

The Liberal Arts Endeavor

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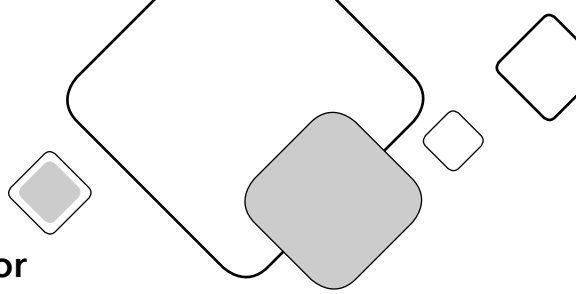
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The Liberal Arts Endeavor

In accepting the editorship of the *Journal of General Education: A Curricular Commons of the Humanities and Sciences*, I am pleased to recognize the thoughtful and creative work of Jeremy Cohen and Patty Wharton-Michael, who served as editors for the past four years, and of Catherine Jordan, who served as the editorial manager. They cultivated and nurtured a journal committed, as they so eloquently articulated, to general education “as a distinctive cornerstone of the arts of liberty.” Drawing on this enduring mission, the journal remains committed to furthering the arts of liberty as integral to our attempts to “prepare citizens to live engaged, responsible, and meaningful lives.”

My tenure as editor begins as the twenty-first century enters its late teenage years and as we all grapple with the power and limitations of the new modes of digital communication that mediate our relationships with one another. As information becomes increasingly accessible, meaningful connection becomes more difficult to establish; even as technological networks bridge great physical distances, the textured fabric of human community risks unraveling. Technology has always brought with it great affordances and daunting limitations; but the balance between the possibilities that enrich our relationships with one another and those that impoverish them has always been determined by the quality of the education we can provide.

Having served over the last decade as a faculty member in philosophy and as an administrator at Penn State and Michigan State, the two pioneering land-grant universities in the United States, I have seen firsthand how new and emerging technologies have transformed the manner in which we undertake the higher education endeavor. In my role as editor, I hope to nurture, foster, and support scholarship that enriches the quality of the education we offer our students in an increasingly interconnected digital age.

In addition to our long-standing interest in the best habits and practices of undergraduate pedagogy, engaged learning, assessment, and foundational

education in communication, math, writing, science, and the liberal arts, my hope is that we are able to bring our collective wisdom and expertise to bear on new, innovative, and emerging forms of scholarship and pedagogy made possible by the technological revolution in literacy through which we are living. More specifically, I would like to invite and support articles that speak in this context to the dimensions of social justice and inclusion endemic to virtues of the arts of liberty.

General education in the United States is the expression at scale of our deep historical commitment to the liberal arts. In speaking of the “arts of liberty,” the journal’s mission calls attention to the degree to which freedom itself is not so much a right bestowed as an activity cultivated.

To take freedom as an activity to be cultivated is to elevate the importance of education in general and of general education in particular. As an activity, freedom determines the quality of our relationships with one another; as cultivated, freedom is a learned practice that requires reflection informed by scholarship.

To practice the arts of liberty well, we need to cultivate the virtues of the liberal arts: the ability to communicate with eloquence, embrace diversity with grace, perceive globally with imagination, and respond to complexity with nuance. The challenge of the general education endeavor is to teach these virtues at scale, recognizing that our communities are enriched when citizens embody the virtues of the arts of liberty. Each of the articles presented in this issue of the journal touches on a dimension of these virtues as they are put into practice.

In “Genre, Identity, and the Brain: Insights from Neuropsychology,” Irene Clark considers the complex, embodied nature of identity formation. Two articles consider the relationship between state mandates and the means by which they are achieved: In “The True Story of Oral Communication in Alabama: A Case of Academic Discrimination?” Richard Emanuel highlights an inconsistency in Alabama between what colleges expect from their graduates and the education in oral communication they provide; and in “State Mandates and General Education: One Campus Responds to Challenges and Opportunities,” Ross Alexander, Mary Blakefield, Katherine Frank, and Markus Pomper argue that, however difficult to manage, state mandates to transform general education can effect positive educational reform. In “Knowledge and Community: The Effect of a First-Year Seminar on Student Persistence,” Adele Pittendrigh, John Borkowski, Steven Swinford, and Carolyn Plumb argue that when students who are at high risk of dropping out are more engaged in the classroom and have a better understanding of the value of a college education, their persistence rate improves. Finally, in “Connecting Intercultural Communication

Service Learning with General Education: Issues, Outcomes, and Assessment,” Robert S. Littlefield, Jessica M. Rick, and Jenna L. Currie-Mueller investigate the ways general education goals are identified by students who have participated in and reflected upon service learning experiences.

If the articles published in the *Journal of General Education* during my tenure as editor contribute to the cultivation of the arts of liberty among a generation of citizens inhabiting an increasingly interconnected world, they will have demonstrated the power of the liberal arts endeavor.

Christopher P. Long