

Themes that emerged from Discussions at Salon Lunch Tables following the October 10, 2015 forum on “Public Universities, the Humanities, and Education in North Carolina”

Note: Each salon table brought together five to eight people for a conversation on the following question: “Can we still afford the luxury of the liberal arts?” The conversations were facilitated by UNC faculty members and members of the Program in the Humanities Faculty Advisory Board, who provided summaries of the themes at their tables. These themes have been collected here (and merged together) in no particular order or hierarchy of importance.

Themes that suggest why the arts, humanities, and social sciences remain essential (along with the sciences) at our public universities:

The Liberal Arts serve the public good because they help people learn the skills of democratic citizenship—including speaking and participating in public conversations; “we the taxpayers” become “we the citizens” through the skills and knowledge of the liberal arts.

The Liberal Arts introduce students to complex historical, social and cultural realities that cannot be explained or understood by technical training.

The Liberal Arts help people discover themselves and who they are as human beings.

The Liberal Arts give people a sense of personal and/or social purpose.

The Liberal Arts show how we learn through dialogue and conversation.

The Liberal Arts promoted intellectual curiosity and lifelong learning.

The Liberal Arts promote cross-cultural understanding and insights into other societies.

The Liberal Arts broaden knowledge of individual and social experiences.

The Liberal Arts put social and personal problems/crises into wider perspectives.

The Liberal arts open up almost all life and career possibilities; they do not shut down opportunities but in fact enhance career opportunities and leadership.

The Liberal Arts are important for K-12 education because students should learn writing skills, languages, and creative arts from their earliest years in school.

The Liberal Arts provide analytical perspectives and critical skills for approaching the world’s greatest social, economic, and political problems.

The Liberal Arts help people learn how to listen to and analyze the ideas of others; this hones decision-making skills and judgment.

The Liberal Arts provide perspectives for conversations about and solutions to difficult issues.

The Liberal Arts help people see their lives as a journey and not just as a destination.

Themes That Suggest the Need for Further Action to Enhance or Explain the Role of the Liberal Arts at Colleges and Universities and in the wider society:

The Liberal Arts need to be used in ways that will bring more people to the University campus.

The Liberal Arts need to be explained in ways that show their value to all kinds of economic activities.

The Liberal Arts and especially the humanities need to be shown as the “seeds” for future creativity and new ideas.

The Liberal Arts should be explained more clearly to state legislators and government leaders; state officials need to see more specifically why this kind of education strengthens the state.

Advocates of the Liberal Arts should do more to bridge the rural/urban divide in North Carolina.

Advocates of the Liberal Arts should explain more clearly why and how the arts and humanities must remain part of K-12 education.

Advocates of the Liberal Arts should explain more clearly how this kind of education leads to better leadership in almost all fields and complex organizations.

Advocates of the Liberal Arts should show political and economic leaders the great diversity of careers and professions in which people flourish after completing degrees in English, History, Philosophy, Art, Music, and other such areas of undergraduate studies.

Advocates of the Liberal Arts should stress that talented students gain their essential technical and professional training (e.g., medicine, law, business, diplomacy, journalism) in graduate or professional schools—but they come from all undergraduate majors.

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