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Farhad Anezai
Butler University

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Learning the Art of Creation

Written by Farhad Anwarzai

After watching your acceptance speech in Chicago, Mr. President, my father turned his eyes away from the television screen and told me a person's words could create a person's world. What you said on that fateful night created a world of unity. People from a variety of ethnicities, classes, and educational backgrounds stood in the snow, their heads held high and their eyes filled with tears. You listened to them; you listened to my father and me. Our voices were heard and echoed back to us over the television.

The liberal arts teach us to embrace and listen to new perspectives through various disciplines, similar to the way you listened and brought our nation's words to life. Your vision was broad, not appealing to some but to all. Such a way of thinking has not been so prevalent in this country. Our nation has only existed for a few hundred years, and the majority of those years has been spent perfecting industry and out competing other countries economically. The nation has not had time to create its own unique culture like other thousand-year-old societies. In a way, the United States has grown anti-intellectual. Money has become more important than our identities. We are isolating ourselves from the world by not embracing other ways of thinking.

When students think of the liberal arts, a job is probably not the first idea that pops up into their heads. In fact, one may view the liberal arts as a set of prerequisites for graduation, a way to "broaden one's horizons" before setting foot into the real world. However, to say a liberal education merely provides general knowledge to broaden horizons is an appalling understatement. The liberal education is more than the giving of general information; it is the never ending pursuit of wisdom, the advent of intellectual curiosity.

The human mind, Mr. President, is the most sophisticated and mysterious entity we know of. It allows us to compose music, paint portraits, write novels, solve mathematical equations, cure diseases, and create a history of our existence through poetic and abstract ideas. To deprive someone of the arts is to deprive them of their God-given capabilities. After all, art is more than self-satisfaction-it is the universal language that unites the human race, something that cannot merely be "learned" but only inherited as our common gift. Music, art, poetry, mathematics, science-these disciplines allow an American student to understand Japanese culture through a haiku or a scientist from England and a doctor from India to team up and use chemistry to produce better medicine. Practical information is used for the benefit of the individual to survive financially. The liberal arts contribute to humanity by being critical of humanity, and embracing ideas as well as questioning them. The arts grant us the freedom to choose how we should think and learn.

If the liberal arts diminished, rigid would be the best word to describe our thinking. Anything outside the realm of business and economic virtue would be considered useless, a misconception that many hold true today. The beautiful, staccato melody of Vivaldi's Winter would go unappreciated to the untrained ear. The only philosophy followed would be the philosophy of making more money. Our children would forget that the words of poets who sought freedom from the shackles of tyranny sparked the American Revolutionary War. We mustn't allow ourselves to view the liberal arts as "useless." If anything, the most useful aspects of life are learned through a liberal education. The best example is the ability to rule a government.

Implementing the best possible government for our people is based on the ancient Greek principle of democracy, or a government "held by the people." Our forefathers did not create this nation based on practical or "useful" information like hunting, trading, or selling merchandise. Our forefathers used theories from ancient governments and philosophers, histories of kingdoms that had failed throughout time and literature that depicted the thoughts of the people. With these elements they were able to craft the Constitution, perhaps the most important piece of art that scholars to this day interpret.

Aristotle once said, "All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth." As president, I am sure you are well aware that the future of this nation goes far beyond the production of money-making conglomerates. Our country works diligently to get its citizens into the work force; money, not wisdom, has become the basis of what we stand for. Is this what our children should grow up believing? Mr. President-the diminishing of the liberal arts means the lowering of educational standards. If we continue to think one dimensionally about the world as a place where only practical information matters, we are also thinning any chance we have of understanding our fellow man. The liberal arts teach us to be flexible in our thinking, to understand an array of ideas. One-dimensionality promotes ignorance and will only deteriorate any relationships we have internationally, for it is our children who will establish future relationships with other countries. A president who knows nothing of China's culture could in no way establish an alliance with China. Nor could the president fight a war if he knows nothing of the history of war, the philosophies behind a war. We are the most blessed country in the world. But if we have no understanding of the arts, our words will not create a world of progression and change.

Money is important, without a doubt. We must be aware, however, that our words will always create the world of the future. That is why we must listen before we speak. Money, for a person who makes a difference like you, Mr. President, inevitably follows, a concept that many of us forget.

An ancient Chinese proverb says, "A nation's treasure is in its scholars." True knowledge is priceless because it does not merely teach us-it inspires us.