1978

Born Again (New Life and Hope for Liberal Arts Education)

William A. Cook  
*Merrimack Valley College*

James C. Gonyea  
*Merrimack Valley College*

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/perspectives

Part of the Higher Education Commons, and the Liberal Studies Commons

**Recommended Citation**


Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/perspectives/vol9/iss3/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Western Michigan University at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspectives (1969-1979) by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.
Linwood Orange established the value of Liberal Arts study as the basis for entry into a variety of career areas: legal, medical, governmental, and commercial. Orange surveyed 400 businesses and industries to determine the kinds of positions liberal arts majors and, specifically, English majors held in those corporations. In addition, his questionnaire provided information on courses that would benefit liberal arts students should they hope to pursue careers in the commerce or governmental area. Fundamental to all employment indicated by this survey were ten (10) basic skills or competencies that seemed to be inherent in liberal arts study and of great benefit to careers in the area of commerce.

While Orange’s pioneering effort established the value of liberal arts study, it has not stemmed the tide of students turning away from pursuing the liberal arts. Furthermore, while the study establishes skills and competencies inherent in a liberal arts program, it does not identify how or in what areas these skills are developed, nor does it identify career areas to which these skills relate. Students or counselors, as a consequence, cannot establish a plan of study that would ensure the development of such skills or prepare for selected occupations. Indeed, none of these problems were addressed by the Orange study, and beyond the field of English and the readers of the Modern Language Association, the Orange study has, unfortunately, had little impact.

What Linwood Orange did, however, was demonstrate, beyond doubt, that there is practical value in terms of career employment in liberal arts study. The questions that must be addressed beyond this fact are the following:
1. If liberal arts teaches skills and competencies, how can we identify what skills and competencies are taught and where such skills and competencies are taught?

2. How can we establish a program of study for students that will allow them to take advantage of the skill training provided through liberal arts study?

3. If we can identify the skills taught by liberal arts study, can we go further and draw a relationship between those skills and career areas?

4. For those of us interested in specific majors, can we identify skills taught by that discipline and their relationship to specific career areas?

Our own experience with students pursuing general studies, one from a career counselor's perspective, the other from the accountability required of a division chairperson, brought us to the realization that identification of career-related skills developed through liberal arts study was essential and possible. We developed last Spring a list of career related skills which we believe were taught and/or required in the pursuit of liberal arts study. That inventory of skills resulted in a survey which was sent to two-year colleges in all fifty (50) states. Since that initial mailing, another forty (40) institutions have joined our national survey and preliminary results are now available. Our survey instrument, "Career Related Skills Developed Through Liberal Arts Study," asked that each institution identify two (2) faculty from each of the general education areas: Math/Science, Social Science, and Humanities. Each teacher was asked to fill out surveys based on the courses that they taught. The purpose was to identify skills which they specifically taught and/or skills which they required demonstration of in order to receive a passing grade. The level of skill development was also indicated on the survey instrument.

When all returns are in, it will be possible to program the information onto computer cards and to cull profiles on skills from this material on each of the disciplines within a general education area as well as profiles within general education areas themselves. Thus it would be possible for a profile to be developed on career related skills taught, for example, in English courses. There are many advantages to this approach.

1. The existence of career related skills taught in liberal arts study is established by those who teach the subjects.

2. The existence of these skills is noted for students prior to beginning a program of study.

3. Counselors and academic advisors would be able to lay out course sequences based upon skill study that would lead to career areas.

4. The existence of known skills beyond the general ten (10) established by Linwood Orange provides a means for identifying career areas using the Dictionary of Occupational Titles as a bridge between Liberal Arts' skills and the world of work.

5. Faculty can develop courses and programs of study utilizing skill development and career related areas and thus respond, in some measure, to the charges of unaccountability, uselessness, and irrelevance.

6. Some areas of liberal arts study, specifically, languages and English, will be able to reassert their significance as very practical pursuits, both in terms of intellectual value and applicability to future career employment.

7. Administrators can offer proof of the accountability and usefulness of a liberal arts education.
While all of the returns are not in and the computerized programming has not yet begun, hand tabulation has recorded significant information which, if corroborated with final returns is of immense value to those of us interested in liberal arts study. It should also be mentioned here that while the preliminary returns indicate definite career areas that are viable through liberal arts study, a complete and thorough relationship between our inventory returns and the Dictionary of Occupational Titles is not yet available. The following statistics are based upon hand counts of the returns we have at this point in time.

For those of us particularly interested in the Humanities, respondents in Humanities disciplines checked, on the average, 33 career-related skills out of the 60 listed as being taught or required in their courses. The total number of skills checked by Humanists exceed 700.

The skill inventory is subdivided into five (5) broad career skills areas: administrating, researching, communicating, coordinating, and examining. Some 69% of the Humanities faculty responding teach administrative skills while only a handful (4.6%) teach coordinating and (13.6%) examining skills. By contrast, the greatest number teach or require demonstration of research and communicating skills, 83.3% and 85.7% respectively.

