

## Getting Beyond “Getting It Over With”: Professional Programs and the Humanities and Liberal Arts

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**I**N LATE MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE Europe, students who participated in the humanities and liberal arts curriculum—the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric, and logic—were considered to be “able to participate in public debate, defend [themselves] and serve in court and on juries, and perform military service.”<sup>1</sup> The curriculum was later extended to include arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy—the *quadrivium*. The ultimate purpose of this education was to produce well-rounded and articulate community members.<sup>2</sup>

Our modern-day humanities and liberal arts (HLA) curricula are less defined and more flexible for students, allowing a larger range of topics for study, but they arguably retain the core purpose of the traditional HLA curricula. Accordingly, an HLA education should be defined not only by *what* courses are taught, but by *how* they are taught and the skills and intellectual virtues that students thereby develop. These curricula should be multi-disciplinary, but must be focused on fostering mastery of critical and creative thinking and communication skills.

As the title of this article indicates, my interest here is to persuade faculty in professional programs to help students see the value of studying the HLAs. Too often students in these programs fail to value the HLAs, and likewise too often faculty advisors in these programs fail to push back against students who just want to get through core curriculum or general education requirements as quickly as possible.

The spectrum of topics typically included in HLA curricula is indicated in Table 1 through the core curriculum requirements at King’s College, Pennsylvania, which is the author’s present institution.<sup>3</sup> A brief list of examples of transferrable skills gained in each of the HLA topic areas is also provided.

**Table 1**

	<b>Topic Areas</b>	<b>Examples of Core Requirements</b>	<b>Transferrable Skills Gained</b>
<b>Humanities</b>	Art; Literature; Philosophy; Religion; Ethics; Modern Languages; Music; Theater; Speech	ENGL 140-149 COMM 101 ARTS 100-149 Intercultural Competence Requirement PHIL 101, 170-199 THEO 150-159, 160-169	Effective oral, written communication  Critical and reflective reading  Time-management  Information literacy  Ability to pose meaningful questions  Ethical decision-making
<b>Social Sciences</b>	History; Psychology; Sociology; Political Science; Gender Studies; Anthropology; Economics; Geography; Business Informatics	HIST 100-149 ECON 111, 112; 150-199 GEOG 101, 102; 150-159 SOC 150-199 PSYC 101 SOC 101	Empathy; cultural humility  Self-confidence, understanding  Ability to work in a team  Cross-cultural knowledge  Organization
<b>Natural Sciences</b>	Astronomy; Biology; Chemistry; Physics; Geology; Ecology	NSCI 100 NSCI 171-199	Effective research  Information literacy
<b>Formal Sciences</b>	Math; Statistics; Logic	MATH 120, 126, or higher	Problem-solving and pattern intelligence  Experience in quantitative and qualitative data analysis  Numerical literacy

As shown in Table 1, the core curriculum at King's College aims to give students at least the following: 1) an introduction to career choices they may not have considered prior to taking these courses; 2) a broadened perspective; 3) preparation for work in a variety of areas (perhaps outside of their major degree and the narrow scope with which they came into higher education); 4) a variety of transferrable skills; 5) a foundation for graduate study; 6) the reinforcement to become a valuable member of their community; and 7) the skills to adapt and thrive in our ever-changing environment (e.g., resilience).

Positive economic returns, on average, are well-documented for students earning a bachelor's degree compared to those only completing a high school diploma.<sup>4</sup> But while professors at HLA institutions may claim to "know" that graduates of HLA-based curricula have skills that employers want, economic benefits are more difficult to demonstrate.

Catherine B. Hill and Elizabeth Davidson Pisacreta investigated the costs and benefits to those studying at HLA institutions versus those at other types of institutions and found that, because higher education has not routinely measured student learning outcomes (SLOs), it is difficult to find data on what difference studying at an HLA institution might make.<sup>5</sup> It is also difficult to find the data required to control for confounding factors. Further, while a very well-controlled Mellon Foundation analysis found no association between HLA offerings and labor market outcomes, those authors suggested that HLA education may provide value-added for low-income students.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the lack of data, speaking from experience as a former HLA student and a current faculty member, I would claim that there are stark differences between HLA and non-HLA institution graduates, as I am sure many of my colleagues would attest from their own experiences. I will provide just a few examples from my own experiences as a nutrition scientist and research mentor at HLA, State/R1, Ivy, and U.S. government institutions. To begin with, I am typically able to sort potential graduate assistant or graduate student cover letters by HLA and non-HLA institution graduate: the HLA students tend to have better writing skills. The HLA students also interview more confidently (regardless of mode: phone, Zoom, or in-person), and they are more capable of keeping a conversation going. In our research or graduate course environments, HLA students typically have better critical thinking skills, ask more and deeper questions, and are able to work more independently for longer periods of time, compared to the non-HLA institution students, who have needed much more micromanagement. Finally, the HLA students tend to learn and grow much more from

constructive criticism and not see it as failure; the non-HLA institution students have a harder time with repeating experiments, rewriting, etc., and seem to lack resilience. Interestingly, an AAC&U study that found that 93 percent of employers agree that job candidates' demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.<sup>7</sup> Four out of five of the employers surveyed also agreed that all students should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences.<sup>8</sup>

The fact remains, however, that undergraduate students often fail to see the value of studying the HLAs. Accordingly, it seems that HLA professors would be well-advised to work with their colleagues in the professions to *align* core and major SLOs. Collaborations could include advising teams, co-taught courses (e.g., professional faculty and HLA faculty co-teaching an introductory college seminar or an academic writing course), or working groups to create assignments for each professional program that satisfy the SLOs for both the core curriculum/general studies and professional program. This collaboration not only would explicitly show students the connections between the HLAs and their chosen professional preparation courses, but also would help professors, advisors, and mentors in the professions in advising current students, recruiting new students, and reinforcing transferrable skills throughout the professional program curriculum, beyond the HLA classroom. Further, deploying HLA professors to professional programs and departments to help with advising and SLO alignment would result in both improved SLOs and stronger connections between the HLA and professional program faculty on campus.

