Facilitating and Evaluating Public Discourse:

Why it Matters

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Why is Higher Education Important for Students?

1. Gain practical skills to get a good job and lifetime income.
2. Gain analytical and critical-thinking skills to participate in civic life and democratic culture.
3. Gain knowledge, perspectives, and talents for a meaningful personal life.

Michael S. Roth, *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters* (2014)
The humanities and arts provide skills that are essential to keep democracy healthy.... Thirsty for national profit, nations, and their systems of education are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive. If this trend continues, nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person’s sufferings and achievements. The future of the world’s democracies hangs in the balance....

Democracies have great rational and imaginative powers. They also are prone to some serious flaws in reasoning, to parochialism, haste, sloppiness, selfishness, narrowness of the spirit. Education based mainly on profitability in the global market magnifies these deficiencies, producing a greedy obtuseness and a technically trained docility that threaten the very life of democracy itself, and that certainly impede the creation of a decent world culture.
[A good university should encourage engagement with communities outside the University] As guides, not judges, we [faculty] can show our students how to engage in the practice of exploring objects, norms, and values that inform diverse cultures. Through this engagement, students will develop the ability to converse with others about shaping the objects, norms, and values that will inform their own lives. They will develop the ability not merely to criticize values but to add value to the organizations in which they participate. Guided by a liberal education they will increase their ability to find together ways of living that have meaning and direction. This is why liberal education matters far beyond the university.

[The goals of a strong university should rest on the] hope that the thoughtful inquiry sparked by liberal education will enable diverse communities to overcome more of their blindness to one another and to the problems they (and we) share. [The value of a good education] isn’t just about landing one’s first job; it emerges over the course of one’s working life. Liberal education matters far beyond the university because it increases our capacity to understand the world, contribute to it, and reshape ourselves. When it works, it never ends.
Seminars on Travel Writers and on the History of Nationalism

1. Commentaries on authors and analysis of strengths, weaknesses, and provocative ideas that appear in books.
   (Clarity and Analytical Insights)

2. Attendance at a public talk or event at Carolina Performing Arts
   (Write a descriptive, analytical account, noting new or surprising perspectives in the presentation)

3. Reflect analytically about encounters with previously unknown information or viewpoints.
   (Thinking beyond a Comfort Zone)

[Carolina Public Humanities Event at Flyleaf Bookstore in Chapel Hill]
Maynard Adams Fellows for the Public Humanities

1. Graduate Students from different departments (including Philosophy, History, English, American Studies, etc.)

2. Develop a public program with partners at Community Colleges, Public Schools, public library, etc.

3. Recognize public engagement and public discourse as key aspects of academic work.

4. Offer diverse perspectives and expertise on complex issues.

[Adams Fellows Discussing Public Humanities Projects at dinner seminar]
Speaking Publicly and Listening to the Speech of Others is Essential for Lifelong Participation in Diverse Communities and Democratic Societies

[Martha Nussbaum speaking at UNC-Chapel Hill]