



THE UNIVERSITY of
NEW MEXICO

Office of the Provost



WEDNESDAY COMMUNIQUÉ

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Liberal education is what prepares you for appointments not yet made.
—Howard Swearer, former president of Brown University

An Expanding Vision of Education: Last week's post on "Birds and Frogs" generated robust feedback. I would like to continue the conversation by encouraging folks to go to the [blog](#) to take advantage of the wisdom of the crowd. I will, however, rekindle the conversation by further clarifying my opinion on the subject.

I am not advocating the superiority of any specific major but rather arguing that the value of college education should not be measured solely by short-term results or economic utility. David Brooks, in a recent [NY Times column](#), has taken up the task of describing a different path, that of the "Big University." The idea of a reversal in the scope and purpose of higher education away from the utilitarian is also highlighted in a [recent Guardian article](#) where American liberal education is considered one of the most successful US exports. Moreover, and contrary to popular belief, it seems that despite all of their limitations, American colleges are imparting their graduates with critical thinking faculties as described in the recent [meta-analysis](#) from the American Educational Research Association. Moreover, where college education may be a matter of life or death, namely in our military academies, the trend is to [support rather than weaken](#) the liberal arts.

Notwithstanding such research, many commentators still attack liberal arts education as a waste of money, and not only in the U.S. Some Japanese institutions are now seeking or have been forced to [cancel humanities programs](#). The push to narrow college education around specific skills actually ignores what employers tell us they want. A [recent survey](#) found that employers want their employees to provide both "instant value, but (also) diverse skills." The survey asked executives which quality they feel is most critical to being an engaged employee. The variety of responses shows that engaged employees are not defined by one single quality. Employers said they valued such things as an internal motivation to succeed (23 percent), ability to solve problems (21 percent), commitment to the company's success (17 percent) and a "can-do" attitude (17 percent)." Notice that none of these qualities is learned in a specific major, but suggest rather that what is most prized is "learning agility" and an ability to adapt and change [when] given new information."

The Core Curriculum: What, if anything, should *every* college student learn? This question is the heart of our discussion about what to include in the core curriculum. In Fall 2003, UNM instituted a Core Curriculum which all undergraduate students must complete as part of their baccalaureate program. The Core consists of 37 hours of instruction in seven areas of study, designed to give each student a grounding in the knowledge and values that constitute a liberal arts education. The Core also provides graduates with a shared academic experience. The areas of study are: (1) writing and communication, (2) social and behavioral sciences, (3) mathematical reasoning, (4) scientific methods in the physical and natural sciences, (5) the humanities, (6) the fine arts, and (7) languages. The UNM core curriculum meets the requirements set forth by State of New Mexico law (Chapter 21, Article 1B NMSA 1978), and the established policies of the New Mexico Higher Education Department (HED).

I have recently been working with other New Mexico provosts and with HED officials to organize a workshop to discuss the state core requirements. For a sample of the philosophical positions various universities bring to the core curriculum and its content, see the following: [Brown](#), [Columbia](#), and [Harvard](#).

Up to Us: The [Up to Us](#) competition is designed to engage students in a critical dialogue about the national debt. Students in UNM's International Business Students Global (IBSG) organization are participating in a three-week

campaign in February, during which they will reach out to legislators and students, and host events. Managing the national debt is vital, and the students in the IBSG need your help. For more information on how you can make a difference, please email the program manager, [Paulo Lanucara](#).

Chaouki Abdallah

Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

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