



Aspen Undergraduate Business Education Consortium: March 2013 Convening

March 10-12, 2013
Daniels College of Business, University of Denver
Denver, Colorado

Overview & Impetus

In March 2013, The Aspen Undergraduate Business Education Consortium gathered thirty-eight colleges and universities – national and international – **to exchange ideas around strengthening the connections between the liberal arts, liberal learning and business education.**

Much is being written, in both public and academic debate, about the promise of a college education – and, particularly in the U.S., about its costs. Part and parcel of these discussions is the immense popularity of the business degree and the parallel decline in studies of the liberal arts.

Against this backdrop, schools in the Aspen Consortium are blazing a path toward **integration** – attempting to tie liberal learning and business education in ways that resonate for today’s students. At the Aspen Institute, our very founding was grounded in the promotion of “humanistic education,” and so we are honored to catalyze this Consortium. Participating schools share with us and with one another an objective to **“ensure that students understand the relation of business to the larger world and can act on that understanding as business professionals and as citizens.”**¹ The curricular and extra-curricular ideas emerging from the Consortium are exemplars of this kind of learning.

¹ Anne Colby, Thomas Ehrlich, William Sullivan, and Jonathan Dolle in *Rethinking Undergraduate Business Education: Liberal Learning for the Profession* (Jossey-Bass, January 2011).

On the Integration of Liberal Learning and Business Education: Key Themes

The March 2013 convening of the Consortium spanned a wide range of views and ideas. Here, we capture key themes and takeaways – and share our initial view of the most promising areas for future work and collaborations.

Faculty development is key to furthering the integration of liberal learning and business. Often faculty members aren’t opposed to integration but they are unfamiliar with ways to achieve it. Faculty also aren’t keen to teach a topic that they don’t feel is well within their expertise. At Franklin & Marshall, a science professor and a business professor collaborated on a faculty development seminar which seeks to explore critical issues at the intersection of science and commerce as a mechanism for enriching liberal education (issues, for example, like marketing and neuroscience, or ways in which financial models and scientific inquiry each deal with uncertainty). Beyond sparking new course content, faculty seminars might also produce unexpected connections and friendships – building trust between faculty members in different departments.

In a world of constrained resources, creativity is vital. Attempts to integrate liberal learning and business bring to the fore sticky questions about budgets, scaling, and already-scarce faculty time. Creative approaches can ease some of these pressures. For example, at ESADE, professors have inserted more liberal arts content into the school’s already-existing language requirement, beefing up discussions of national histories and cultures within language classes.



Taking another tack, the University of St. Gallen is implementing new integrated “big lecture” courses, taught by two professors – one from the humanities and one from business – to 200 students. For example, one of these courses is on media and culture and is being taught by a French professor and a corporate communications professor. In another approach, several participants mentioned the creative use of summer programs as a potential mechanism for integration. In this vein, The University of Texas at Austin offers an 8-week Summer Institute to non-business majors so that they can develop business skills. This allows students to focus on their non-business major during the year but still acquire important business acumen. Creative approaches can also help outside the classroom – building support for the integration agenda. At the University of Richmond, the Dean of the Robins School of Business has launched a (low-cost!) book club for faculty, to read and discuss together books that address current concerns in undergraduate business education.

Within large, complex institutions, the ability to reframe problems can be powerful. As Albert Einstein once said, “If I had one hour to save the world, I would spend 55 minutes defining the problem and only five minutes finding the solution.” Jumping to problem solving mode too quickly often prevents actual problem solving. Be patient and ask yourself questions like – *how would someone 20 years ago or 20 years from now think about this problem? Or how would your mother, friend, or professor describe the problem?*

The liberal arts may need better marketing. Participants largely agree on the need to better communicate – to students, parents and recruiters – the value of the liberal arts and liberal learning. In the words of one participant: “We need better stories; often philosophy majors do great things in business.” Many raised the question of time frame and concur with the idea that “your major gets you your first job; general education gets you your career.”

Regarding students, one faculty member summed up: we need to tell students why they need “broadening.” Another took this idea further, saying: “We have to *show* students how to use what they learn. We need to give them a different sense of instrumentality.” But a third participant,

March 2013 convening by the numbers...

38 colleges and universities were represented, with 68 total academic attendees

41 attendees have an administrative role at their institutions (often in combination with a teaching role)

14 attendees hailed from humanities/liberal arts disciplines

Since the Consortium’s launch in 2012, schools have been busy. Though our data are incomplete, we know that:

At least **9** new courses have been designed or launched; 2 existing courses were redesigned

4 schools are overhauling their entire undergraduate business curriculum

At least **3** new majors, minors and certificate programs are under development

1 special issue of the *Journal of Management Education* devoted to “Integrating Liberal Learning, Humanities, and Management Education” is forthcoming

.. and **many** schools reporting enhanced dialogue on campus around Consortium topics!

acknowledging that this isn't *only* a marketing problem, questioned the group: "How can we do a better job of getting our liberal arts students jobs?"

"Showing" students potential ways to apply their learning may soften another dynamic: what one participant observed as an either/or approach among today's students – i.e., Millennials **either** want to save the world **or** make a lot of money. But if students think that they **have to make** this choice, they might overlook existing opportunities that could satisfy both objectives – i.e., in corporate social responsibility, sustainability, or impact investing.

Reflection is an important piece of undergraduate education – and provides opportunities to "connect the dots" between classes. As the authors of *Rethinking Undergraduate Business Education* note, "Reflective Exploration of Meaning" – the self-discovery and questioning that leads one to potentially reconsider their own views – is one of the major modes of thought in liberal learning. Dominican University of California has focused on creating curricular-wide intentional reflection mechanisms that help students to link coursework and experiential/engaged learning opportunities. An overarching goal of this effort is not only to get students to reflect, but to build habits of reflection. In another approach, the University of Michigan has incorporated reflection into student advising by using appreciative inquiry. Advisors are trained in the use of appreciate inquiry by taking a 14-week online training program.

