe it’s just my imagination BUT.... Institutional inertia: employers say they hire new employees whose educational background suits them to bring with them original ideas. But in fact there’s always resistance to change on the part of institutions as well as individuals, for good reasons, and bad ones.

Now for a general discussion.... We’re not aiming at “an answer” here, we’re focusing on ideas about goals and processes.

DISCUSSION

(At end of the period, I’ll mention that there are a few reading references, plus how to watch the entire 45minute video, all are on my website. References include: AACU Leap document at www.aacu.org 2013 survey. Also: Carnegie Corp’s 2000 report, Carol Baker’s LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION FOR A GLOBAL SOCIETY. Also the video THE CONVERSATION CONTINUES: Liberal and Professional Education, by Prof. Roos.)