“Dearest Editor”

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I hereby affirm that this is an original essay and my own work.

Dear Editor:

You have placed me in a difficult situation. I’m sure this was unintentional, but I am here just the same. In your article, you debated the value of a liberal arts education. You made excellent points regarding the benefits of both liberal arts education and job-based education and I completely understand both sides of your argument. That is where the difficulty lies.

I am the youngest of five children. My parents had no education beyond high school- they barely even made it through that. My father inherited the family farm and my mother became a housewife. My sister married young and is a stay-at-home mom. My brothers went to various technical colleges; they focused on receiving an education that could prepare them for the in demand jobs they were to fulfill. And I went to college.

To be honest, I felt as though I had no choice in the matter. I did not really see the appeal of spending the next four years of my life trying to balance studies, work, student loans, and a social life. I was scared of the uncertainty leaving home would bring me, but everyone said, “Go to college,” “You need to get a degree,” “It’s impossible to get a good job without a degree.” My parents were content with me attending a technical college; they wanted a better life for me. However, tech schools do not exactly offer courses for the “undecided” major. So I went to college.

I have always had a passion for language. I have excelled in both English classes and Language Arts classes for as long as I can remember, and I enjoy the ways literature and composition challenge my modes of thinking. When I began my college experience, I was taken aback. I decided to follow my passion and declare an English major, yet I was only able to enroll in one English class for my entire first year of college! In order to enroll in additional English classes, I had to fulfill all of my general education requirements which included math, communications, and religious studies-all class I deemed useless for an English major. I was baffled and disgruntled by this revelation: how would these classes make me a better English major? And why did I need a speech class? Public speaking made me nervous and I had no intentions of *teaching* English, so why did I need these unnecessary classes? To conclude my rant, I was a firm believer of job-based education.

Then everything changed. My classes started relating to each other in ways I had not think possible. My math class covered mathematical concepts and practical application. My communications course, coupled with a linguistics course dissolved my fear of public speaking and deepened my understanding of language. My religion course briefly touched on religious conflicts of the past while also focusing on why religious conflicts are still occurring and possible resolutions to future conflicts. Additionally I registered for a psychology course. This helped round my understanding *why* humans act a certain way. I linked this information to my religions course. I took a seminar course regarding diversity. I applied this new knowledge to what I had previously learned about regarding human conflicts and in-group biases.

Needless to say, my first year flew by and I was then able to pick English courses! I studied Flannery O’Connor for a major authors course. O’Connor was a major religious author- she made me appreciate my religious studies course. I enrolled in “Ethics in Literature” and already possessed a basic knowledge of the material thanks to my diversity and psychology classes.

What I am trying to say is that my general elective courses- the mathematics, psychology, linguistics, communications, and the like, were essential to the continuance of my college education. The classes I had deemed so unnecessary and useless have turned out to be fundamental to my understanding of the world.

What I have realized is that general education is the basis for a liberal education. Without have a vague understanding of everything, it is impossible to realize the connections that are everywhere. Furthermore, liberal education has taught me how to think to benefit not only myself, but society as a whole. It has broadened my knowledge of the wider world and has taught me to think beyond myself.

I am still undecided as to how I wish to apply my English major in the real world after graduation, but my liberal education has swayed me to make a difference. Thus far I have obtained the necessary qualifications to become a writing tutor and I try to help my fellow students recognize their own abilities and strengths. I believe I would have never accomplished this if it wasn’t for my communications class as well as the confidence I have acquired through my numerous English classes. I am now considering a career as an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher, but I am still weighing my options.

So, dear editor, this is my struggle. I firmly believe that a liberal education is mandatory in creating informed and successful citizens in a global economy. I also believe that individuals can be happy and successful with a career-oriented education as proven by my family. I know that receiving a liberal education has presented me with dilemmas that career-based education may not have unearthed such as complex feelings and a desire to become involved with various world problems. However, it is exactly this education that has allowed me to more completely comprehend and evaluate the different aspects of an issue to make more informed decisions.

Another difficulty I have discovered is trying to relate to people who haven’t received a liberal education and thus possess the depth of knowledge I do. Take my family for instance; sometimes I feel that I am more informed or more well-rounded than some of my family members. This can lead me to feel guilty about receiving a quality education while everybody else settled for a cheaper option because they felt that that was their only option. It is also very unsettling to have more background knowledge on a particular subject than your mother or father. I have always viewed my parents as intellectual beings and I still do; however, I have realized that my liberal education has educated me about various aspects of life that my parents are ill-informed about. I will always respect my parents and their opinions, and receiving a liberal education has taught me to form opinions of my own while still respecting and considering the opinions of others.

So, my dearest editor, you know my story. You know I stand with liberal education, but I appreciate the values provided by career-based education as well. You know that I would have never been truly content with anything less than a liberal education, and you know that my family is pleased with their individual lives after receiving a career-oriented education. I see the benefits of both styles of education, yet I consider only liberal education as the true form of higher education.