

## Liberal Arts: Skills for Every Career

I first heard the rumors on a Tuesday in July. “They’re going to fire Cindy,” someone said. “No,” another colleague countered, “She’s going to step down.” A few days later, she packed her things in a white cardboard box and never came back. In doing so, she left behind a behemoth of an assignment; Cindy had been managing a timekeeping software implementation for our 3000 employees, and no one else knew how to finish the configuration she had started. Fortunately, I was able to draw on the things I had learned from my liberal arts courses when I eventually took over the project. A liberal arts education is valuable because it teaches skills related to research, critical thinking, problem solving, and communication.

Learning how to learn is a priceless skill. I could have read through the setup files of our current software, figured out the existing terminology, and copied the same information into the new one, saving both time and effort. I knew that wasn’t the best approach; my education has taught me to question the first source I find and look for additional confirmation. Instead, I researched my company’s policies and consulted a librarian to help me find the applicable legal regulations, surprising my co-workers. “Why would you go to the library when you can just Google the laws?” they asked, but I’ve written enough research papers to recognize the value of a helpful librarian over an impersonal search engine.

I used my problem solving and communication skills to resolve the issue I uncovered. A law had changed and our old software wasn’t updated, so we had underpaid a number of workers. First, I worked with the developers to make sure the new program was correct, and then convinced the old vendor to help us pay the past wages owed to our employees because of the error. If I had a different background, I could have fixed the problem in the system myself, but

there would be downsides as well. Liberal arts courses trained me to think critically, so I realized the need to audit the past information. This closed our vulnerability to penalties and fines. Also, without my experience writing and delivering persuasive speeches, my company would have paid the full amount ourselves. It is clear that a liberal arts education can have a direct effect on a business's bottom line.

In a world driven by technology, many people think students should study computer-related fields so that they have the right skills to find and succeed in jobs after graduation. My own degree will be in Business Administration, so I certainly understand that point of view. At the same time, it's important to have an understanding of liberal arts, regardless of future plans. A person can be successful in some fields without knowing Microsoft Excel, but it's impossible to be fully engaged in any career without the ability to communicate effectively, learn new things, and apply critical thinking to problems.