

# Center of Inquiry

WABASH COLLEGE

## Blending the Liberal Arts and Business

14 November 2004

Business is one of the most popular areas of study for undergraduate college students. Twenty-one percent of bachelor's degrees awarded in the academic year 2000-01 were in the field of business/management. This percentage has remained relatively constant in recent years; since 1989, 19-24% of all bachelor's degrees conferred have been business degrees. (1)

Although some liberal arts colleges eschew the idea of including business or any other pre-professional programs in their curricula, stating instead that a traditional liberal arts focus will develop the skills necessary for success in any career or profession, business programs can be found at many liberal arts colleges. In fact, at some of these schools, the business major is the most popular undergraduate major. Furthermore, many liberal arts graduates go on to seek employment in business, regardless of their majors.

Despite this popularity, business courses are often treated as separate entities on liberal arts campuses and are not integrated well with the rest of the curriculum. Arts and Sciences faculty tend to dismiss programs with such obvious practical aims. Moreover, business programs at liberal arts colleges were often created with little or no input from successful businesspeople, so their value outside the academy is uncertain.

These observations raise two main questions for us: What is the best way to prepare undergraduate students for careers in business? *and* How can liberal arts colleges better integrate business programs on their campuses? We will address these issues as we explore the connections and divides between liberal arts education and business at this conference.

This two day retreat will bring together leaders from business, government, and not-for-profit organizations to design a model undergraduate program that blends the benefits of liberal arts education with strong preparation for a career in business. In order to do this, we will discuss the skills necessary for success in the workplace, liberal arts colleges' preparation of students entering the workforce, and the types of business programs employers find valuable. Consistent with our emphasis on assessment, participants will also develop methods to evaluate the model program's effectiveness. The Center of Inquiry will use the findings from this retreat to help liberal arts colleges from across the country create, strengthen, and evaluate their business and career services programs.

[Digest of Educational Statistics, 2002, Table 252, National Center for Education Statistics.](#)

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Institution</b>
John Elliott	Director of the Center for Business Preparation	Hanover College
Ted Grossnickle '73	Chairman/CEO	Johnson Grossnickle & Assoc.
Joseph Hale, Jr.	Vice President and Chief Communications Officer	Cinergy Corporation
Robyne Hart	Associate Director & Assistant Professor of CBP	Hanover College
David Kieffer	Partner	Mercer Human Resource Consulting
Robert Klee '79	Director of Human Resources	Eli Lilly
Jeff Koeze	President	Koeze Company
Tom McKenna	Deputy Chief of Staff	Office of the Governor
James Merten	Vice-Chairman of the Board	City Securities Corporation
Kelly Pfledderer '96	CEO and President	Apparatus
Dick Ray	Operations Manager (ret.)	Alcoa Tennessee
Gloria Smith	Human Resources Director	Keithley Instruments, Inc.

Andy Wilkinson '83 Vice President and Actuary  
Fred Wilson '69 CEO

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## Agenda

*Sunday, November 14th*

2.00 - 2.15 Welcome and Introductions, Trippet 325

2.15 - 3.15 **Session One: Valuable Skills for Business and the Liberal Arts**

Using the pre-readings (see page 4) as a starting point, develop a list of the top skills/qualities a college graduate from a blended liberal arts and business program would possess.

For each skill/quality:

- a. Provide an explanation/definition.
- b. Provide examples that illustrate application of the skill in a realistic workplace situation.
- c. Discuss why this skill/quality is important for business.
- d. Discuss why this skill/quality is important for the liberal arts.

How do recent college graduates in the workplace differ from the ideal college graduate just described? What skills/qualities are missing or insufficient? Provide specific, concrete examples when possible.

3.15 - 3.30 Break

3.30 - 4.30 Session One continued

4.30 - 4.45 Break

4.45 - 6.15 **Session Two: Developing a Blended Liberal Arts and Business Program**

Break into two groups and create model business programs (one business major and one non-major program) for liberal arts colleges that will provide students with the ideal skills/qualities identified in Session One and address the shortcomings discussed. Each group will develop one program.

Programs should include:

- a. Key experiences for liberal arts education
- b. Key experiences for career preparation

Experiences should include:

- Courses
- Projects
- Capstone/Senior experiences
- Internships
- Co-ops
- Study abroad
- Immersion experiences
- Lecture series
- Alumni involvement
- Workshops
- Online training
- Career portfolios
- Career Services components

Keep in mind the following constraints:

- Undergraduate students usually take between 32-40 classes in total.
- Majors usually require 8-12 courses.
- Summer internships change financial aid calculations. In addition, certain experiences (e.g., immersion trips) usually cost more money.
- Extracurricular activities such as clubs and organizations, athletics, and work provide valuable benefits for students. Successful programs will allow students to balance their time between curricular extracurricular pursuits.

6.30 - 7.00 Reception

- 7.00- 8.00 Dinner  
8.00- 9.00 Present and discuss the model programs. (1/2 hour for each group)

*Monday, November 15th*

- 7.30 - 8.30 Breakfast, Trippet Hall Dining Room  
8.30 - 9.00 Check Out  
9.15 - 10.15 **Session Three: Evaluation Methods and Next Steps**  
Additional thoughts regarding yesterday's conversations.  
Develop evaluation methods for the model programs created in Session Two.
- How can liberal arts colleges evaluate whether these programs have successfully blended liberal arts education and career preparation? What are meaningful outcome measures?
  - How can we validate the programs developed during this conference? What other people/groups should we talk to?
- 10.15 - 10.30 Coffee Break  
10.30 - 11.15 Next Steps- What else should the Center of Inquiry do to explore and strengthen the ties between liberal arts and business? What other ways can we address the connection between liberal arts education and life after college?  
11.15 - 12.00 Campus Tour  
12.00 - 1.30 Lunch