

# A Toolbox for Promoting the Liberal Arts

(Concurrent Session VI – Friday, November 7<sup>th</sup>)

CCAS Annual Meeting  
November 2015  
Washington, D.C.

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**“ARTS, HUMANITIES,  
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, OH MY!”**

***Recruiting students into Bachelor of Arts programs***

***Dr. Todd Pfannestiel***

***Dean, College of Arts, Education, and Sciences***

***Clarion University of Pennsylvania***

***(and un-apologetic advocate of the liberal arts)***

# THE CHALLENGE (PART ONE)

- ▶ On average, nationwide, traditional Bachelor of Arts degrees account for under 20% of the baccalaureate degrees offered at colleges and universities (this number falls to under 15% at public institutions).
- ▶ The challenge is part perception, as students perceive that traditional B.A. degree programs are by-and-large not conducive to subsequent employment and career success, despite their overwhelming enjoyment in these fields in high school.
- ▶ The challenge is part structural, as at many public colleges and universities, traditional B.A. degrees account for barely 15% of the degree offerings.

# THE CHALLENGE (PART TWO)

- ▶ Most faculty are defensive in describing the work they do in traditional B.A. disciplines.
  - ▶ What will my child do with a degree in History (English, Art, Theatre, etc.)?
  - ▶ Financial resources for traditional B.A. disciplines are not as great as they are for B.S. and professional disciplines.
  - ▶ Faculty colleagues in the professional disciplines don't appreciate the skill sets we develop for their students.
  - ▶ We need to hold (with a death grip) on to General Education as the last bastion of traditional liberal education.

# WE HAVE BECOME OUR OWN WORST ENEMY IN PROMOTING B.A. DISCIPLINES

## WHAT IS A BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A.)?

A Bachelor of the Arts degree program provides students with a more expansive education, requiring fewer credits that are directly linked to a particular major.

## WHAT IS A BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (B.S.)?

Programs resulting in a Bachelor of Science degree are generally more strictly focused on their subject matter, requiring more credits that are directly linked to the major. Students are expected to concentrate their academic energies on mastering their field.

The coursework required for a Bachelor of Arts degree generally allows students to sharpen their communication and writing skills. By comparison, the demands of a Bachelor of Science degree typically foster analytical skills and a detailed understanding of subject matter.

A Bachelor of Arts is a broad interdisciplinary undergraduate degree program encompassing general education, electives and major area of study courses. As opposed to a Bachelor of Science program, B.A. programs generally give you more flexibility in choosing your courses and are less specialized.

Most BA programs require 30-some or 40-some credits, which leaves a lot of flexibility in the form of free electives. The student can use the free electives to sample widely from other course offerings or to earn an additional credential (a second major, a minor, or some combination of additional credentials). The BS is best suited to the student who wants to focus more on courses in the major rather than 'collateral' courses and is willing to give up some of the flexibility of the BA in return for the greater focus.

When choosing whether you want to pursue a Bachelor of Science or a Bachelor of Arts, think about the future career path you want to take when your education is over. A Bachelor of Arts degree is great if you intend to go on to get your master's degree or even a doctorate in the field. This is a great choice for a career in art or academia.

On the other hand, a Bachelor of Science degree is a great option if you want to work in the field, where you'll be focused on more practical applications.



# “THE B.A. MATTERS: IT’S NOT JUST B.S. ANY MORE”

## I) The Message

- ▶ Stop shooting ourselves in the foot (pro-active, not defensive; careful use of language in marketing, web design, etc.).
- ▶ Deliver a consistent message, both internally and externally.
- ▶ General Education reform to a competency-based model where all disciplines contribute in a meaningful fashion without the traditional B.A. disciplines losing ground in credit-hour production.

## 2) The Structure

- ▶ Tie program and credential development to the skills that we frequently tout in our B.A. programs (Arts & Entertainment Management; Public History).
- ▶ Bachelor of Applied Art degree development.
- ▶ Develop B.A. options in traditional B.S. disciplines (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Earth Science).
- ▶ Transform curricular flexibility into intentionality (through certificates and minors).
- ▶ Develop “Plus One” programs linking B.A. degrees to professional master’s degrees (MBA, MPP, MPH).

### 3) Best Practices

- ▶ Develop high school partnerships through dual enrollment programs geared towards B.A. disciplines (both face-to-face and online).
- ▶ Career exploration and preparation from pre-Freshman year, specifically targeting undecided/exploratory students.
- ▶ Integrate High Impact Practices into the B.A. curriculum (freshman inquiry seminars; student+faculty research opportunities; internships).

# How a liberal arts education - practically applied, is meeting emerging career needs

Dr. Carmen R. Cid  
Dean – School of Arts and Sciences



A Liberal Education. Practically Applied.



COUNCIL OF PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

The Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges advances the aims of its member institutions and drives awareness of the value of high-quality, public liberal arts education in a student-centered, residential environment.

***Eastern Connecticut State University*** is one of 29 U.S. liberal arts institutions that comprise COPLAC – it was designated as Connecticut’s public liberal arts university in 1997.



