

Life and Career Preparation through a Liberal Arts Education

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The liberal arts experience was the college environment I craved. The small classrooms, distinct learning environments, and focus on collaboration drew me like no other universities. Most importantly, public liberal arts schools, like Georgia College, make it affordable and accessible to achieve such an education. Otherwise, the private universities that dominate the liberal arts can limit the types of people who attend and require students to take on even greater debt.

Of course, the most important aspect of any university is the experience within the classroom. Course layouts varied from professor to professor, making each class a new experience. Often, courses were a mixture of lecture, discussion, collaboration, and student-led topics. This lent a more well-rounded experience that is more representative of real collaborations and workplaces. Without my class experiences, I would not feel as prepared to enter graduate school or the workforce. Interdisciplinary classes allowed me to listen to well-crafted, and engaging lectures from my talented professors, and they permitted the opportunity for discussion. Several of my history professors were completely engaging, and they made history and its importance come alive for me.

Additionally, many of my professors regularly guided students into discussion during lectures, but they also set aside days just for seminars that allotted time for lively discussions pertaining to the materials. In several of my history classes, we debated how primary sources affected our understanding of events and people, in addition to monographs that enlightened the subjects with others' research. Furthermore, almost all of my courses included presentations. Our professors were giving us the opportunity to improve our oratory skills, but most importantly, they wanted us to share our research and knowledge with each other. One of my professors routinely requires that we present our topics and findings because she believes sharing our

research with each other is the highlight of our education. I, too, feel this is one of the highest achievements of liberal arts schools, because they encourage collaboration and interest in other peers' and colleagues' work. Through these exercises, I was given the chance to learn more outside of my own research. I discovered what topics my fellow students were interested in and learned more about those subjects through my peer's findings. Several chose research topics I would never have thought of, such as the difference in funeral practices from one culture to another, and these topics fascinate me. I do not believe I would have these classroom experiences outside a public liberal arts school. While I enjoy lectures, these other elements provide another dimension that better prepare me for life after college.

One of the foremost aspects that I am thankful for is the small classroom sizes. This allows the professors to tailor courses to students' needs and interests while also providing us with individual attention. Some may see small departments as a disadvantage, but I believe it to be a great benefit. My professors know me as an individual, and they not only care about what I am doing in college but also how I fare after graduation. They have no problem accommodating messy schedules and outside influences such as work, because they know that many students need to earn a wage to survive. If there were too many time conflicts for registration, my professors have offered me the opportunity to complete independent studies modeled after the original course on several occasions so that I could still participate. Consequently, I was able to stay on schedule for graduation because of the option to complete required coursework and pursue my interests and passions through independent study. I doubt that I would have have this option if not for attending a public liberal arts university. Independent studies are a remarkable tool that many liberal arts schools utilize to allow students the ability to follow their passions as undergraduates in addition to not falling behind schedule for graduation.

Because of the smaller number of students, my professors are aware of the different disciplines represented in the room. They will point out facts and arguments that are better suited to a certain topic or department, and in the process, I learned something that I would not have if the class were uniform. Similarly, when students from multiple disciplines take a course together, discussions are much more interesting and useful, because many different viewpoints and opinions are represented. The same can also be said of professors, and it is extremely valuable to them and the students. Departments are not isolated. Many professors know other professors and their research, which leads to unique experiences in the classroom. Many a time, my professors have invited faculty members from different departments to help clarify a topic. I find this absolutely fascinating, because while I had to choose only two majors, I am interested in so much more. Just the other day, one of my geography professors brought the anthropology professor to bring her specific knowledge to one of the topics that needed to be covered. In a different situation, my geography professor asked the only openly transgendered professor on campus from the business school to share her experience of gender. The interdisciplinary approach taken by public liberal arts schools permits these kinds of interactions that are beneficial to everyone involved. Both professors and students gain so much from an environment that encourages collaboration and communication.

A more specific aspect of my experience in liberal arts courses is the focus on the community. Frequently, universities can dominate their town, cause disruption, and incite anger. Therefore, any student should be aware of not only their university's local community but also any other community they inhabit. My professors often stress the impact we will have once we enter the workforce. Regularly, when in need of examples for a concept, professors would use our town to demonstrate how the community is affected or interplays with other influences. For

instance, my geography professor used Georgia College as an example to demonstrate its effect on the space. Additionally, some of my courses had a direct impact on my university's town. In one class, we broke into groups and each coordinated a project to help one issue in town. My group worked on updating a map and database of the local cemetery. I am extremely proud of my group's and my peers' projects. I believe we made an impact in the community and shaped a positive perception of our public liberal arts university. I doubt I would have had that same experience in a traditional university, and it and the school's larger focus on the local community has impressed upon me the significance of getting involved in my community.

I am grateful for the university I chose to attend as an undergraduate. My experience was wholly unique due to Georgia College's status as the public liberal arts school in Georgia. Without a doubt, I know I am a better, balanced person who is prepared to enter life after college due to the interdisciplinary and student-focused environment that instilled in me a sense of collaboration and community.