Liberal Arts Education and the 21st Century Discussion Notes

“Get comfortable with being uncomfortable”, says Carol Johnson (Johnson, 2019). Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. I needed to hear that phrase today. The first time I went to college 30 years ago, it was going to be for a liberal arts degree. The second and third times would have been specialized. In her TEDx talk called “Liberal Arts Education and the 21st Century”, Carol Johnson discusses the benefits of a liberal arts education and dispels the myths against it. She explains how, through the varying subjects required for the course, exploration is just as important as being ready to start a career right out of college. Ms. Johnson refers to a book by Fareed Zakaria called “In Defense of a Liberal Education,” where it is explained that “the ‘liberal’ in liberal arts does not refer to the opposite of conservative. It refers to the concept of freedom.”

I agree with her about the benefits of a liberal arts degree. In my 30 years as a legal adult, the last 20 years without any formal education, I have experienced a great deal of difficulties in the real world, getting an education in the most difficult ways. Much of life you have to experience to understand, but an education that begins to prepare you to function within all the parts of life, and not just the narrow career you study for, is invaluable. A liberal arts degree helps you see the world from many viewpoints so you can be empathetic tto the experiences of others. A liberal education helps people to see the world and its issues in “historical, social and political contexts,…the best avenue to prepare individuals for lives within and outside of their careers in free and just societies” (Johnson, 2019). A liberal education broadens your mind, making connections in your brain to help you solve problems from any number of angles, not just from the position of, for example, an architect. Students with a liberal arts degree are probably more likely to be better leaders, using their broader understanding of life and what motivates people, from an earlier age. This world needs more people with empathy, resulting from an education with a broader base of information; a broader foundation to build a better person on. We all still have to experience life and listen to and learn from others to truly understand, but having a jumping-off point in multiple disciplines is a better place to start.

Reference

Johnson, C. (2019, April). *Liberal arts education and the 21st century* [Video]. TEDx Talks. TEDxCentralArizonaCollege. <https://www.ted.com/talks/carol_johnson_liberal_arts_education_and_the_21st_century>

Response to [Audrey Larson](https://canvas.cwi.edu/courses/6111/users/11751)  
Thank you for your post. It was well thought-out and well stated. I have also had it in my head that a Liberal Arts degree was some sort of cop-out, but now I see that it has been a huge benefit to my life. I'm glad you have realized this early in life, that you can benefit yourself, your family, and the world around you better, with a broader understanding of what is available to you and possible in this world. The world definitely needs more out-of-the-box thinkers to solve problems and treat people with more respect and understanding.

Response to Noah Collins

What a great perspective you have brought to us. I am involved with music and fiber arts, and I still sometimes allow the culture around me to discount the importance of the arts. You are correct that they are invaluable to problem-solving, understanding the viewpoints of people around us, and showing empathy, especially when we don't agree. The world would be a much better place if we gave the arts the value they really do play in society, instead of just calling them a hobby and trying to pretend they aren't vital.