## Enhancing the liberal arts experience by focusing on practical, interdisciplinary skills needed for current career paths


Focus on developing career skills across the curriculum that teach students how to solve real-world problems with their liberal arts education – examples:

- Multimedia communication skills
- Science, social science, literature and art interactions in today's world
- Western and non-western comparisons in relation to philosophy, business practices, sociocultural community outreach
- Connecting global and local health issues in teaching how to put theory to practice



## Connecting the liberal arts mission with interdisciplinary collaboration


- **Direct connection** – hire a cluster of faculty (through various departments) who do research in a related subject from different perspectives -- such as health, media studies, sustainability or nutrition studies.
  - **Indirect connection** – determine interdisciplinary research connections for existing or new faculty and develop programs that allow, promote and enhance their interdisciplinary collaboration in curriculum as well as research
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## Developing interdisciplinary majors that showcase the value of a liberal arts education

- **The Individualized Major pathway**– a self-designed major that can be used as a pilot mechanism to generate new majors that meet emerging career needs
- Based on coursework required for admission to graduate programs in current interdisciplinary careers
- Faculty advisors from at least 2 departments
- Encourages interdepartmental faculty collaborations in fields of study that are by design interdisciplinary





## Interdisciplinary majors that can showcase the liberal arts

- **New Media Studies** – Art, English, Computer Science, Communication departments collaboration
- **Health Sciences** – Biology, Kinesiology, Physical Sciences, Sociology, Psychology, Business collaboration
- **Comparative Philosophy** – Political Science, Sociology, English collaboration
- **Sustainable Energy Studies** – Environmental Earth Science, Business collaboration
- **Environmental Studies** – Sociology, Political Science, Environmental Earth Science, Biology collaboration
- **Women and Gender Studies** – English, Sociology, Art, Psychology, Communication, History and other collaborations

## Connecting to Student Affairs in Enhancing the value of a Liberal Arts Education

### What is an I.D.E.A.L. Residential Portfolio?

A LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION FOCUSES ON WELL-ROUNDED, HOLISTIC LEARNING WHERE STUDENTS ARE INTENTIONAL ABOUT THE EDUCATION THEY RECEIVE, BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM. THE I.D.E.A.L. RESIDENTIAL PORTFOLIO ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO SAMPLE A VARIETY OF EASTERN'S OFFERINGS, EXPOSING THEM TO USEFUL RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES OF INTEREST.

### How to Participate


STUDENTS WILL COMPLETE THE REQUIRED CHECK-LIST AND PROVIDE PROOF OF ATTENDANCE (I.E. MEETING MINUTES, PAMPHLET, FLIER, TICKET STUB, OR PROGRAM)

Beyond Internships & Soup Kitchens:  
Creating an experiential learning culture that  
promotes liberal learning


Monica Cowart, Ph.D., LMHC  
Professor & Associate Dean of Liberal Arts

Merrimack

**Liberal Arts' Perception Problem:  
Numerous False Beliefs Regarding a LA Education**

- A liberal arts degree is equated with limited job opportunities (e.g., jokes about working at Starbucks).
  - Critics claim that liberal arts graduates are not prepared to creatively solve the emerging problems of this century.
  - Critics contend that top companies are not hiring liberal arts graduates.
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### **The Reality Is Very Different!**


- The good news is that data support the conclusion that employers value a liberal arts education and are hiring liberal arts graduates.
  - Forbes (2015) article notes that “software companies are discovering that liberal arts thinking makes them stronger” employees.
  - Liberal Arts graduates are adept at critical thinking and argumentation, written and oral communication skills, relating to diverse groups and using ethical reasoning to creatively problem solve.
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- How can we help students, parents and the general public see the clear benefits of these degrees?
- How can we offer students transformative educational experiences?




## **One Strategy is Experiential Education**

### **Use Experiential Learning to:**

- Further strengthen existing skills/abilities associated with a liberal arts education
  - Foster connections with other students, professors, and the larger community
  - Provide opportunities for students to creatively engage in complex real-world problem solving that is “messy” (i.e., no clear solution)
  - Increase retention, foster community, create engaged citizens (bonus: employers want this!)
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## Definition of Experiential Learning


- “Experiential learning is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with students in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values” (Association of Experiential Education).
  - Philosopher John Dewey “learning by doing”
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### **What is Experiential Learning?**


- learning through hands-on experience and reflection
- in and outside of the classroom
- applying academic learning to solve real world problems

### **Various Types of Experiential Learning Opportunities**

- Internships & Co-op
  - Master classes in Theatre Arts, Poetry & Writing
  - Study Abroad
  - Service Learning
  - Undergraduate Research
  - Field Experiences
  - Historical & Political Simulations; Immersive Role Playing
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**96%** of the School of Liberal Arts' Class of 2014 were employed, attending graduate school or completing a year of service within nine month of graduation.

