



LIBERAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE 2017

THE IDEA OF THE UNIVERSITY



THE STATE OF LIBERAL EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA

APRIL 27 - APRIL 29, 2017

KEYNOTES

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Many champions of liberal education defend against the reduction of education to purely instrumental purposes. An undergraduate education, they argue, is an incubator for a democratic ethos and it can, at its best, encourage a critical understanding of one's own beliefs, while taking seriously beliefs that shape the lives of others. In this way, the spine of liberal education is hortatory: a call to action that seeks to preserve what is best and to critically reflect and alter those features of our collective inheritance that fall short of our ideals. Thinking beyond one's self-interest, being an engaged citizen, and cultivating the capacities to integrate and appreciably assess data seem hallmarks of the liberally educated person. In recent years some apologists have come from business and STEM subjects, touting the aggregate benefits to their particular sectors from the hiring of the liberally educated student. In light of the many significant challenges we currently face and will no doubt have to imminently confront, the defense of the liberally educated, engaged global citizen seem obviously true and right-minded.

Still, there are critics and skeptics. Calls to increase STEM funding and other areas promising ready employment are a commonplace. Cuts to liberal education requirements and reports of the elimination of liberal and fine arts programs seem to threaten core assumptions about the idea of the university and the purpose of higher education. Critics argue that concerns about climate change, water and food security, disease prevention, technology and ‘big-data,’ emerging economies, migration and urbanization, gender equity and access to education (among other things) require specialists—those trained to solve “real-world” problems with relevant “real-world” credentials. The critics’ message is also hortatory: a call to create effective pathways from the university to the workforce and from the workforce to full social contributor. Are these two visions of education inherently at odds?

The Department of General Education at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta, Canada would like to invite papers and panels for our inaugural liberal education conference. Our conference theme, “The Idea of the University and the State of Liberal Education in the 21st Century,” hopes to bring together scholars interested in the ‘idea of the university,’ assessing its history and purpose, and its relationship to liberal education. The conference welcomes papers on any topic related to the ‘university’ and the nature, scope and viability of liberal education. While certainly not exhaustive, some questions presenters might consider include:

- What is the history of the university and its link to liberal education?
- Are traditional notions of the aims of the university and liberal education outdated? Or, in fact, are they more contemporary than ever?
- What is a liberally educated graduate?
- What is the relationship between the university, liberal education and the preservation/strengthening of democracy?
- Many of us live in diverse societies. Cultural pluralists defend diversity, placing conditions on certain underlying assumptions about how differences can be accommodated. What role does a liberal education play in defending pluralism? What problems does such an education raise?
- In university settings where general education is a primary vehicle (sometimes the only vehicle) for delivering on the aims of a liberal education, how do we optimize/strengthen general education provisions?
- What does the accumulated data suggest universities are doing well in terms of liberal education outcomes? What are they not doing so well? What do we need to know more about in order to make a judgement?
- What role, if any, should the fine arts play in the development and delivery of a liberal education?
- Should the fine arts, including music and performance, design and computation arts, dance and theatre, be central to a liberal education? What arguments might there be against their centrality?
- Are there pedagogical strategies that better serve the curricular aims of a liberal education that can complement and perhaps at times replace the “traditional” lecture?
- What role do the STEM subjects play in liberal education programming?
- Do business schools and business programs need liberally educated graduates?

- In what ways are business schools the right place for a liberally educated graduate?
- Does a liberal education have a place in professional programs (i.e., nursing, medicine, law, education, engineering, etc.)?

We seek abstracts for high quality papers on the conference's theme, some of the questions we have suggested, and any topic related to the university and liberal education. Papers should be prepared for 20-25 minutes of speaking time, leaving 20-25 minutes for discussion. Panels of up to three presenters should be prepared for 20-25 minutes presentation and 20-25 minutes discussion. Please see below for submission details. We intend to publish proceedings of selected papers on the conference theme.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

We request submissions of abstracts prepared for blind-review of between 250 and 500 words. The deadline for receipt of submissions is 5pm on Monday 6th March 2017. Please send abstracts in a form suitable for anonymous review to (liberaleducation2017@mtroyal.ca) with the subject line 'Submission'. Attached to the same email, please include a separate cover page that gives the following details:

- Title of Paper or Panel
- Name of presenter(s) or panelists
- Institutional Affiliation
- Contact Details

Please send documents in PDF, Word, or Rich Text format. Submissions, and any further enquiries, should be sent to (liberaleducation2017@mtroyal.ca)

Arrangements are being made for accommodations on the MRU campus and at a nearby hotel – both at a reasonable cost to participants. Registration will be \$200.00 Cdn. Please visit our conference website for updates: <http://www.cvent.com/d/1vq3nx>.

This conference is sponsored by the President's Office of Mount Royal University and Medicine Hat College.