Roadmap to Leadership in Humanities, Science, and Medicine

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There has been a significant and amplified worldwide interest in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math or STEAM, the latter with the inclusion of Arts in the equation, for the past several years. The insurgence of interest is a valid proposition given sustained efforts invested in finding the relevance of education to the economic and entrepreneurial needs of academic communities and business corporations. Without a firm foundation in the humanities, from classical literature, history, writing skills, and interpersonal communication there is something left desired from an educated person. Without such even, the foremost expert in the STEAM disciplines are limited in reaching his or her potential. This may come as a shock to some, coming from the president of an institution like Lawrence Technological University (LTU), a broad-based education is a key to differentiate between just securing a job and evolving into a leader.

One might be among the world’s most brilliant clinicians, scientists, engineers, architects or accountants. But if people can not communicate their work and discoveries effectively to relevant recipients; if they can not convincingly persuade others that their innovations and discoveries make a difference; if their business invention or idea is not relayed in understandable language; and if they can not work effectively with those around them, succeeding and reaching their full potential in the long run could be elusive.

That is why college students in technological and clinical disciplines need to study not only calculus and chemistry, but also attend classes focused on philosophy, political theory, science, and religion that contributed to the development of society, along with others exploring the great works of literature and art in their historical context and the basics of expository composition.

Just as an opera singer should be able to balance a checkbook and calculate percentages, I believe a competent physician, engineer or designer should have the ability to write a coherent essay and be able to quote from Tagore, Gandhi, Shakespeare, and Einstein.

It strikes me that the current division between science and art, and the scorn to which humanities subjects are occasionally subjected, is a relatively recent phenomenon. After all, there was a little division between science and art for great figures of the past like Leonardo da Vinci—or, more recently Steve Jobs, whose business acumen ad products combined trail-blazing function with exquisite design. And who cannot sense the mathematical precision behind the music of Bach or Mozart? Similarly, students in audio engineering technology and clinical simulation laboratories who learn how solid-state electronics work and become familiar with the intricacies of the science of acoustics, can at the same time develop an ear for what makes a great guitar solo. Thus, a broad educational experience is the key to leadership.

LTU was established in 1932 as an engineering school, and soon thereafter added programs in business, architecture, and design. LTU has always been a leader in what most educational authorities view as the most important parts of higher education in today’s economy—STEM, for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, which has lately been expanded to STEAM, adding art and architecture. However, the university is also home to a healthy humanities program that is crucial to our students’ success. For only those with an appreciation for all of the world’s incredible body of knowledge, can our full potential be realized?

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