**100%** of Merrimack students complete an experiential learning experience.




**Phase I: A Few Good Faculty**

- Small Faculty Working Group
  - Wrote Grant to Fund attending a summer EL Institute as a team
  - Developed an EL Strategic Plan to Increase Involvement
  - Grant to Fund Faculty EL Course Development
- Challenge:* Increasing awareness of benefits of EL & Addressing Myths


**Phase II: We are all in! Disciplinary Buy-In & Symbolic Successes**

- Turning Point: EL Requirement Added to General Education
- Challenge:* Creating Clear Standards for EL Courses
- New Center for Teaching & Learning (Teaching Circles, EL Fellows, & EL Grants)
  - Liberal Arts Research & Creativity Conference (205 student presenters)
  - Multiple EL Configurations & Models---The Symbolic Matters!!!

**Phase III: Toward Interdisciplinary Experiential Learning**

- Discussing the Need & Definition of Interdisciplinary Work
  - Creating more Interdisciplinary EL experiences
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**Phase I: A Few Good Faculty**

- Small Working Group of Faculty Passionate About EL
  - Wrote Grant to Fund attending a week long summer EL Institute as a team
  - Developed an EL Strategic Plan to Increase Involvement at Institute
  - Awarded Grant to Fund Faculty EL Course Development
  - Members Elected to Curriculum Committee before general education review and revision
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**Phase II: Disciplinary Buy-In & Symbolic Successes**

--**Turning Point:** EL Requirement Added to General Education

*Every student will graduate with at least 1 EL experience*

--Center for Teaching & Learning (Teaching Circles, EL Fellows, & EL Grants)


**Symbolic:** Director reports to the Provost & on Senior Leadership Team

--Liberal Arts Research & Creativity Conference (205 student presenters)

--Experiential Learning highlighted in college publicity and during prospective student presentations (e.g., Tied to Mission!)

--Multiple EL Configurations & Models in Departments

**Challenge:** Enforcing Strict Standards Regarding EL Gen Ed Requirement




### **Phase III: Toward Interdisciplinary Experiential Learning**

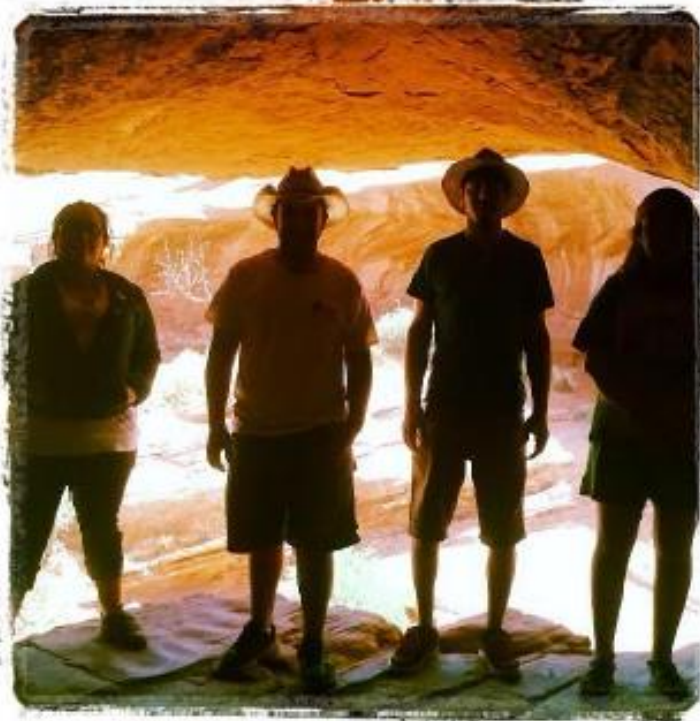
--Educating Faculty on the Need & Definition of  
Interdisciplinary Work

--Creating more Interdisciplinary Experiential Learning  
experiences

**Challenge:** Meeting High Student Demand



Cave at Monument Valley on  
the Navajo Reservation.



### What is *Interdisciplinary* Experiential Learning?

Using multiple disciplinary lenses to view a problem/  
question

Recognizing that complex, “messy” problems require  
multiple vantage points and tools from multiple  
disciplines to make progress

Learning to see the advantages/disadvantages of other  
disciplines; Move toward integration

Creating hybrid methods to problem solve in teams





**Southwest Studies Course**

**Key Question: How has “the land” defined the Southwest?**

Professors from multiple fields: Ecology, Women’s & Gender Studies, Photography and Physics (& guest experts)

**Desert ecology:** the animals and the ecosystems

**Diverse cultural groups:** traditions, histories, myths, beliefs, values, oppressions, and ongoing conflicts

**Archeo-astronomy & Archeology:** Northern alignment of structures, markers and cave drawings at Shockro Canyon

**Photography & Art:** Local artists & Hands on opportunities



Viewing “land” on multiple levels from various perspectives (sacred/profane; ownership/colonization; harmony/domination)

Counted for Diversity & Experiential Learning Requirements

Team taught class in Spring; 14 days in the field

Research projects prior to field work in Southwest

Journal writing and daily de-briefing during and after field experience



- Think Mission!! (Funding & Buy In)
  - Find EL Allies on Campus
  - Offer Multiples Types of EL Experiences
  - Create New Programs with EL in mind
  - Add EL requirement to General Education
  - Pay Attention to the Symbolic
  - Create & Revise Your EL Strategic Plan
  - Experiential Learning opportunities are transformative and draw students to the liberal arts!
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