WaCLA Essay Contest

29 January 2014

The Liberal Arts Prepare People for Democracy

On first thought, liberal arts and democratic principles may appear to have nothing in common. Education and government don’t seem to share any links. However, people must be well educated for government to run smoothly. According to the “Center for Education in Law and Democracy,” some key principles of democracy are citizen participation, protection of human rights, and preventing abuse of power. A liberal arts education refines the life skills that we need to be successful in all we do. They will prepare us for our careers and ensure that these key democratic principles are fulfilled.

The most basic principle of democracy is citizen participation. Without actively involved citizens, a democracy would have no “people” to be run by. A liberal arts education is an important element that will lead to a more involved population. The fundamental component of a liberal arts education is the development of the critical thinking skills necessary to be an active member of the community. Not only will these skills benefit people at home and in the workplace, they will also transform how people are involved in democracy.

One way we can be actively involved is by utilizing the skills obtained through our liberal arts education to formulate our own opinions and positions. We can then back up our positions and vote for what we deem best for our city, county, state, or country. Without a well-rounded education, we may be easily misled by others or choose not to participate in democracy. The essential life skills obtained via a liberal arts education are invaluable and crucial for ideal citizen participation in democracy.

Protecting human rights and preventing abuse of power go hand-in-hand. Similar to citizen participation, a well-rounded liberal arts education goes a long way in achieving these democratic principles. Having accumulated knowledge of human rights and developed discernment skills, we can be sure that power is not abused and that our rights are protected. Being able to differentiate justice from injustice, we will notice when human rights are infringed upon and when people with power are abusing it.

Many people either don’t know this is happening, or do nothing about it. The most common reasons for not acting are a lack of knowledge and a lack of self-confidence in our ability to make a difference. A liberal arts background is the perfect cure for these flaws. Through this form of education, we learn about our rights and notice when they are interfered with. We also acquire leadership skills and reasoning skills that allow us to become confident in our ability to make a difference. With these benefits, we can protect our rights and keep those with power from abusing it.

Liberal arts and democratic principles go hand-in-hand, as the former readies us for the latter. The critical thinking skills we develop through a liberal arts education prepare us for being actively involved citizens, aware of our rights, and willing to stand up to those that abuse power.