For example, table 2 shows the alignment of SLOs in the King's College core curriculum with the SLOs of the College's athletic training program (AT, BS/MSAT).<sup>9</sup> Education at King's is focused not only on the acquisition of clinical and practice-based skills (e.g., AT knowledge), but also on intellectual development, personal and social responsibility, and integrative and applied methods of learning (i.e., learning *anything*, not just AT-course based information). The HLA SLOs integrated throughout the AT program empower students as individuals and interdisciplinary team-members and prepare them to deal with "real-world stuff" such as complexity, diversity, and change.

**Table 2**

<b>HLA Course</b>	<b>Core Curriculum SLOs— <i>Students will be able to:</i></b>	<b>Practice-Based SLOs— <i>AT students will be able to:</i></b>
N/A – Satisfied by Major requirement (SBM)	N/A – SBM	Demonstrate entry-level knowledge, skills, and abilities of AT.
ENGL 110 COMM 101 ENGL 140-149 ARTS 100-149	Identify the tone, purpose, audience, and main ideas of a text and interpret its meaning through close analysis; critically evaluate arguments; synthesize materials to construct and express ideas, formulate positions, and solve problems	Demonstrate critical thinking and clinical reasoning skills, including analysis, evaluation, and improvement of thinking and reasoning.
NSCI 100 - SBM NSCI 171-199 - SBM MATH 126 - SBM PSYC 101 – SBM	Use information and information technologies ethically, legally, and effectively; explain information presented in mathematical forms	Demonstrate interprofessional collaboration with healthcare professionals.
ENGL 110 COMM 101 ENGL 140-149 ARTS 100-149	Engage in discussion to acquire, develop, and challenge ideas, even in the face of disagreement; incorporate effectively and document properly sources that are reliable, accurate, and relevant	Communicate effectively with stakeholders.
PHIL 101 PHIL 170-199; MSB 287 THEO 150-159 THEO 160-169	Analyze moral arguments about matters of contemporary and perennial importance in view of differing moral perspectives locally and across cultures; construct, evaluate, and defend moral arguments about matters of contemporary and perennial importance; develop self-awareness about core moral convictions and a capacity for self-criticism and scrutiny	Apply legal, moral, and ethical principles in AT practice.
NSCI 100 - SBM NSCI 171-199 - SBM MATH 126 - SBM PSYC 101 - SBM	Interpret and evaluate information and its sources critically and incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base; critically assess sources and claims to test their validity from a scientific and quantitative perspective; evaluate the strengths and limits of the scientific method and articulate the relationship between science and other ways of seeking knowledge	Demonstrate problem-solving skills, including finding, analyzing, and interpreting medical research in order to guide clinical practice and assess outcomes.

HIST 100-149 ECON 150-199 GEOG 150-159 SOC 150-199 Intercultural Competence Re- quirement	Demonstrate knowledge of the interrelatedness of local and global issues; engage critically with one's own and other cultures; construct, evaluate, and defend moral arguments about matters of contemporary and perennial importance	Demonstrate the ability to advocate for and serve as a leader in the profession of AT.
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In advising students, professional program faculty should help students to choose HLA courses that would work best with the professional program courses they are taking. This may help students and advisors alike get over the “getting it over with” attitude toward core and HLA courses not obviously related to students’ majors. Emphasizing alignment also might help attract new students. The value of an HLA education just cannot be taken for granted in the current economic context. Being able to show prospective students and parents the alignment between HLA and professional program SLOs might be just the case that traditional HLA institutions with growing professional programs need to make.

<sup>1</sup> See Hasna Haidar, “What Is a Liberal Arts Education?” <https://www.topuniversities.com/blog/what-liberal-arts-education>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.kings.edu/academics/essentials/core>.

<sup>4</sup> See Catherine B. Hill and Elizabeth Davidson Pisacreta, “The Economic Benefits and Costs of a Liberal Arts education,” *Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Research Reports*, January 2019, <https://mellon.org/news-blog/articles/economic-benefits-and-costs-liberal-arts-education/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See Daniel Rossman et al., “Measuring a Liberal Education and Its Relationship with Labor Market Outcomes: An Exploratory Analysis,” *Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Research Reports*, September 2020, <https://mellon.org/news-blog/articles/measuring-liberal-education-and-its-relationship-labor-market-outcomes-exploratory-analysis/>.

<sup>7</sup> Ashley Finley, “How College Contributes to Workforce Success: Employer Views on What Matters Most” (Washington, D.C.: AAC&U, 2021), 5–7, <https://dgm81phvh63.cloudfront.net/content/user-photos/Research/PDFs/AACUEmployerReport2021.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Athletic Training: 3+2 Master of Science in Athletic Training Program, *Undergraduate Catalog 2022-23*, King’s College, [https://www.kings.edu/sites/default/files/MSAT\\_3%2B2\\_program\\_curriculum.pdf](https://www.kings.edu/sites/default/files/MSAT_3%2B2_program_curriculum.pdf).