It’s particularly interesting to note, and perhaps not surprising, that the Humanities disciplines exceed both Science/Math and Social Science in teaching or requiring demonstration of communicating skills, 85.7% versus Math/Science with 42.9% and Social Science with 71.4%. Math/Science, however, exceeded the other two areas in teaching research skills, 91.7% versus 83.3% and 84.6% for Humanities and Social Science respectively. Administrative skills are taught more extensively in the Social Sciences, 84.6% against only 69.2% for Humanities and 53.9% for Science/Math.

A quick run through the career-related skills identified by the Humanities faculty reveals the following: all teach or require “decision making”; 86.4% teach “organizing skills”; 81.8% teach “abstracting/conceptualizing skills” and “initiating skills”; and 68.2% “advising” and “planning” skills. All of the above fall within the “administrative” category.

Research skills of particular concern to the Humanities faculty are the following: “classifying” (95.5%), “inspecting” (95.5%), “compiling” (86.4%), “creating” (86.4%), “investigating” (86.4%), and “collecting” (72.7%).

The most decisive career-related skill area taught by Humanities disciplines seems to be in the communicating area. Only two of the fourteen (14) skills listed in this area were taught by less than half of those responding. “Corresponding”, “explaining”, “interpreting”, “persuading”, “rewriting”, and “speaking” are taught or required by the majority of Humanities faculty.

In the remaining two areas, coordinating and examining, only two skills (both in the examining area) were taught or required by a significant number of respondents: “evaluating” (72.7%) and “reviewing” (95.5%).

A cursory look at the results for Math/Science shows greatest strength for career skill development in the area of research, 91.7%. Only administrative skills of the remaining four (4) categories netted over 50% in the returns from Science/Math teachers.

Interestingly, Social Science registered relatively high skill development in all areas. Both administrative and research skills topped 84% while communication and examining skills exceeded 71%. Some 58% reported teaching or requiring demonstration of coordinating skills.
If additional surveys, already mailed out, corroborate the above statistics, it is safe to say that Liberal Arts faculty believe that study in their disciplines definitely develops career-related skills. To translate that knowledge into useful reference for job requires, however, an additional step.

That step can be taken if a relationship is made between the sixty (60) identified career skills in the survey and the worker functions listed in Appendix A, “Explanation of Relationships Within Data, People, Things, Hierarchies”, of the Dictionary of Occupational Titles.

Our preliminary returns point to some thirteen (13) “Areas of Work” within which two-year liberal arts students might find employment. Since liberal arts students tend to concentrate in “data” and “people” categories (as defined in the DOT), the “Business Relations”, “Education and Training”, “Investigating”, and “Managerial and Supervising Work” are the types of areas in which students would find employment.

Within the areas of work, over thirty-five (35) “worker trait groups” which require the inventory skills can be identified. “Business Relations”, “Clerical Work”, “Investigating, Inspecting, Testing”, “Managerial and Supervisory Work”, “Scheduling”, “Dispatching”, “Contract Negotiating”, “Purchase and Sales”, and numerous others call for skills taught through Liberal Arts study. Even restricting other variables, including the General Education Development Level and the Specific Vocational Preparation Length, did not upset these conclusions.

While all of the above statistics are based on limited returns, definite trends are evident. This survey confirms Linwood Orange’s study - liberal arts graduates do learn career related skills. With knowledge of these skills available before a student selects a program of study, a more career related program can be designed. In addition, students can select career areas knowing that their study in liberal arts will be of benefit to that career and indeed be an apt preparation for it.

2. The ten skills identified by Orange are:
   1. To speak well in public
   2. To handle office paperwork with grammatical accuracy, conciseness, and clarity.
   3. To edit or rewrite material that has been prepared by technical personnel
   4. To analyze, interpret, reorganize, and rephrase material.
   5. To use general and specialized reference materials in preparing well-documented reports
   6. To analyze and interpret unpublished data of various kinds in preparing well-documented reports
   7. To use research materials with creativity and originality
   8. To speak and write a foreign language fluently.
   9. To become reasonably knowledgeable in areas in which there has been no previous training
   10. To present an argument or to debate logically, succinctly, and clearly.
3. The specific skills listed under each category follows:
   Administering
Abstracting/Conceptualizing
Advising
Appraising
Budgeting
Decision Making
Initiating
Interviewing
Managing
Mediating
Negotiating
Organizing
Planning
Supervising
Researching
Analyzing
Classifying
Collecting
Compiling
Creating
Inspecting
Investigating
Laboratory Working
Measuring
Processing
Recording
Updating
Communicating
Corresponding
Displaying
Exhibiting
Explaining
Interpreting
Persuading
Politicking
Promoting
Proposal Writing
Rewriting
Selling
Speaking
Translating
Predicting
Coordinating
Calculating
Committee Work
Controlling
Designing
Developing Models
Estimating
Group Facilitating
Monitoring
Operating  
Programming  
Timing  
Examining  
Coaching  
Counseling  
Dispensing  
Evaluating  
Reviewing

4. Identification of occupational areas related to skills will be undertaken when the 4th edition of the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles* is available.

5. Based upon the 3rd Edition of the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*.