Entrepreneurship – or the development of an entrepreneurial mindset – is a natural vehicle for integrating liberal arts and business. An entrepreneurial mindset requires out-of-the-box thinking and creative problem solving – both hallmarks of a liberal arts education. Two freshman entrepreneurship courses, "Ethics and Entrepreneurship" (Georgetown University) and "Gateway to Business" (University of Denver) allow students to start developing this entrepreneurial mindset early on in their college career. As one participant noted, "Our faculty are so stretched for time that it is hard to ask them to add anything to their teaching. [Hearing about these two courses] gave me ideas on how to meet multiple (big) learning goals in the course, such as entrepreneurship and critical thinking and ethics and communication." An entrepreneurship class can also be an attractive forum for teaching writing – a skill often cited by employers as lacking in today's college graduates.

In setting the context for integration, the sooner, the better. Freshman offerings like these in entrepreneurship have the potential to alert students early on to questions they might explore outside of their business major (if in fact they choose business), and why these questions matter. Experiences to further integration can even be embedded in orientation. At the University of Pennsylvania, PennSTART – a required online assignment – teaches resilience skills that help freshman overcome common adversities faced by college students. Resilient individuals adapt quickly to challenges, bounce back from setbacks, solve

10 Takeaways as "tweeted" (via response cards) by participants:

- 1 Everyone sees liberal learning differently but there is universal agreement on the need for integration.
- 2 "Guerilla" tactics can work when trying to win over skeptical institutions.
- 3 And top down is OK too!
- 4 Don't rush to problem solution. Focus on the PROCESS of problem-solving rather than the outcome.
- 5 Taking a different perspective when defining the problem – putting ourselves in the users' shoes – in this case, students who dislike a course – can lead to unexpected insights.
- 6 Creative integration projects are more likely to be effective if they are small scale and voluntary.
- 7 Don't just hang out with your friends.
- 8 The importance of "education for mind, heart & hands" – what will our students do with their learning?
- 9 More than updating each other on progress, we discussed/learned about creative solutions that have emerged in the past year to common problems.
- 10 We are not alone!

problems effectively, and manage complex scenarios adeptly. After completing PennSTART the summer prior to their freshman year, students enter school in the fall more prepared to deal with the challenges that lie ahead and – most importantly for our agenda – more prepared to think critically about their coursework.

6 Open Questions

- 1 What are the optimal roles of admissions, student advising, student services and career services in forwarding the integration agenda?
- 2 What are schools learning about integration through the design and delivery of joint degree programs or double majors?
- 3 How do varying approaches to minors (business minors for non-business majors and vice versa) promote integration? How can we encourage students to integrate insights from their major and minor?
- 4 What could we, as a group, practice together? Is there a role for joint initiatives among participating schools, and what could such projects look like?
- 5 How can faculty and administrators be best supported in the role as change makers?
- 6 How can the Consortium most effectively collaborate with other organizations which influence undergraduate education – including accreditation bodies, academic networks, and business itself?

Next Phase of Work

Based on conversations with participants in Denver, and with faculty from “new” schools who have contacted Aspen, we know there is real interest in continuing a process of convening. Participants particularly value the exchange of ideas about curricular and extracurricular approaches to integrating liberal learning, liberal arts, and business, as well as the “benchmarking” component of the convenings – i.e., understanding where their school falls relative to others. Given the strong interest from both participating and new schools, we are planning to continue the Consortium in a

form similar to the original structure (two convenings over two years) – but augmented by other activities that will seek to engage the participants to a higher degree and create a true community of educators working to transform the face of undergraduate education.

We welcome your ideas and engagement!

Call for Content

CasePlace.org – our on-line resource for teaching materials – features an [undergraduate portal](#), dedicated to featuring materials that strengthen the connections between liberal learning and business education.

As part of our next phase of work, we hope to deepen the content on this site – and we welcome your submissions of materials. These can include: syllabi, course readings, cases, essays, books, videos. To submit, please email paige.reidy@aspeninstitute.org.

Please contact: claire.preisser@aspeninstitute.org for more information. Or visit: <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/policy-work/business-society/undergraduate-business-education>

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 Villanova University
 Wake Forest University
 Washington and Lee University
 Yeshiva University

(List of individuals from each school can be found [here](#).)

Special Guests at the March 2013 convening

Edward Ayers, President, University of Richmond
Joanna Graham, Director, Field Marketing, GMAC
Robert Hagstrom, Chief Investment Strategist and Managing Director for Legg Mason Investment Counsel, Legg Mason Capital Management
Jim O'Toole, Daniels Distinguished Professor of Business Ethics at the University of Denver, Daniels College of Business

Staff and Project Team

Anne Colby, Consulting Professor, Stanford University
Tom Ehrlich, Visiting Professor, Stanford University School of Education
Julie Engerran, Fellow, Institute for Sustainable Social Change, Prescott College; Faculty, Bard MBA in Sustainability
Nancy McGaw, Deputy Director, The Aspen Institute, Business & Society Program
Claire Preisser, Senior Program Manager, The Aspen Institute, Business & Society Program
Paige Reidy, Program Coordinator, The Aspen Institute, Business & Society Program
Judith Samuelson, Executive Director, The Aspen Institute, Business & Society Program
William Sullivan, Senior Scholar at the Center for Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College; Director of the Educating Tomorrow's Lawyers project at the University of Denver