

Connections: liberal education, honors, and NAU

Education is not only the memorization of pre-appropriated facts, but is more importantly the evolution of thoughts and thought processes. Once the rudimentary level is surpassed, students then enter into the realm of liberal education. However, the definition of such an education lacks a universal standard, varying from college to college. In particular, William Cronon's annotations give a well-rounded characterization to the ambiguous liberal education and provide a basis for the assessment of an honors education, as well as for the Northern Arizona University Flagstaff-as-Text program.

Even though the concept of a liberal education has been diluted and warped as a result of time and changing political tactics, the root of the word "liberal" can still be identified and used as a reliable source of clarity. Originally derived from Sanskrit and traced through the Greek *eleutheros*, the essential meaning combines "free" and "one grows". Sensibly, Cronon elaborated and included the education component to form his accurate definition of liberal education: "it aspires to nurture the growth of human talent in the service of human freedom" (74).

Consequently, the overall purpose of liberal education is to create a student body that has "been liberated by their education to explore and fulfill the promise of their own highest talents"

(Cronon 74). The teachings of such a schooling not only focus on the basic skills of communication, comprehension, and ability, but also on the more human aspects of connecting with the community and using knowledge to impact society. In order to eventually have this influence, the student must study numerous topics, to develop objectivity and to resist not being able to comprehend the impact on humanity as a whole. From the basic studies of reading, writing, and arithmetic, a liberal education prepares the mind to evaluate information, transform it into a real-world application and take action to make a connection with the community.

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Comment: Are you sure this is used here correctly – this word usually assumes some form of force is involved.

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Comment: Of what?

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Comment: Evidence??

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Comment: Again, is this word here used appropriately? No pun intended. List??

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Comment: A general initial comment: *simplify*. Read through your writing and find ways to say what you want to say concisely and simply. Sometimes your use of certain words serves to muddy the waters and detract from what you are trying to say here.

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Comment: Why sensibly?

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Comment: Accurate by who's judgment? A very loaded term here.

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Comment: Good use of the text to support your argument here.

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Comment: Repetitive use of "in order" – be careful of this.

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Comment: The impact of what? This whole sentence is very dense, with a couple of ideas buried here. Unpack, perhaps to more than one sentence.

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Comment: This is a very interesting reading of Cronon here, one that I admittedly missed on my very first reading – neo-Marxist theory would refer to this whole idea as *praxis*, with an additional step of the action taken re-informing the first steps of developing a liberal education.

In addition to a common liberal education, there is also the more intense approach of honors learning. Both have similar goals while still maintaining their own distinctions. Most of the qualities desired or found in an honors student coincide with the ideals and purpose of a liberal education as suggested by Cronon. For example, basic communication abilities are essential in an honors student as well as the mind set that learning is never limited by time, it is a constant factor of life. As in liberal learning, a certain propensity towards learning is vital to the honors distinction as is a continuous commitment. Other shared qualities can be seen in the individuality that is necessary for the advancement of society and quality of life: imagination, creativity, and curiosity. These are imperative to the honors experience, as they demand that the student thinks, ponders, and creates her own philosophies so that, once out of school, she are capable of solving the problems of life. Freyman also emphasizes that the honors experience provides “learning for living, not just for making a living”, which is equivalent to Cronon’s opinion that general liberal education is a preparation for life (2). An appreciation for diversity is also necessary for the honors student to embrace because of their guaranteed future exposure to other cultures and other belief systems. This has become especially prevalent with the constant advancement in technologies that are shortening the distance and time with which information can be exchanged across the world. In opposition to Cronon’s belief the liberal education should expose the student to the world so that the knowledge can be used to better the community, Freyman characterizes the honors student as one who “should not be working at any more than a minimal job” and that even the minimal absence from study should be frowned upon as indulging a want rather than satisfying a need, in regards to satisfying the need to study (3). Even though the honors qualities, as defined by Freyman, are slightly less concerned with the working-world outside of school, there are numerous parallels with Cronon’s liberal education elements.

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Comment: OK – I began to edit this sentence, and really ended up with no true understanding of what you are really trying to say here. Please re-read and re-work.

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Comment: Again, unpack.

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Comment: When you use the singular (as in student) using the plural (their, they) does not work. Use the plural initially, or use a pronoun such as she, her. Also, maintain this usage throughout the entire paper.

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Comment: Overall, there is too much going on in this paragraph – too many ideas competing with each other for attention, and not enough focus. This is in part due to a lack of overall focus in the paper – you have not clearly defined what the paper is about.

In relation to Cronon's fundamental commentary on liberal education, Northern Arizona University's Flagstaff-as-Text program significantly reflects his goals for a high-quality liberal college experience. The texts demonstrated the qualities of the community and how connections could be easily made. In particular, the Friends of Flagstaff's Future organization provides an easy access into the conservation and maintenance of the natural environment surrounding the town of Flagstaff, which is the essence and foundation of the town's persona. Cronon would endorse this group as allowing liberally educated people to use their knowledge and influence the community that they thrive in. The field work especially showed the core of the town by obliging the students to physically interact with the citizens and community. Flagstaff-as-Text creatively portrayed Cronon's purpose of a liberal education and gave a practical application.

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Comment: Good connection

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Comment: This does not connect with your previous statement

The basis of Cronon's commentary on liberal education relates to not only Freyman's piece, but also Northern Arizona University's Flagstaff-as-Text program and allows the broad issue of education to become more consistent and clear. Liberal education standards can be manipulated and distorted, but the foremost goal will always be to "allow one to make sense of the world and act within it in creative ways" (Cronon 78).

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You have the seeds of a very good paper here that would work best if you approached it more simply. First, define a thesis here. It is not clear, and that would certainly help you maintain a focus. It would lead into paragraph topic sentences that would also force you to focus. You dump a lot of ideas into sentences and whole paragraphs that need to be unpacked. Therefore, you need to simplify. Focus on what you want to say and just say it. Don't worry about how you sound for the moment – again, just say it. As an example, I have pulled from your text the variety of ways you refer to Cronon's article:

Annotations, opinion, elements, fundamental commentary, commentary

Works Cited

Cronon, W. (1998). Only connect: The goals of a liberal education. *The American Scholar* 67(4): 73-80.

Freyman, J. (2005). What is an honors student? *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* 6(2), 23-29

<<http://www.friendsofflagstaff.org/>>